



Above, neither Kate Samuels nor Nils du Terroir display any hesitation coming off a bank at a cross country competition. At right, Emily Beshear and Here's to You (Quincy) negotiate a bizarre water obstacle in a cross country course. Below, later, Quincy proves he is still serviceable as he easily clears a stadium jump.

Contributed photos



Eventing

Of all the equestrian disciplines, eventing may require the most from horse and rider. It started out in the 19th century as a cavalry competition, and over the years it has been refined to what it is today.

At risk of sounding obvious, a three day event combines three different horse disciplines over three days. The first day features dressage, a precise equestrian ballet that demonstrates a rider's control over his mount. The second day is the grueling cross country section, where horse and rider must show athleticism, bravery and stamina while negotiating all manner of obstacles from ditches to banks to huge solid structures. And the third day is an intricate technical show jumping course that demonstrates that, after all they've been through, horse and rider are still serviceable.

At top levels, events are "starred," with four stars being the toughest.

Eventing is also dangerous, resulting in serious injury and, fairly recently, several highly publicized deaths. The various ruling bodies that control the sport are naturally concerned, and they have done much to make the sport as safe as possible.

Emily, who has suffered a back injury from years ago, says "I think a big part of it is simply that we have more horses, and more riders competing. Simple statistics will show that accidents are going to happen...I think that it has made a lot of us sit back and look into everything that we do to make it as safe and to be as prepared as we can be. It's just a sport where things can happen. A horse can slip and these are solid jumps. There are falls all the time in steeplechases."

Which brings her to make the following observation: Everyone trains with top dressage pros and top

show jumping pros, "but no one ever goes and trains with a top steeplechase professional, and that's where the hardest part of it is."

There's another more delicate question. As Emily terms it, "an even balance between keeping my horses very in tune to me and yet very independent at the same time, and that's a really hard, fine line to find...As competitive as the sport has gotten in the dressage and the show jumping phases, it requires us to make our horses very much on the ball and focused and disciplined and in doing that, you lose a little bit of their independent thinking in cross country."

For this reason, really good event horses cop something of a 'tude, as it were. "Oh yeah," agrees Emily. "I always call Quincy a punk. He's a punk. You have to give them the freedom to be individuals and not fully try to dominate them, because the ones that are good all have that. They can't be like dirt bikes or like robots," says Emily. "The really good ones are very sure of their personality. They know who they are," echoes Kate.

The same is true for the riders. Eventing is definitely not for the faint of heart. "You have to be brave," says Emily.

For that reason, among event riders, there's a unique feeling of camaraderie, a sense of we're all in this terrifying mess together. "Everyone in the event world is so helpful to each other, and I think it's because we all realize there are so many variables that go into it... everyone is out there and trying hard and it's really who's day it is," says Emily.

Well at Jersey Fresh, it was most definitely the partnership of Emily and Quincy, Kate and Nils that made it their day. May they have many more.



During a gymnastics exercise jumps start out low and gradually increase in height and complexity. The idea here is to teach the horse to think independently.

Photo by Phil Audibert

The Partnership

Quincy was fast asleep when they came to fetch him for his cross country ride at Jersey Fresh this past May. "He was passed out, shavings all over him, I mean just sleeping," laughs owner/rider Emily Beshear. Heck, he may have even been snoring gently. But the Thoroughbred ex-racehorse, in true Sea Biscuit style, pulled himself up, shook himself off, and took Emily to a first place finish at the two-star three day event. Right behind them, rode Emily's student, Kate Samuels aboard Nils du Terroir, for a close second.

A story of two women and two horses

It has catapulted the two to national prominence in this, the most demanding of equine sports.

Just look at the July/August edition of *Eventing*, the official publication of the United States Eventing Association. There on page 44, is a Q and A with Kate, mostly about her relationship with her remarkable horse. An account of the aforementioned three day event follows with a photo of Emily and Quincy sailing over a stadium jump. And then moving on to page 72, the national leaderboard shows Emily has broken into the top 50 event riders in the whole darned country, making her the second



Photo by Susie Audibert

Emily's partner is a fine-boned Thoroughbred ex-racehorse named Quincy that she hopes to develop into a top event horse. Together they won a two-star three day event in New Jersey this past May. Quincy's routine includes a hand graze and a nap before every competition.

Orange County resident that we know to be in that elite group. (See *Insider* "The Event Rider" Aug. 30, 2007).

