

ROBIN PARSKY

Putting American Show Jumpers on the world stage

INTERVIEW **HEATHER BUCHANAN** PHOTOS **NICOLA UGHI**

George Morris paid horse owner Robin Parsky a high compliment when she paired Kent Farrington with her new mare Blue Angel. “You created a match made in heaven,” said the training legend. Parsky’s passion for horses has taken her from rider to owner to breeder to major force in the development of American show jumping. Patriotism, Walt Disney, and the magic of Southern California have all helped create her core values, and this world traveling go-getter knows how to set high goals... and achieve them.

Tell us about your history with horses?

I grew up in the Southern California community of Pasadena, a well-known area for equestrian sports. My mother often took me to horse shows to watch show jumping which sparked my interest. My family was involved with Disney Studios and we attended a screening of the Disney-produced documentary, *The Horse With the Flying Tail*, about Nautical, a palomino former cow pony that gains fame as an international show jumper for the USET ridden by Hugh Wiley. The movie won an Academy Award and captivated me. Growing up with the Disney culture of imagination, creativity and optimism was encouraging and made me believe that living harmoniously with animals was not only desirable but achievable. My first pony jumper was a palomino named Tinkerbelle, of course a Disney character.

Kent Farrington has had amazing success on your horse Blue Angel. How did you find this mare and see her potential?

She was recommended to me by IN Showjumpers and Lauren Hough. One of my favorite show jumping mares had been Ludger Beerbaum’s Ratina Z, and when I saw Blue Angel she reminded me of this fabulous mare. She was spunky, brave, big-hearted and an efficient jumper, which I knew would make her very fast in jump-offs. I grew up riding thoroughbred horses and have an affinity for the light athletic type of horse. She was also an approachable and kind mare which was a selling point to me as I spend a lot of time with my horses. I gave Kent the ride on her beginning in 2013, and they starting winning right away at the WEF. He was confident that he could bring her to her full potential on the international

circuit and he greatly admired Blue Angel’s “*desire to win and big heart*,” he said. She knows the difference between winning and not winning. She is very good at award ceremonies and gets pumped up and poses for the cameras. She has even been caught looking at herself on the jumbotron!

It’s said that you changed her name to Blue Angel in honor of your brother, a retired US Navy Pilot. Can you tell us about that inspiration?

I am first and foremost a proud American, and I like patriotic names. I knew this horse would be representing the United States. My brother is a graduate of the US Naval Academy and a former Navy pilot. In the Navy the ace pilots are “*Blue Angels*,” a popular flight demonstration squadron worldwide. I saw how quick and precise the mare was, just like the precision pilots, so



ROBIN CLEARY PARSKY

Robin Cleary Parsky was born and raised in Pasadena, California where she was a child model and actress for Disney and Warner Brothers Studios. She began riding at the age of six and competed in everything from children’s jumpers to amateur owner divisions. Robin Parsky founded Buena Vista Farms in Rancho Santa Fe, California in 1992 for the purpose of breeding and training show hunters/jumpers. She has had key roles in the industry including the Equestrian Officials Coordinator for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee and serving on the USET Board of Trustees, USET Foundation since 2002.

She is a leading owner with champion horses:

HUDSON USEF Zone 10 Champion Amateur Owner Hunter

TRISTAR USEF Horse of The Year Green Conformation Hunter

PAJAMA GAME USEF Horse of the Year Hunter Breeding (homebred)

FIRST LADY USEF Zone 10 Champion Hunter Breeding (homebred)

EROS (group owned) ridden by Anne Kursinski US Olympic Team Silver Medal 1996

FERINA ridden by Anne Kursinski and then became foundation mare for Buena Vista Farms

CLASIKO (group owned) ridden by Lauren Hough US Olympic Team 2000

BLUE ANGEL ridden by Kent Farrington currently on international circuit

GAZELLE ridden by Kent Farrington currently on international circuit

the name came to mind and seemed to suit her. I think it is important for the sport that our audiences can identify the horses and a memorable name helps.

What is your personal emotional attachment to your horses? I heard you said when you sent your champion hunter Pajama Game off to train with Louise Serio that it was like you were “sending him off to college.”

Yes, I love animals, and I treat them with affection and respect. I want them to have the best chance possible in their lives. I always tell my riders, “*You are going to have me with my horse*,” because I relate to them, and it is good for me and for my horses. As owners we watch our horses more than the trainers and riders because they are our main, and sometimes only, focus of attention. My sensitivity is to how my horse



is feeling and responding on any given day as I watch her so closely. I feel that is my contribution. It is particularly nice to be with Kent and his staff as they know I am attached to my animals and they never say “don’t spoil her.” They are very inclusive, so I spend a good deal of time in the barn and enjoy it very much.

