



Scarlett Lovett, 16, and her parents, Robert and Robin have lived in Orange County since she was two months old. She first sat on a pony at age three. She is the winningest junior rider in the history of the Virginia Point to Point.

Photo by Phil Audibert

all the swelling and that's why I lost my sight." They joke nowadays that her odd behavior stems from that incident, but then admit that they worry about her when she's racing. Oddly enough, other than one of the broken noses, all these injuries happened in horseback riding disciplines other than steeplechasing. Still, she has come off plenty times in races and will again.

Robert explains the sport is dominated by riders from the British Isles, "because we don't raise our children (with that degree of risk). It's unacceptable, but over there they do, and it is an acceptable risk." In fact Scarlett knows of only one other local junior rider of American birth who has stuck it out, like her.

She tells a story of how her mettle was tested at Morven Park a month prior to the Montpelier Races. She was riding Untamed Hero, and the field was pushing her off course. "I look up; I'm coming straight at the beacon. And if you go around it, you go off course. So all I did was I pointed and squeezed, and he went right in between the other horse and the beacon. He didn't even think twice; he did exactly as I asked; went in this teeny little space." Scarlett talks machine gun style, in bursts of words. "Around

the corner, after the beacon, I went a little bit straighter; they turned because I was still on the inside." She collided with another horse and jockey.

"I T-boned him, and his horse went straight down and he hit the ground face first." The impact "popped me out

of the saddle and I went soaring like a cannonball." She was uninjured. "You were lucky," says Robert softly. The other jockey, Liam McVicar wasn't as fortunate; he broke his neck and lost eight teeth. Miraculously he is reportedly not paralyzed and will return to the circuit this spring. A steward's inquiry ruled the incident an accident.

But it caused some controversy. Scarlett looks upon it as something of a test, particularly since she is a rookie and a female. In steeplechasing, only 10 percent of the riders are women, and none of them are as tall as she. "I'm six foot tall. For me to make weight, it's harder. That's why you don't see tall jockeys. A guy my height and stature would probably weigh 180. I weigh 140 right now... I have a harder time keeping my weight down. If I were shorter it would be easier."



Orange County "jump jock," Scarlett Lovett clears a rail fence at the Old Dominion Hounds Point to Point aboard a quarter horse named Izzy's Clus Kid that she broke and taught how to jump.

Photo contributed by the Lovett family

Robert looks at her and adds, "She could eat herself out of the saddle quickly. She has to be twice as strong and work twice as hard as a male. It's



"Huggy" and "Lassie." Scarlett Lovett was age nine when this photo of her and her incredible pony, Lassie was snapped at the 2002 Virginia Gold Cup Small Pony races. Scarlett did everything with this pony: team penning, barrel racing, games, dressage, jumper classes, gymkhanas and foxhunting.

Photo contributed by the Lovett family

all upper body holding the horse."

Home-schooled since 10th grade, Scarlett recently earned her high school diploma two years early through The American School. One of the reasons she was homeschooled is because of her riding. "So many days on the road, so many nights, so many injuries, but that's what it takes," says Robert. The walls in the downstairs den are plastered with framed photographs. Robert has built an awards case from a jewelry store revolving watch display. "This is years and years of going to the shows and competing," he says proudly of the rows of belt buckles and Jefferson cups. "The world is at her feet."

Scarlett has just enrolled at Germanna Community College. She's seeking an Associate Degree in Engineering. Asked about her personal goals, she says sensibly, "I want to get my education in case I get too broke up." Then she gets that determined gleam in her eye. "Really, I would like to win the Gold Cup."

The first turn at the flat track race at Montpelier last fall. Dressed in blue silks with yellow chevrons and an orange fox head, Scarlett Lovett is on the outside aboard Attention Deficit. The horse that won the race, Moving Violation is on the rail, being ridden by the jockey with a "K" on his chest. Scarlett came in second. She also won the "groom's award," as the best turned out jockey and mount in the race.

