



YEAR IN THE LIFE OF ALLISON SPRINGER: **FOUR DAYS ABROAD**

BY ALLISON SPRINGER

Allison gets an education unexpected on her recent horse shopping trip to England. She learns that even an eventing powerhouse is susceptible to insecurities and reminds her American comrades that it can't rain all the time.

It is an odd and very scary thing when the Brits are vocally worried about their future competitiveness in the sport of eventing. How is it that the sport's once unquestionable powerhouse leader is sounding just like the Americans, wondering how they can get back in the game? Oh dear, where does that leave us now?

On a recent trip to England, I logged 1,500-plus miles over four days driving my rental car from London to York, to Devon, and back to London with long zigzags in between looking at horses. During my journey, I had the opportunity to discuss the topic with a number of representatives of British Eventing. I was not asking anyone about it, but you know how when people are so confused by an issue—be it politics, religion, or eventing—they tend to babble on about it to anyone? I heard from breeders, coaches, spectators, owners, and three different riders on the British team.

We all know that horses are part of Great Britain's culture, but it was overwhelming to witness the collective depression of a country over the state of things horsey/eventing. The HSBC FEI

European Eventing Championships in Malmö (SWE) this past Labor Day weekend, where Britain finished sixth as a team, were the first real blow. Then to look at the Burghley leaderboard and only have two Union Jacks

LESLIE THRELKELD PHOTO

depicted in the top ten is a bit shocking, and I think for the above lot, just simply wrong.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) I think does by far the best event coverage ever, and their Sunday installment of Burghley this year did not disappoint, but it might have displayed the crushing confirmation that England was not ready to accept. All the Brits sported their very best character in their interviews, but despite their well-chosen words and smiling faces, which were so properly and painfully painted on, you could tell they were just gutted. William Fox-Pitt, fourth place finisher at Burghley and bronze medalist at the 2013 European Championships (a lot to celebrate) and quite possibly be the nicest man on the planet, borderline looked like he was going to cry. When I tried horses at his farm, he was kind, but dare I say, mopey about the situation. Tina Cook, ninth at Burghley, gave herself/her country a bit of a reassuring pep talk. She told the country not to worry, that they really did have a great new stack of up-and-coming riders and horses and that they were just in a temporary lull. Does this sound familiar to what we have been talking about in our own country?

One of my favorite interviews was with Tom McEwen after his fall cross-country. Tom was just recently named to his first Senior Team—a joy I cannot wait to feel myself someday! I guess his horse did not travel well to Malmö and it did not pass the first jog. It is a bit of bad luck that we all know this sport will throw our way but massively disappointing for him to not have the opportunity to represent his country. At Burghley, Tom fell at the Olympic planet fence at the beginning of the course. He had an awkward jump and landed behind the saddle. His horse started going faster and faster and things got a little more awkward. He unfortunately could not get back in the saddle, and when he fell he looked like he was sliding into home base on his tummy watching his horse gallop solo to the *Classics Leaf Pit*. In the video, you can almost tell what poor Tom was thinking from the way he watches his horse gallop off without him: “Are you kidding me?” Then Tom’s horse reportedly trotted up

the *Leaf Pit* bank prior to being caught (I hope someone got video of *that* part!). In Tom’s interview later he says, “Everyone tells me these last two weeks are meant to give me character. I’m not sure I believe it or not, but I guess by now I should have a lot of it!”

Why does this sport have to build so much character...don’t we have enough already?! We are Eventers! Goodness knows Arthur and I must have enough character for the rest of the world. But as

you know, I am the forever optimist, and just like Tina Cook I believe everything comes in waves. Our next wave is right around the corner. I am hoping the U.S. will be riding that wave soon, and here is to hoping we are on the upswing before the Brits. Better yet, perhaps the Germans and the Kiwis will experience some “character building” just in time for the World Equestrian Games next year...kidding! It is not in my nature to wish ill and certainly not more “character”



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on anyone or any team. I truly hope for us all to be on our best and me, the ever optimist, to have the U.S. on top.

So as I boarded a flight back to the country I love after this four-day whirlwind, I could not help but reflect on what everyone had said and think, what am I doing to help improve the U.S.'s chances?

Earlier in the year I wrote about my "Success in the Next Olympic Cycle." My biggest need going into the future was the horsepower and the backing needed to acquire and support said horsepower. Not having the horsepower is the common prohibitive factor amongst all our future team riders. The eventing community in this country has collectively made a pretty tremendous effort to help overcome this issue whether it is from the good work done by the Event Horse Owners Task Force in promoting syndication and bringing new owners into the fold, or the increased excitement and involvement in sport horse breeding dedicated to event horses.

Through the help of some wonderful supporters I was able to acquire

Copycat Chloe from the West Coast. In a relatively short amount of time we have formed a great partnership, and she is demonstrating that she has the goods to be a team horse.

Arthur is his wonderful self, albeit a bit on the chunky side! After a huge year in 2012 and six years of back-to-back seasons at the three- and four-star level, Arthur got to enjoy an easy 2013. He is in full work, going great, and we are looking forward to Normandy and Rio.

Not only do I want to make U.S. teams, I want to help put the U.S. back on top. It is a very special type of horse that can do this now. The quality of horses and riding in our sport at the highest tier has gone to an entirely new level now, one that the Brits are concerned that they cannot play at thanks to the Germans and some recent others emerging...ahem, Jock Paget.

Despite all of our great efforts of syndication and the great excitement there is in getting the U.S. back on top, I am realizing it is almost impossible to find the right horses! I have been

looking and networking for ages now. In my recent trip to England, I looked all over the country for this ever-elusive horsepower. I saw a lot of nice horses, but I was a bit discouraged as I just was not feeling or finding it, not until I sat on two horses right at the end of my trip. All I can say is that I hope that I can make this happen and bring these two back because they are remarkable!

The simple truth, however, is even if I can come up with the money to get these two special horses to the U.S., it requires dedication, sweat, love, tears, sometimes blood, as well as luck being on your side at the right time to make the dream a reality. We all know that it is not luck that makes things go well, but let's be honest, it does not hurt! I always wish people luck, and when it is wished to me I always say, "Thank you! Luck is good to have!"

I pray that I will be successful in my efforts and get to tell you all about it in my next article. Until then, keep working hard and dreaming big because if we have a "can't" attitude, then we have nothing! 🐾

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