

Horse & Talk

The magazine for horse lovers

Volume 4 Number 6

January / February 1999

Rookie of the Year: Frankie Chesler

By Tracy Hanes

If there was a Rookie of the Year prize for showjumping, it would have to go to Frankie Chesler.

In November, the 17-year-old from Orangeville made showjumping history by becoming the youngest-ever Canadian Equestrian Team member.

It the culmination to a heady year for Chesler, who wore the red team jacket as a member of the all-female Nations Cup team in New York.

Two years ago, Chesler, who has dual U.S./Canadian citizenship and her family moved from the U.S. to Ontario so the teen could further her ambition to become an international rider. While she made some noteworthy performances in the grand prix ring last year with her quarterhorse gelding, Braveheart, last year, she lacked a mount of truly international calibre.

But in March, her dad, Alan, took a gamble and bought Ravenna Z, a nine-year-old Hanoverian mare in Florida that many other top Canadian and American riders had tried and rejected. The big bay lacked grand prix jumping experience and had spent most of her previous life mothering four foals.

"She doesn't like to be pulled together before the jumps and her mouth was awful. She went around with her nose stuck in the air," recalls Chesler, who found the key to the mare's rideability was in switching to a bitless hackamore. "Because I had no grand prix horse this year, I kept moving her up. I had no idea she'd do as well as she did. She's careful, she's scopey, she's brave and she's a big pet."

The chemistry clicked between the two, and the mare and her young

rider tackle daunting courses with the confidence of seasoned professionals. When Chesler's in Canada, she's coached by Eric Lamaze, who is thrilled when she does well - even when she beats him out in the ribbons.

This year at the Collingwood Horse Show during a crucial jump-off in the \$50,000 grand prix, Lamaze knocked a rail. The second Lamaze left the ring, he tossed the reins of his horse to a groom and raced off to give Chesler his hints on how to ride the course to win. She rode clean and placed second.

Chesler and Ravenna Z also placed second in an arduous World Cup qualifier at the Capital Classic Horse Show in July. In October, Chesler and the mare finished second at the Washington International Horse Show's \$25,000

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Frankie Chesler

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grand prix, behind fellow Canadian Jill Henselwood.

Around the barn, the strapping mare is known fondly as Elsie, named by a friend of the Cheslers.

"I just love this horse," says Frankie, which comes as no surprise

to those who know her the careful attention she lavishes on her mounts..

When Chesler's horses aren't in the ribbons at the grand prix circuit, they get a holiday of sorts at the family's Florida home. That's when Chesler takes them for bareback hacks and trail rides them.

Next year, she has her sights set on

even loftier goals. First of all is competing at the legendary Spruce Meadows in Alberta, then hopefully qualifying to ride as a team member for Canada at the Pan American Games in Winnipeg.

Tracy Hanes works at the Toronto Star.