

Auburn Excell Rider, Trainer Means Real Business

By Stephanie Stephens

It's nice to love horses and riding, but making a success of one's passion is quite another thing entirely, and hence, the frequently uttered lament, "She's a great rider...but not such a great business person." For in all pursuits that entail talent, lack of discipline in business endeavors can be the greatest impediment to success; riding is certainly not exempt.

Auburn Excell of Excell Equestrian Services at Sycamore Trails in San Juan Capistrano has her sights set on the Pan American, World Equestrian Games (WEG) and Olympics, and she's no longer hesitant to share her patiently-formulated goals—note the word, "goals," versus "dreams"—with those who inquire.

"good coaches continue to get good coaching,"

"The more I've talked about them, the more support I've gotten from clients and friends. It spurs action," avows Excell. She's responsible for the action of winning, most recently returning from her first competition in the demanding one-star* division of three-day eventing, taking fifth place among 30 competitors at the High Prairie Farms (Parker, Colorado) CCI** Three-Day Event on her 8-year old Irish Thoroughbred gelding, Irish Treasure.

It was Excell's initial move up to the FEI level of competition; she now rides at Intermediate level, with the next goal being the CCI** in the fall at Galway Downs. Next season, she'll pursue the three and four levels. She also won first place in her Preliminary divisions in horse trials at Copper Meadows in April, preceded by the championship blue ribbon in Prelim at Galway Downs in Temecula in February.

Excell means business, and meets weekly with Dr. Ed Kraus, a business consultant and professor at Chapman University where she obtained her B. A. in organizational leadership. She wrote her mission statement: "To serve my clients in a quality program, so that riders will increase their abilities, confidence and passion for the equestrian sport."

Kraus has helped her take "extra steps," she says, those she might not take on her own, to stay motivated, with his expert guidance. "I feel confident I will go all the way," she asserts.

Never mind that Excell will ride literally anything—spooks, bucks and spins only

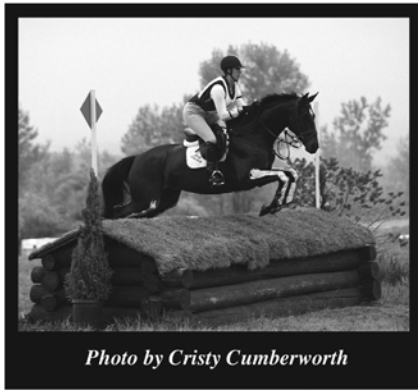


Photo by Cristy Cumberworth

make her chuckle—and that she took her once "unrideable" rogue horse and personally turned him into what in-the-know observers call "an eventing machine."

"Quality, integrity and perseverance, those are key words for me," says Excell. "And when my students get the blue ribbon, and they win, I feel successful, that I'm winning too."

If Excell doesn't win herself, sure, it's disappointing, she admits, but she's reflective. "The higher you go, the more critical you get. Not winning that day is just a very small detail in the bigger picture. A year from now, riding Advanced, it's not going to matter to me that I didn't get first place at a one star. I keep focusing."

An ardent believer that "good coaches continue to get good coaching," Excell trains with Ginnie (Virginia) Bryant trainer/owner of adjacent Equites Equestrian Services. "She's been a major positive influence on me and her knowledge and integrity have inspired me to run a quality business. I also admire her superb coaching and riding skills."

Excell herself coaches some 15 riders, juniors and amateurs, not only in eventing, but also in show jumping and dressage. Strenuous and consistent demanding work on the flat is a foundation for all; we're



Photo by Cristy Cumberworth
Auburn Excell during the steeplechase phase at High Prairie horse trials

not talking "a hack" here, folks. Bending, stretching, impulsion and suspension are requisites of all the Excell-trained equines. Jumping isn't just "line-diagonal-line," but intricate patterns requiring hairpin turns and an accurate eye to the complex distances.

Her boarders expect, and receive, what they pay for; lengthy lessons that challenge, motivate and teach. For development must be ongoing for both Excell and her clients, "always moving to the next level," and having the correct basis to do so. And when things don't go as slated for a student?

"When someone has the talent and the opportunity and they don't use the tools I provide them, it's discouraging, sure. When I coach them and they don't follow the plan, it's disappointing; I want them to put in 125 percent. And it's hard when a young rider lets grades slip and then can't compete; I want my clients to be well-rounded, achievers in all areas of life."

Excell is certain that horses teach kids lessons, citing one child in her barn who was once painfully shy, but with her horse, now has blossomed in obvious and heartwarming ways. "I cried when she got that horse, because I had to hide him for 10 days until her birthday," remembers the trainer. After the youngster tried him, Excell had to invent "fangdangled stories about where he'd gone," she says, before the Big Day.

"We decorated the horse's stall, and when she walked into it, she put her arms around him and gave him a hug. He put his head down for her as if to say, 'I'm your horse now.' They're such a good match!"

Excell is witness: Horses change kids' lives. "Riding is about goal setting, having responsibility, being disciplined. I enjoy seeing parents getting involved, sharing in this experience. Bonding can happen within families, as well."

Such experiences are what it's all about for Excell, in addition to achieving her own triumphs, earned by the seat of her greenish-beige breeches. Excell has had nothing handed to her in the way of gift horses, entries or major financial support. She's self-made, the epitome of "do-it-yourself" and "do it well." She's set to embark on a major sponsorship acquisition campaign, designed and implemented, as one would expect, as an effective business plan.

Last month, when mentor and professor Kraus invited her to address his university class of aspiring coaches and mentors, a few students there confided that they were "struggling" in their career pursuits.

"It made me realize it's important to do what you love with passion and energy, and the successes will come. You will manifest the product," says Excell.

Excell welcomes new clients at 949-661-6440.