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Robin Parsky: Owning Horses for Team U.S.A.



Robin and Gazelle in Wellington, Florida

By Britney Grover with Marianne Taylor

Portraits by Isabel J. Kurek

Robin Cleary Parsky was only 6 years old when she had a clear vision of what she wanted to do with her life: own horses that represented the U.S.A. in international competition. Her course was set after she saw a screening of Walt Disney's Oscar-winning documentary "The Horse With the Flying Tail," the movie that told the story of a palomino horse from the American West that became a United States Equestrian Team (USET) show jumping superstar. The story of Nautical and Hugh Wiley.



Robin in Wellington, Florida

"One of my mother's closest friends was Sandy Cummings, an executive at The Walt Disney Company," Robin remembered. "Mr. Cummings often requested my brother, sister and I be included in Disney programs and commercials. We were in the opening screening of 'The Horse With the Flying Tail' and I told my parents that someday I wanted to own a show jumping horse that would compete for the U.S.A. like Nautilus."

Now, Robin is fulfilling that dream as a professional owner, helping to keep the United States Equestrian Team's riders supplied with great horses to show internationally. Currently, Robin is partnered with Olympic show jumper Kent Farrington, who piloted her Blue Angel to 26 prestigious wins around the world including back-to-back wins on the same weekend in Shanghai and again in Calgary at the Spruce Meadows Masters.

"Robin is unique in that she has always been passionate about owning sport horses even more than riding them," Kent said. "In particular, her real passion is horses that can represent the U.S. at high-level competition."

Kent was ranked top in the world when he piloted Robin's Gazelle to win the \$1 million prize in the Rolex Grand Prix at the CHI Geneva 2017 and Gazelle is still going strong. During the 2019 WEF circuit, Gazelle won more prize money than any other jumper, earning Robin the Harrison Cup Perpetual Trophy and the Simba Run Perpetual Trophy.



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Quest for the Best

Robin's equestrian journey began when she was a small child taking riding lessons at a stable near her hometown of Pasadena, California. "My first pony was a palomino named Tinkerbell, another Disney character I admired," she said. "She won the children's jumper class for me several times."

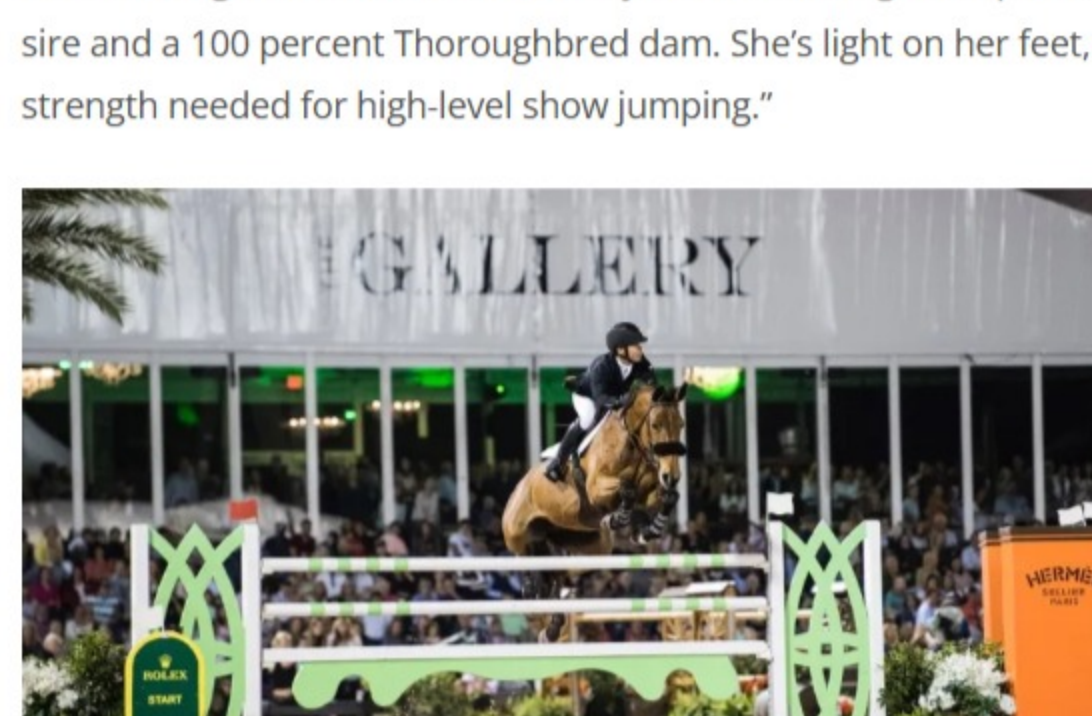
Over the years, Robin moved to ride in Rancho Santa Fe with Hap Hansen and then on to Linda Hough. As she was developing her own riding, she was also developing her professional experience in the horse world. In 1984, she was responsible for coordinating all details for the FEI officials attending the Olympics in Los Angeles, including their housing, transportation, meals, official clothing and social events. That role included working closely with the then-president of the FEI: HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

"I spent a good deal of time with him during the two weeks of the equestrian competition and was responsible for proper protocol in dealing with his entourage," Robin shared. "My most memorable experience was when the Prince asked if he could come to take a swim at our home because it was his day off and he wanted to avoid the gawkers at the hotel swimming pool. My mother became stressed about what to serve for lunch as we had less than six hours to plan for a royal visit! It all worked out beautifully and we enjoyed each other's company immensely. The Prince was charming and amusing and he loved my German shepherds who wanted to swim with him."