What makes a successful relationship between rider and owner?

Communication is at the top of the list. I really like to set goals and be disciplined to try to attain them. Kent is the same. We discuss our goals both for him and for my horses and then the strategy going forward. Kent encourages me to travel wherever my horses compete so we work together on a travel schedule. He emphasizes “being flexible” as we know situations can change in the competitive horse show world. Not

so easy with the wardrobe however! When we first started working together Kent was in the top twenty and then he rose to the top ten and then to number two in the world. That’s a huge accomplishment. I was proud of the contribution my horse and I made to Kent’s achieving so many of his goals. I do think riders need to be more genuinely appreciative that we owners are passionate, not silly or goofy, but just plain passionate about show jumping and our horses. It is a good thing and healthy, because without that passion there would be no sport of show jumping. The exposure I have had over the past two years with the Rolex sponsored FEI Jumping Owners Club has really enhanced my life on the road. Sharing experiences, information and ideas with like-minded horse owners is invaluable. I have made some great new friends in Europe and look forward to

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seeing them on a regular basis now. I love the special greeting of “good luck” or “bonne chance” we always exchange. We are a very supportive group.

As a member of the Board of Directors of the USET foundation you have pledged to support equestrian athletes, promote international excellence and build for the future. Where would you say the USET has been successful in meeting those goals and where do challenges still exist?

The biggest challenge for the USET Foundation is in broadening our base in order to raise the needed money to fund teams that will be competitive against all the other equestrian teams in the world. As the Foundation is the main funding source for our US teams, it is an enormous undertaking to assist the riders, horses, owners and their various support staff in

their travels abroad competing on behalf of our country. I am hopeful that with the advent of live streaming on the USEF network and other broadcasts we will be able to grow our audience. We must work hard to make sure these viewers also become supporters of the Foundation. I have been involved with the USET for over twenty years and I hope to continue for at least another twenty years.

You were the coordinator for the equestrian events at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. What are your hopes for the 2016 games in Rio?

I was the “Officials Coordinator” in 1984 which meant I was responsible for the FEI officials and judges and protocol matters. I was fortunate to work HRH Prince Philip (President of the FEI), Bert DeNemethy, and Arno Gego among others. I made sure they had their uniforms, accommodations, transportation and social schedule. It was a great experience to be involved with an Olympic Games in the US, especially in my own backyard. I am a big fan of the Olympic movement. I have a new horse named Gazelle and Kent and I are very hopeful that she will be a good Nation’s Cup/Olympic horse. She has been in the “Farrington School” the past year for her “college education.” She is just turning nine and is another mare with talent and heart so we are excited. For me right now the timing is just right—I have the opportunity and the time to spend doing what I love. Blue Angel is turning thirteen and is very healthy so she has a few more competitive years, and we can put her where she shines. Gazelle will just try to follow in Angel’s very large “hoof steps.”



MRS. JANE CLARK NAMED AS JUMPING OWNERS CLUB OWNER OF THE YEAR 2013
Mrs Jane Clark, owner of the top ranked grey Belgium Warmblood mare Cella, has been named Owner of the Year for 2013.

Ridden by Great Britain’s Ben Maher, Cella enjoyed a string of successes throughout 2013, including notable victories in the inaugural Global Champions Tour event in London and the Warsteiner Grand Prix during CHIO Aachen, and second place in the FEI European Championships in Herning, Denmark.

The presentation of the award to Mrs. Jane Clark was made by HRH Princess Haya, President of the FEI, Mrs. Madeleine Winter-Schulze, representing the Jumping Owners Club, and Ben Maher, at the Stade d’Ornano during the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games™ 2014 in Normandy.

Created by the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) in 2005 and supported by Rolex, the Jumping Owners Club is an exclusive organisation of international owners which works towards growing the popularity of the sport around the world. It is the only body which represents the views and opinions of the owners, and works closely alongside the FEI in building the profile and inclusiveness of Jumping.

Mrs. Jane Clark said, “Cella has been an amazing horse and, despite only being with Ben since 2012, she has enjoyed great success all over the world. We are extremely proud of her achievements and delighted that, as Owner of the Year, we are following in the footsteps of some great horses, including Hickstead and Big Star, who have won this award in previous years.

May I take this opportunity to thank all the support team who work so hard to prepare Cella for her competitions, without their dedication and focus, we would not be where we are today.”

From left to right: HRH Princess Haya, Mrs Jane Clark, Ben Maher and Mrs Madeleine Winter-Schulze, representing the Jumping Owners Club.

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