Photo by Susie Audibert



Scarlett Lovett is visibly nervous...but she's not afraid...she's never afraid. It is just before the first race at Montpelier this past fall, and the reason she is nervous is that she is late. She strides purposefully into the paddock, immaculately turned out in jockey silks of "blue, yellow 'V' with orange fox head, blue sleeves, inverted yellow chevrons." Two experienced horsewomen who are judging the "groom's award," for the best turned out jockey and mount, nod appreciatively. They make notes and whisper to each other.

The jump jock girl

Scarlett is the last to weigh in. At six feet tall, she towers over the other jockeys. At age 16, she is younger than some by half. David Bourke rides up leading her mount. David is an experienced and talented Orange County steeplechase jockey and trainer. He's leading a bay mare with the somewhat disconcerting name of Attention Deficit. He brought this horse here just a week ago, fresh off the track at Charlestown.

So, yes, Scarlett is nervous. She is about to ride an unfamiliar mount at breakneck speed in one of the most dangerous sports on earth. But she's not afraid. She checks the girth on the half-pound saddle and mounts, nimble as a cat. Finally she breaks a smile, because, well, she's about to do something she adores.



Untamed Hero came to Foxx View about a year ago. Here, he comes in first at the Marlborough Maryland Junior Flat race last spring.

Photo contributed by the Lovett family

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The distinctive trumpet fanfare announcing the beginning of the race reverberates through the oak trees and across the mass of some 20,000 tailgaters and spectators. The mounted jockeys make their way out onto the track to the starting gate.

This is the first race of the day. It is run on the track and it only has a \$500 purse. Still, it is important for Scarlett, because just this past summer she received her jockey's license from the National Steeplechase Association. She is now in the big leagues. It is also important because she wants to see what this horse that David gave her can do. So does he.

David has coached this jump jock girl well. He has told her to resist the urge to chase the "rabbit" horses, the ones that bolt out of the gate to an early lead only to give out halfway round the track. Chasing them will only spend your own horse. He has also coached her to stay to the outside in better footing. Everybody in the know has figured out that the horse to beat is a Breeder's Cup qualifier by the name of Moving Violation. The plan is to stick with that horse; when he moves, you move.

A crowd of several thousand press against the rail, five and six deep. Tension mounts this crisp and perfect November midday. For some of the owners, jockeys and trainers, time elongates. Everything seems to happen in slow motion. And then... in a flash... they're off.

Scarlett does everything right. When they come around the first turn, she's on the outside, running maybe fourth or even fifth out of a six-horse field. Paddy Young aboard the favorite, Moving Violation, is riding with his 'feet on the dashboard.' In other words, he's standing up in his stirrups doing everything he can to hold his horse back.

As predicted the "rabbit" horses tire; Moving Violation blazes to the lead, and... right there behind him, from the last turn to the wire, for a second-place finish, is Orange County's own jump jock girl, Scarlett Lovett.

Back at the Lovett's modest 14-acre farm off of Little Skyline Drive, Scarlett relives the race. "I was supposed to stay wide and stay second or third because of the rabbit horses, and at the last quarter mile, I cut loose." Her parents, Robert and Robin, are understandably proud. Robert compares their home-based

steeplechasing operation to "taking a go-cart to NASCAR." But he can't resist adding "to run second against a horse that qualified for the Breeder's Cup is quite an accomplishment."

Admitting that he knows next to nothing about horses, he can hardly contain himself. "She's just an exceptional rider with an exceptional gift...She's trainer, rider and



Although Foxx View Farm is only 14 acres, neighboring landowners allow Scarlett Lovett to train on their land. Here, she conditions Untamed Hero in preparation for the spring racing season.

Photo by Phil Audibert



Scarlett Lovett checks on some of her steeplechasers. The horse that won second in the first race at Montpelier this past fall, Attention Deficit, occupies the stall the furthest to the right.

Photo by Phil Audibert

owner...Everything she's done, she's done on her own...She has a special way with horses," he blurts excitedly. "This has been a backyard operation, but we've got great support, like David (Bourke)." Robin lists and thanks others who have helped them in one way or another:

Noel Twyman, Lacy Heider, Patrick and Cindy Jenkins, Jeff and Emily Beshear. "Horses are expensive, a rich man's game," shudders Robert.