In 1992, Robin founded Buena Vista Farm in Rancho Santa Fe, California. Her horses, many of which were Thoroughbred bred at her farm, had success in the amateur owner hunter division, hunter breeding and green conformation. Though Robin's no longer breeding in California, the farm remains home to some retirees including her 29-year-old champion amateur-owner hunter, Hudson, and 2006 USEF Hunter Breeding Horse of the Year, Pajama Game.

As an owner, Robin was a part of the group who owned Eros, Anne Kursinski's mount for the Atlanta 1996 Olympic silver medal-winning U.S. jumping team, and the group that owned Klasiko, who represented the U.S. on the 2000 Sydney Olympic team with Lauren Hough riding. In choosing the horses she buys, Robin still draws on the experiences from her past.

"I grew up around Thoroughbreds because we had multiple racetracks in Southern California," she said. "Racetrack rejects became riding horses and sometimes jumpers, so I rode Thoroughbreds growing up at most of the riding stables where I took lessons. The show jumpers that I want to buy today have Thoroughbred blood and Thoroughbred characteristics. My horse Blue Angel is a perfect combination: She had a Dutch Warmblood sire and a 100 percent Thoroughbred dam. She's light on her feet, she has speed and stamina but also the strength needed for high-level show jumping."



Owning elite show jumpers has given Robin the opportunity to travel the world.

The Perfect Partnership

Robin is picky about who rides her horses, and Kent Farrington is the perfect match. "Kent is the consummate professional," she said. "He has a very organized operation with top-flight people on his staff. His barn is very impressive and very neat, and his training facility is one of the best in the world. The horses are very well cared for and he never overtaxes them. Kent and I discuss which venues are the best for my horses in regards to footing, size, crowds, stabling, etc. We share information with each other and set short-term and long-term goals. I've learned a great deal in the last seven years with Kent as my professional rider and for that I am most grateful."

One of Robin's favorite experiences as an owner of elite international show jumping horses was when Blue Angel won the Speed Stakes at the Dublin Horse Show. "When the American flag was raised in our honor," she said, "I thought of my ancestors, the Clearys, and how proud my mother and father would be to see that I had reached my dream of owning a wonderful show jumping horse and representing the U.S.A. and winning in Ireland!"



Robin receiving "The Harrison Cup Perpetual Trophy" from Jeanie Harrison, left, wife of the late Hunter Harrison, and Jeanie's grandson. Photo by SportFot

In 2018, Robin was awarded the Mrs. A.C. Randolph Owners Legacy Award by the United States Hunter Jumper Association (USHJA) for her support of the industry. "I was thrilled to be recognized by the USHJA," Robin said. "I've been a professional horse owner for over 25 years. I like to feel that I've contributed to the accomplishments of some of our country's top riders with great horses I've purchased over the years. The experience has been rewarding, but it was so nice to receive such a prestigious acknowledgment. Knowing that your peers respect you for your efforts is wonderful encouragement to continue in the pursuit of having the U.S.A. well-represented in the sport of show jumping worldwide."

Robin has been involved with the USET for over 20 years. She serves on the board of directors of the USET Foundation, whose biggest challenge is raising the money needed to keep the U.S. teams competing at international events around the world.

Robin is passionate about supporting every aspect of such high-level competition. "We have often spoken about how difficult it is to get more interest behind owning and supporting high-level sport horses," Kent said. "In order for that to happen, we need to promote, encourage and celebrate jumping horse ownership like they do in racing. I know it's one of her goals to see that through and she's very committed to making that a reality. I think that is a goal that can help all riders across all disciplines."

To that end, Robin is now vice chairman of the FEI Jumping Owners Club, where she's found friendship and support as she travels to horse shows around the world. "The Jumping Owners Club is an exclusive organization of international owners that works towards growing the popularity of the sport around the world," she said. "It's the only body that represents the views and opinions of the owners plus works closely alongside the FEI in building the profile and inclusiveness of show jumping. The Jumping Owners Club provides a platform for owners worldwide to share their common passion of equestrianism."

Because Robin's no longer breeding horses at her farm in California, Blue Angel is retired and being bred in Europe, where Gazelle will eventually retire as well. For now, Robin, Kent and Gazelle have 2019 mapped out. After spending most of the spring and summer in Europe, the crew will be back on North American soil starting in September and then finish the year in Paris and Geneva. Though Kent was sidelined for a time as he recovered from a February 2018 injury, Robin is by his side supplying him with the horses needed to climb the FEI ranks once again.



Robin, Kent and Gazelle

In her support of the USET and traveling the world to watch her own horses represent the U.S.A., Robin is living the dream she saw as a child on the silver screen. "I have very much enjoyed my traveling experiences with Kent and Blue Angel and Gazelle," she concluded. "Representing the United States in foreign countries with world-ranked horses and a world-ranked top 10 rider is the best possible position to be in and it makes me very proud wherever I go."

Photos by Isabel J. Kurek, unless noted

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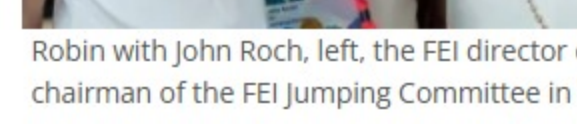
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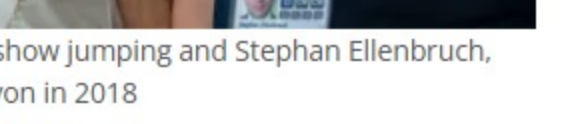
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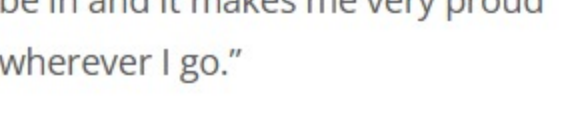
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