Meanwhile, Emily's student Kate was ranked fifth in the magazine among top young riders. But that's old news. After she led her team to victory in Lexington, KY, she became the top junior rider in the nation! But that won't last for long because she will soon turn 22, sending her into that vast and competitive ocean of adults.

Even more incredible is that these women are doing all this with just one horse each. At this level, top riders have multiple mounts and deep-pocket backers. At Brickland Farm up behind Hardwick Mountain in northwestern Orange County, the sponsors, like CFC Farm and Home Center and Foxden Equine Supplements are all local.

Still, you'd think there'd be some swollen heads and strutting of stuff in the Brickland barn aisle. But nooooo. It's pretty much business as usual. Emily is still teaching lessons and training budding event horses, and Kate, who has roots deep in Orange County (she is the granddaughter of longtime commissioner of revenue, the late Joe Samuels), tries to shoo horn in practice sessions with Nils between being a fulltime UVA student and working nights as a waitress at Farmington Country Club.

So what's this success thing been like? "I've been in this sport long enough to know you just have to ride the wave," shrugs Emily the coach. "It comes up and it goes down. And you have to enjoy it when it's going really well. Yeah it's great," she smiles, but she's not letting it go to her head.

After Emily and Kate came in first and second at Jersey Fresh, some people urged them to immediately progress to the next level. "It's so easy to get caught up in this 'I have this great horse. I better get going, get going, get going.'" But she resists the temptation. "He's not ready," she says of her kind-eyed Quincy. "I know it's in there for him to be quite good, but he's physically and mentally not quite ready." She points out



Photo Susie Audibert

Kate Samuels has been riding since age 3. She spied her future event horse, Nils du Terroir, in a barn in Middleburg where nobody wanted to ride him because of behavior problems. Now they are an inseparable team.

that he is only 9 years old, a relative youngster in a sport where the best performers are well into their mid-teens. "So, he's going to continue out the year at the same level and hopefully when he moves up next year, he'll be ready to compete and can grow from that." Many horses move up too quickly, she cautions, "and within a year, they've disappeared...It's a fine balancing act,



Photo by Phil Audibert

Coach and student, discuss what they hope to accomplish, then set about doing it, and then critique the ride afterwards.

and in the long run, being patient pays off."

What about Kate, the impulsive 21-year-old; how does she feel about being patient? After winning the junior rider competition, she says "That is enough for one year." This striking and seriously focused young lady points to her 8-year-old Selle Francais (French Warmblood). "He is just taking it easy this fall and doing a few national levels just to keep us in tune and improving, in order to move up in the spring. I would rather make sure that everything is very solid and the skills are all there before I make a leap into a different level."

Emily, the coach, was actually quite surprised by her own performance at Jersey Fresh. "I did not go to the Jersey event even thinking about being competitive with him this year. I went as a stepping stone for him to be where he was because I see him as a horse for the big time, for the future, for the next year or two; that's when he's going to hit his stride."

Partnership Number One: Emily and Quincy. Actually his official name is Here's To You, but everyone knows him as Quincy. "The nice thing about horses that are successful at this level is that, in general they know how to conserve energy. The horses that you find that are the best at this sport are this laid back in general on the ground." She points to the bay munching grass at her feet. "He loves going to competitions. He knows his routine. And if I don't take him out for a hand graze, he won't take his nap." And we all know by now, how important his nap is. "So if I have an early ride, I have to get up earlier to take

him out for his hand graze, let him come back and have his little nap. It's just part of his routine."

She looks fondly at the fine-boned animal. "I've had a lot of other horses along the way that I've ridden for other people, but this is the first horse I've had probably since I was a Young Rider that's had this ability that I'm finally at a point financially where I could support it and not have to sell it. I've had to sell a lot of them along the way before they have gotten to this point."

Partnership Number

Two: Kate and Nils. Kate shudders as she tells how she met this animal. "Everyone refused to ride him; he was horrible to deal with, and nobody could figure out that the more you used your strength and your force against him, the more he pushed back in force and strength. And



Photo by Susie Audibert

Kate Samuels has roots deep in Orange County; her grandparents are Doris and the late, Joe Samuels. Kate is a busy young lady. She exercises and takes care of her event horse, Nils du Terroir, attends classes at UVA as a fulltime third year student, and works nights as a waitress at Farmington Country Club.

it was just escalating beyond belief, and nobody could deal with it."

But Kate, who has been riding since age 3, had always been attracted to quirky horses. She saw promise in the wild and crazy Nils. "He really needs his person," she observed. "So after my day of work was done I would just go in his stall and hang out with him and groom him and play with him and so he got to trust me more as an individual...And so I saw a window of how to take this horse who was obviously very talented athletically but very difficult to deal with mentally, and I could see I could work on him that way and he would improve."