But what can parents do when their daughter is not only fearless, but highly competitive and talented as well. "She's never been scared of them. She finds out what makes them tick, and it doesn't take her long to really dial their number in and see what they'll do," says Robert. "They all want to respond to her, do things for her."

At Foxx View Farm, the plan is to acquire horses that aren't quite working out at the track, "and then if they've got the ability, she'll get 'em jumping and get 'em over fences." Scarlett obliges by putting a steeplechaser named Untamed Hero over a lone jump in their front field. "I got him a year ago," she says with pride. "He was terrified of jumps; it was pretty funny." Untamed Hero effortlessly sails over a two-foot rail.

The key here is the environment and the variety of experience. It's nothing fancy at Foxx View; no big stable with an aisle and a cupola and a weather vane; just a four-stall shed and some pasture with a stream running through it. But it sure beats what these horses came from. "Up in Saratoga, they stay in a stall. They'd get an hour turnout in a dog pen," says Scarlett, eyes flashing in anger. "The horses have drilled the ground down so they step a foot down in most pens and that's all they have for an hour turnout, no grass, nothing."

But here, to quote a line from the movie Sea Biscuit, "they can just be horses." Up at the track, "they get wild, you know," interrupts Robert. "Most of them are so hyped up they give 'em drugs to control them. So, if you let them be a horse...it's that special touch, that special loving that makes them a good horse. Most of the time, when we get them here, they come around." Some don't, but most do.

The Lovetts are also fortunate and grateful for their neighboring landowners and leasers: Shack Shackelford, Carl Owens, and Mike and Pattie Knight. All of a sudden their 14 acres become 600 of steep but rideable terrain; as Scarlett's mother terms it, "some of the best steeplechase training ground you can find in Virginia." To prove it, Scarlett

gallops Untamed Hero straight up a hill. She's preparing him for the upcoming spring steeplechase season.

But wait, there's more. At Foxx View, Scarlett exposes her horses to a wide variety of stimuli. "You take 'em out and do everything with 'em, anywhere and everywhere, every chance you get. My poor race horses go team penning, and they'll sit there. They sit for hours on the trailer. They go wherever we go, whatever we want to do. They do everything; they don't just do their thing."

Speaking of team penning, Scarlett is a five-time state champion in the sport. And she actually gets this huge (17.2 hands) thoroughbred steeplechaser to run cattle! "He's actually pretty good at it," she chortles. "It's funny, because he's so big he like literally stalks the cattle because they can run right through his legs."

At Foxx View, "instead of being cooped up in a stall, they get to see things," like... herds of cattle, or the mass and confusion of the Christmas parade. Here's Untamed Hero, only a year off the track, and he's being dressed up in "bows, ribbons, bells and glitter," not to mention being exposed to other distractions such as fire engines and sirens and kids and floats and flashbulbs. Scarlett says the parade is no big deal compared to the Gold Cup at Big Meadow. "Like in a race there's 50,000 people on the sidelines and the tents and the flags. He'll be walking up there (at the parade) like he's the man, like he's going to a race. So, it's no different in a way. This guy here will go through anything."

Like foxhunting, for example. Scarlett will travel as far as the Middlebrook Hunt over in the valley to expose these formerly stall-bound wild-eyed flat trackers to something different. "That's the key there; get them in that group, get them to stay behind and get control, because if you don't have control, you don't have a horse," chimes in Robert.

Robert explains that in steeplechasing, the big money horses are the ones that can jump and run and do it over as much as four miles. "When you get the top horses that have the speed and get them over fences, they become million dollar horses very quickly."

He pauses and asks rhetorically of the mare that came in second at Montpelier, "Will Attention Deficit be that? We don't know; it all depends, how well she likes it. Some horses love to jump." He points to his daughter and says "she's got her started over jumps, and I think she'll be a good one...Get her calmed down with all the handling, and be a horse for



Scarlett Lovett trains on land adjacent to her family's Foxx View Farm near Orange. On Friday eves, however, you might see her and Untamed Hero team penning; the next morning, they might show up at a foxhunt.

Photo by Phil Audibert

awhile. Take her to the hunt, let her get around a crowd, stuff like that."

