

MUTCH more

By Ashley Matchett Woods, The Equestrian's Concierge



Mutch and Dinner For Two, Thermal 2016, Saratoga Farm, owner

Some at the top are a riders' rider – some are a horseman's horseman – but Bert is much more -- a horse's horseman. Born into American hunter-jumper royalty (son of the famous Ronnie Mutch), Hugh "Bert" Mutch learned early and from the best, that ours is a game of hard work and glory as much as it is of heartbreak and disappointment. But a true champion triumphs every day doing what he loves – and what he was made to do. He is the gentleman rider, the finesse over strength, the invisible hands with high impact.

Speaking with Bert is like listening to history happen in real time. Early days with his father, Ronnie Mutch, at famed Nimrod Farm, along with his time spent with greats like Rodney Jenkins, Eddie Macken, even with George

Morris (he was sent to Hunterdon as punishment for not listening to his dad). He is more than just tradition, he is the rare combination of his own convictions on horses and perspective from time away.

Being Bert

I find Bert at HITS Thermal for our sit-down, he finds himself at a familiar place: ramping up his impact on the West Coast. He is working with John Charlebois and team at Portola Valley, the Reyes family's Saratoga Farm, and most recently, in the irons on the horses of Sloan Lindemann Barnett in Sonoma.

To know Bert one must know the importance of the details!



Bert Mutch Outfitted By EQ Rider in Winston Equestrian, 2016

That is the theme that comes up no matter how far off-topic we go, no matter how many horses we talk about. And most importantly the patience with the details he has with horses and riders.

Bert is an artist, not a technician -- but make no mistake there is method and discipline to his artistry. He is a creative thinker who uses his adrenaline and visualization to bring concentration, rather than letting it take away his edge. He is competitive and intense and is all-focused, be it in the Grand Prix ring, the Hunter Derby, or teaching a student to "find the jumps" through mental imagery.

"What's been fun is how competitive he is and how seriously he takes the job of training me and the horses," says Sloan, "It makes me work harder because I want win for him. It feels he is so committed to me – every class is the Olympics for Bert," she jokes.

Coaching Sloan is a bit of a déjà vu, she having ridden with Ronnie Mutch as a Junior. Now as an amateur with a young daughter herself, she feels it is a bit of kismet, *"I have the most wonderful memories of Nimrod, it gave me my start – one I now hope my daughter will have with Bert."*

Bert is viewed by trainers and riders alike as an excellent teacher and coach and loves to share his knowledge. *"I give my secrets away too easily, but that's my role, my obligation*



Mutch on Bunistar, Sonoma Hunter Derby, Saratoga Farm, owner. Photo by Colleen Cavalier Photography

as a horseman. We've lost some great ones – the true masters of the sport – so I need to pass that wisdom on." A sentiment he shares with colleague and business partner John Charlebois, *"if not, who will?"*

There is a timelessness to Bert, his riding has no age limit to its effect. The young professionals and amateurs I ask are somewhat in awe: he is the epitome of form and function – and grace -- in our sport. He is seen as unique, a *"living legend legacy."*

His greatest method of teaching is by demonstration. His work ethic, his commitment and his endless thirst for learning are all exemplary. The proof is also plain to see. *"Watching Bert on the flat, over fences, in the show rings, is receiving a free clinic on efficiency, effectiveness, and beauty of our sport. Any horse that Bert rides is better having been ridden by him."*



Charlebois team



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Bert & Brandon Mutch, father and son. EQ Photo



Mutch on Balios Z Thermal 2016, Sloan Barnett owner



Mutch on his own PF TwisterII

The Mutch Touch

He characterizes his approach to training as a blend of patience, compromise, and consistency – no short cuts. He feels people over-train because they want instant results – but sees that as the quickest way to ruin a horse. He believes the smallest detail can make all the difference and the careful cultivation of the finest points are what makes the end result. Every aspect counts: the feed, the shoeing, the tack selection, etc. Nothing goes un-touched by Mutch.

The ultimate is what happens once he's in the saddle – and all around bear witness. The communication, the flow, the seamless picture of horse and rider that appears that he's doing nothing at all. All the while, the horse is transformed – happily – to its peak performance.