And he did. For the first year, all they did was ride around a 2,000-acre tract in conservation

easement that adjoins the Samuels' modest 35-acre farm west of Charlottesville. Gradually Nils improved, being allowed to be just a horse. And in fact at Brickland Eventing, Emily routinely turns horses out for the night to "play around and hope they don't do anything too foolish. If their bodies need to stand up to what we do with them in cross country, they better be able to hold up to cantering around in the field. That's part of conditioning them too, letting them be out to slide around."

Anyway, Kate and Nils reached an agreement. "Look at the size difference between myself and Nils," she says pointing to his 17 hands. Using force is pointless. "If I tried to use that tactic against him I would lose, hands down. And that's how he was dealt with before." But now they work together. "Every new experience for him is equally as new for me...He's my complete responsibility. He's definitely my horse of a lifetime. He's an amazing animal, and I want to ensure that he's around for another 10 years."

It is interesting to note that in the eventing world, in fact in the equestrian world in general, there are more women than men. Why is that? Kate's calm approach to a difficult horse may be the answer. She cannot dominate him; the best she can do is work out a deal with him. Whereas some men want to force an animal to their will, many women prefer to persuade the animal to join the team, often with better results.

Partnership Number Three: Emily and Kate. Sure, they are coach and student, but watching a lesson, they seem to operate by mutual consent. Sure Emily has a dozen years on Kate, but they are more like sisters or best friends, rather than the teller and the told. "I think our relationship is pretty unique," smiles Kate, quickly glancing sideways at her coach. "It's pretty cool, yeah," says Emily, confirming they are equal partners, not adversaries, just like the relationship they have with their horses.

Do they compete against each other? "I've never felt that way," continues Emily. "I take as much pride in helping my students as I do in how my own horses go." The admiration is mutual. Kate says, "I would like to do this as my life's work. I really can't imagine doing anything else," adding she wants to end up "just like Emily."

Of Emily's teaching style, Kate says, "I don't feel like Emily is some sort of authoritarian figure that's lurking over me. She's somebody I'm more than happy to take advice from." She remembers other coaches where "You feel nervous about doing the wrong thing so much that you can't concentrate on doing the right thing. Whereas, every time I come away from a lesson here, I feel I'm a smarter person and a better rider and I don't feel bad about myself or my



Photo by Phil Audibert

By the end of the gymnastics session, Nils is soaring effortlessly over huge oxers like this one.

horse." This sentiment is echoed by other students at Brickland Eventing.

Emily, who has lived in this area since '97, and who bought the Orange County farm three years ago with equine vet/husband Jeff, regularly boards and trains 25-30 horses here. Some of her 30 regular students travel as much as four hours just for a coaching session at Brickland Eventing.

"I don't like having to yell," smiles Emily of her laid-back style. Growing up in Michigan and bringing herself along from age 12, Emily

learned much from occasional clinics with famous trainers, like the O'Connor family. "I still think of myself as someone who is still learning. So I don't try to dominate it too much. I can learn as much from teaching a lesson and watching a horse go as I can help the person.... It's a sport that you can be involved in that's never ending; it's always evolving."

In event riding, there is a delicate balance between letting your horse go and sharply reining him in. Recent accidents, including some deaths, have had some riders reconsider training techniques. Emily describes the ideal relationship between event horse and rider. "It's a good mix, I think, between courage and trust. And I think that's what's cool about our sport is that it really does require that relationship; that bond between horse and rider; because if they're just

dumb, brave, and want to run at things, it's not safe. So it's the right mix of them being careful, smart horses that just put all their trust in you and are willing to do whatever you ask them to do."

She demonstrates this as she coaches Kate through a gymnastics clinic. "Sometimes, we concentrate on making him listen to her the whole time, and other times like today, what I want to do is a little bit more of him having to think for himself. With what we do, we have to balance it out." By the end of this session, Kate is letting Nils find his own way through a complicated combination of 3'9" jumps and tight

turns. Nils independently adjusts his stride to fit the varying distances between obstacles.

"Good partnership," continues Emily, "and I think that's why it's great for both of us because we've been able to bring both of our horses along so we've got that base to work from...There's quite a few that tend to buy the horses that are already going at the upper levels and think, 'Oh, this horse has done this; it understands the job; I can just hop on and go.' That's not usually very successful because, in the end, I think you have to build up that partnership."