

HADLEY NOVAK

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

The children of horse trainers grow up in a most unique situation. Many are practically born in barns and certainly spend the majority of their young lives there. Some drink the water early and follow their parents without thoughts for anything else, while others take it all in, keeping an eye open for what else is out there.

Oconomowoc, Wisconsin's Hadley Novak is one of today's bright, young adults navigating her path in this wonderful world. In her last junior exhibitor year, she has been blessed with some nice horses to show from her parents' Equitate as well as many thrilling catch rides and drives from Sheri Brandl and Mark Bodnar's network of peers.

"There's nothing better than for her to make connections with other professionals," said Sheri Brandl. "She has an incredible extended family who have helped raise and guide her. I didn't tell her 'No' when it came to doing this professionally. I left it and came back to it, so I want her to find her path."

"Outside of Sheri, she's the smartest person at the farm," said a very proud Mark Bodnar. "She misses nothing and she's not afraid to tell us what she thinks. And she's usually right."

From Rhythm Latte in walk/trot pleasure to her current three-gaited pony (Callaway's Still Enough Woman) who was recently voted Best In Show at the Madison Classic, Novak has been blessed with the opportunity to show many nice horses of her own as well those above-mentioned catch rides and drives. At this young age she has already been teamed with CH Talkin To You, She's Packin', Doctor Simon, Malibu Rum, Gilcrest's Billy Doux, HCH Black Bart, Heartland Inspired, Regal's Prime Rate, CH Carson Nation, CH Holy Tequila, Too Hot To Kiss, MLV Sagitarius Rising, and CH Don't Mention It, among others.

"My whole life I've been at horse shows," said Novak. "I grew up at Madison and Milwaukee. My first horse was Rhythm Latte. He was special: ears forward, good attitude, every day he was ready to be a show horse."

"As I've grown up, I'm more into it and have more responsibilities. I like the structure and helping prepare horses for the ring."

Her mom and Maureen Lydon were great friends at college and that friendship and connection to ponies has also played a big role in Novak's youth.

"I wanted a pony for years. Mom and Moe were best friends at school, so Moe invited me down a few years ago and I have been knee-deep in ponies ever since, said Hadley. "There are a lot of similarities to the horses. A nice horse is a nice horse and I like to go fast so the ponies have been great."

"Lynda Freseth was the first to put her on a pony," said Brandl. "We've been so fortunate that many different professionals have been a part of her life. Todd Miles, Maureen Lydon, Rich Campbell, Amanda Simpson, John Willis, Whitney and Meredith Bodnar, Jay Wood, Greg O'Kelley, so many people have helped her."

"Last year I decided I wanted Hadley to show Prime Rate at Louisville, but I told her that he was tough and not an angel," said Maureen Lydon. "She didn't care, she had a special connection with him. She has shown Inspired for us previously and she loved it. After that she started hanging out with Jay Wood at the shows in their area and helping him with his ponies. She just loved it."

"When she came out of the ring in the qualifier at Louisville this past year, she was disappointed in herself. I told her to shake it off and we would have a different strategy. She does what you ask. She knows where you are on the rail and listens. Hadley is so talented and has such a passion. It's so easy to team her with any pony because she gets it. She loves the animals



Sheri Brandl and Mark Bodnar have loved the process of watching Hadley grow up in the barn with them. Photo by The National Horseman, Murphy McSemek

and the competition. We love this kid so much and love that she's so supportive of others."

"It's funny how so many professionals like her," added Bodnar of Hadley. "She is four years ahead of the curve because of her exposure to this business and other professionals. You see more of the world. It's funny, in the barn our help and customers will ask her opinion. They look up to Hadley and she has handled it well."

Juggling her final year of high school and horses has made for a busy year. "I graduated in the middle of the Madison show," said Hadley. "I want to get through Louisville and Kansas City having fun. I don't have any specific goals, just to have good performances. The hardest part with those shows is there is a lot of pressure. I have to remind myself that they are just horse shows and focus on the performance and having fun."

"I'm going to stay home this year and take some classes at a local college and figure it out from there. I'll always be involved, just not sure for a career or as an amateur. There's a strong possibility that I'll do this professionally."

Like most children of professional trainers, there is heartbreak as most of the time their horses/ponies get sold but the plus side is the opportunity for catch rides.

"I don't put too much pressure on myself," said Hadley of the catch rides. "Getting those opportunities is the best part of being in my position. It's a lot of fun with all of those different horses and ponies. When I got to show Prime Rate at Louisville last year and win it was an amazing drive. It meant a lot to me. Ponies have so much power, it's exhilarating."

As Hadley said, the more she is around this the more responsibilities she has and working in the barn with her parents is one of those challenges.

"It's a work in progress," chuckled Hadley. "It's a new dynamic every day. It's a matter of balance. They do a great job and it's not easy."

"The three-gaited pony has been a project between all three of us. It doesn't matter if I'm first or last with her, it's cool to see the work pay off."



Callaway's Still Enough Woman is Hadley's current project. She selected the game mare even though her parents weren't too sure about that decision.

When she started out riding as a very young kid we basically handled her as a client," said Brandl. "She looked for her name on the chart on the school board. She was part of the process and wanted discipline. "When we first started looking for a horse for her she said, 'I want my own horse so I can ride on Saturday like the others.'

"Even when she was little, she was the ringleader. Now, she is part of the barn. She helps brace horses and anything else needed. The staff looks up to her; it's like her age doesn't matter. She likes the moving and shaking part of the business."

As Hadley prepares to finish up her final junior exhibitor season, she is putting emphasis on having fun even though some hard decisions await. Being ahead of the curve as she already is, she has this bit of advice for other young persons in the show horse industry.

"Stick with it," said Hadley. "You're going to have bad rides, bad shows, even bad seasons but stick with it. Put in the work and it will pay off."