When asked what he is most proud of in his career, he cites being able to ride – and enjoy – both the hunters and jumpers equally as well (another nod to the masters). “I

Most Memorable Career Events

1. 1978: Won AHSA Medal Finals in Harrisburg, PA - only parent/child combination (Ronnie Mutch won 1950)
2. 1979: Return to Harrisburg as a first-year professional, won GP on Boston Taxi
3. 1979: Receiving USET Team, pink coat, affixing Ronnie's USET patch to front
4. 1981: Awarded Working Hunter Champion on Holy Smoke at Madison Square Garden, Devon, Washington, Harrisburg and later inducted to the Show Hunter Hall of Fame in 2015
5. 2000: 4th in American Invitational at Tampa on his own Corrumbero, the joint project with Ronnie Mutch (see inset)
6. 1991-92: Showing Rox Dene (Elaine and Chanda

Boyen, owners), the famed “Hunter Horse of the Century”, in her pre-green and entire first year to USEF Horse of the Year 1991-95

7. 1994: First rider to win 3 GPs in the series at Palm Beach on S&L Second Honeymoon and S&L Low Rider (Sam & Libby Edelman, owners)

8. 1998: Won World Cup qualifier American Gold Cup, Devon, PA on Cardinal 846 (Randy Johnson, owner)

9. 2015: Joint coach (with John Charlebois) to Rebecca Reyes, 3rd place at International Hunter Derby finals in Lexington; Co-coaching Rebecca Reyes on Casseur de Prix and Let's Dance to win 3 out of the 5 Young Rider trials

10. 2015: First rider to win Open Welcome, Hunter Derby and Grand Prix in one week at LEGIS Woodside

can go horse to horse and ring to ring and turn into the performance necessary. Its really fun, but in my career I was usually handed the problem horse, so I've had to make that horse great. I've ruined some, and made some – and some have made me."

He feels that by now, he's ridden so many horses, that often he can identify a way a horse goes and be able to draw upon the wisdom found with a similar horse from his past. *"Within 5 minutes, I can usually feel the way of a horse and can spin my mental rolodex to see what will work in terms of method, bit, and training."*

"I pay each horse the same respect I would hope to be paid," he explains, "I look to understand what I can do to help him expose his strengths and overcome his weaknesses." And on the toughest mounts, he simplifies, *"we're either going to go my way or his way – and with some horses you need to go his way."* Regardless, what he's riding is the connection.

The Non-Riding Lessons

It is surprising that Bert didn't ride going through high school, but instead played football, basketball and was the #5 pole vaulter in the state of Kentucky. He quit riding again later in his 20s, going to school for landscape architecture and working as a grounds keeper. He left the business a couple more times in adulthood to get into other industries – but he always returns to riding. *"I always come back to this – it is a passion for me and I feel I was meant to do this – I learn that everytime I go away and come back – and I come back a better rider."*

As a result, he is a well-rounded person, with interests in other things (he's a self-taught golfer with a 4 handicap), while retaining the fresh, enthusiastic intensity that many life-long horse people lose. John Charlebois finds that to be an outstanding trait, *"he is riding 12 horses a day with the physical body to do it. He has the same desire, drive, and passion for the sport as his younger self and competitors half his age."*

Couple that with the wisdom and grace we receive as we get a little older, and Bert feels that he rides better now than he did 10 years ago. *"I had alot of success in my 20s, but I'm a better rider today from the lessons I've learned. I have so much more knowledge, and patience and intuition into the animal."*

What's Next

Bert and John are now looking for a few more special horses, and an ownership team to make one more run to the highest levels. Bert says he'll be done some day, just not today, *"I will ride horses until my body won't let me ride anymore."*



Mutch on HM Currembero

Ronnie & Bert Mutch

Bert's favourite memory of his father, Ronnie Mutch: Currembero

One of the most important moments of my life came in 2000 at the American Invitational in Tampa Stadium. Prior to that time, Pierre Jolicoeur was working with me quite a bit from the ground. A course designer, it was insightful to walk with him and strategize. He called and said he found a great horse for me – in Bogata, Colombia. I jumped on the plane, tried the horse and took him home – the horse, Currembero. He wasn't the prettiest thing and there was quite a bit of training to do, but after 20 years of being independent from my father, (I had become a father myself two years prior), we rejoined to work on this horse together. He was a handful – spooky – I had to remove the jumps just to flat him. But, I could put my little 2 year old son on the saddle in front of me and go anywhere.

We were winning, the horse was getting stronger and unfurling to be a great competitor. It was and April 4th, my birthday, I draw last, I'm clear – I feel today is the day its going to happen. I go in the jump off, had a magnificent ride – but pulled a rail. As I finish my end circle, I'm headed out and I see my dad running down the stairs to the back gate – beaming with pride and excitement – how well I rode and how far this horse had come with our training. I'll never forget that moment and the look on his face. I finished 4th, a huge accomplishment, but more importantly, that was our project together – it rekindled our father-son connection.