It all started when 'Huggy,' at age three, first got on a pony named Lassie. 'Huggy' is Scarlett's nickname. "When she was a little kid, she liked to hug," explains her Dad. "So we just nick-named her 'Huggy' and it stuck."

Lassie was a pony that thought it was a dog. It had broken its leg as a foal, and her owners raised her first in a bathtub, then in their living room. "She would go in the house; she would do anything, like a big dog," says Huggy's mom. Lassie was given to Scarlett for her third birthday. She turned out to be a one in a million pony. By age four, Scarlett was riding Lassie solo.

It quickly became apparent that Huggy had a special talent. "It's hard for her to ride with other people because she's always ridden at such a high level, even when she was little," continues her mom. "She would just take off and her friends can't do anything but walk and trot, and she's running and jumping."

By the time she was eight she and Lassie were doing everything together: team penning, barrel racing, games, dressage, jumper classes, gymkhanas, foxhunting, you name it. In fact

today, Lassie is doing the same thing for Nicholas Beshear, the son of Jeff and Emily Beshear. (See October 8th 2009 edition of the Insider: "The Partnership")

It was in 2002, when Scarlett was nine, she entered the pony race at the Virginia Gold Cup, and that's what hooked her. She came in fourth out of five entries, but it was a beginning. Since then, she has entered some 70-plus point to points and hunter races compiling an overall record of 25 firsts, 21 seconds, and seven thirds. She is the winningest junior rider in the history of the Virginia Point to Point Association and the Maryland Governor's Cup Awards Association. She won the North American Point to Point Junior Championship. She won the Thomas McFarlane Memorial Cup. She won the Grand National non-sanctioned race. And then last summer, she hit the big leagues; she got her license, and "the opportunity of a lifetime," to train with Jack Fisher.

"He's not like other trainers," says Scarlett of this legend in steeplechase circles. "He would stick snakes in your bed and play practical jokes. He'd put you on a horse and try to get you off. But if you could jump and you could run, shoot, put you on a horse and you could go. As

soon as he found that out, you were fine."

She was told to not unpack her bags when she arrived at the stable in Maryland. He would know within 24 hours if she could ride as a jump jock. "Other trainers sit on the sidelines and have their riders ride; and they train. He rides with you. He can outride anyone who rides with him, every day with us. And he has no helmet, no boots; he rides in tennis shoes and jeans."

Scarlett made the grade. "She called after the first day to let us know she was staying. We said 'fine, you can stay a month.' And he told us, 'anytime she wants to come back, she can stay as long as she wants,'" says Robin. When she left, Fisher gave her a 2008 National Steeplechase Association book, where the owner, rider and trainer of the year are pictured on the front. "2012, Scarlett will be on cover," wrote Fisher.

Asked about the difference in riding style between negotiating a jumper course and riding a steeplechase, Scarlett rolls her eyes. "You're out in a big open area; you don't have any fences or anything to keep you in. Your legs are jacked up to your chest. It's not a controlled environment. There are 13 other horses surrounding you. All the fences are not the same, not level ground. You go any footing, any weather." Robert sums it up in two words. "It's racing."

Asked to compare the distinctive back seat jumping style of steeplechasers versus the over the neck style of show riders, she explains "Since your legs are so jacked up, when you come down, if you stay crouched over like that, when the horse lands, you would go straight over the neck. You have nothing in front of you. So all you do is lean back like that so you don't fly off forward."

But fly off you do, on occasion. "It's a very dangerous sport," understates Robert. Depending on who you listen to, you can expect to crash once every six or ten rides. Scarlett recites her horseback riding injuries like she's reading a grocery list. "I broke my nose three times and I had plastic surgery, a rhinoplasty to fix it. They broke both my cheekbones to set it back in place. I've had two or three broken shoulders, I've broken my elbow. I broke my shoulder blade in half."

When she was five, a horse stepped on her head causing her to have her first of four concussions. In that incident, she was temporarily blinded. "I had fallen off," explains Scarlett. "You know how you're not supposed to move the person. He (another rider) picked me up, put me on his horse and cantered me back to the barn. Well the jiggling jiggled my brain loose...caused