

## **Mandy Porter Has A Knack For Being In The Right Place At the Right Time**

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*Jackie Freundlich*

When looking back, we can see how our choices, timing and circumstances weave together to form the tapestry of our life. And grand prix rider and trainer Mandy Porter of Solana Beach, Calif., knows how true that is. By consistently being in the right place at the right time, she's created her own rich and textured equestrian tapestry.

Porter's beginnings are similar to many young equestrians. She rode and competed with various trainers through the years, learning valuable pieces of the how-to-ride puzzle from each one. And by college, she was lucky enough to have the horse of a lifetime, Orbit.

"He couldn't have been a better jumper to take me through the ranks – from juniors to amateurs to my first grand prix," she recalled.

While majoring in animal science, with a minor in agricultural business, at California State Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, Porter, 39, would sneak away on weekends to show Orbit in grand prix events throughout California.

"Talk about right horse, right time – I was spoiled," she said with a smile. "What he lacked in scope he made up for ten-fold in heart. At age 28 he's still hanging out at my parents' place in Diablo [California]."

But her post-college career plans in equine pharmaceuticals changed when northern California trainers Butch and Lu Thomas offered Porter a job as an assistant trainer.

A few years later, through good timing and the right circumstances, Porter was given the opportunity to try her hand (legs and seat) in Muntschemier, Switzerland, at Gerhard Etter's sale barn. The trial period turned into a five-year position with Etter.

"I made the decision to stay so I could keep learning – I wanted to be confident handling every horse, face whatever challenge was ahead," Porter explained. "I got that and 10 times more."

Porter competed almost every weekend, from young horses to international-level horses. She also represented the United States on three Nations Cup teams. While competing on the teams, Porter got to know international competitor Katie Monahan-Prudent, who lives in France and Florida and has been chef d'equipe for several Nations Cup teams.

"One of the most influential and inspirational people I've run across is Katie. She knows how to bring out the most in a rider. She teaches you to be technical, tough, competitive and ready to win," said Porter.

She also spent countless hours in the warm-up ring watching top Europeans ride and train. She soaked up the knowledge and applied it to her methods.

"The opportunity to learn was incredible, there was so much camaraderie among the riders, and everyone helped one another," she recalled. "Plus, I rode on teams with

Peter Wylde, Alison Firestone, Alice Debany and Katie. Again I realized how fortunate I was to be in the right place at the right time.”

### **A New Chapter**

After riding for private sponsors in Italy for 18 months, Porter was ready to close the European chapter of her career and go home. Her time in Europe had been invaluable, but she missed her family and wanted to return to California.

After settling in the San Diego area, Porter started her own business in 2001. She chose to keep a small barn, working with an average of 10 horses at one time. Soon after she opened her barn doors, Porter began to work with Barbara Ellison, owner of Wild Turkey Farm in Woodside, Calif. Ellison has created a memorable advertising campaign for her warmblood stallions Admiral Z, LioCalyon, Lavita, Chesapeake and Argensohn, whom Ellison sold last year after he'd placed with Porter in several grand prix events.

Ellison explained how she reunited with Porter: “I knew Mandy as a junior riding with Butch and Lu Thomas. When I decided to move my horses' home, she had recently returned from Europe. When Mandy came up to Woodside to discuss working with me, we knew right away it was the right fit.”

It wasn't long before Porter was successful with Wild Turkey's stock. Starting with the \$25,000 Grand Prix of Bakersfield [Calif.] in 2002, Porter topped a field of 39 starters to win the class on the Holsteiner stallion LioCalyon. She followed this victory with a win a few months later at the Oaks Blenheim CSI-A (Calif.) on Lavita. In the \$25,000 St. Regis Resort International Class, Porter and Lavita beat the fast times posted by veteran riders Francie Steinwedell-Carvin on Laddidor and McLain Ward on Rio to clinch the win.

Porter was third with Argensohn in the \$75,000 Del Mar National Grand Prix last spring and returned to Del Mar last October to win the \$40,000 Del Mar International Grand Prix with her new mount Summer, this time beating California star Richard Spooner and 27 other riders.

Her current location is a trainer's dream – a private 19-stall barn with a full veterinary clinic. One of her veterinarians owns the facility and is usually nearby in needed. In this setting Porter is able to customize the horses' programs, from start to finish.

Her goal is to achieve each horse's maximum fitness, and the schedule is consistent yet flexible. The horses are turned out daily, put on the European walker for 30 to 45 minutes, and worked six days a week. One or two times a week, they're schooled over jumps, and, depending on an individual's needs, the horses alternate between road hacks, flatwork, pole and cavaletti exercises, gymnastics and course work.

“I feel what will work for that day, encouraging the horse to reach a goal, but maybe altering the plan according to something the horse communicates to me,” she said.

“I like to challenge them, keep them thinking by jumping all sorts of patterns. It's a kind of freestyle workout,” Porter added.

Porter also coaches a handful of select jumper students. Occasionally she gets to the Ellison's stable in northern California and gives an intensive clinic, but most of the horse and rider training she does is on the road.

Ellison's daughter, Megan, trained with Porter for three seasons, qualifying to ride in the North American Young Riders Championships, with Porter as the Zone 10 team's chef d'equipe.

"Mandy is so great to work with," asserted Ellison. "She emphasizes flatwork, which I really enjoy. If I'm working on something at home and have a question, I can call her, and she'll train me right over the phone. And Mandy did a phenomenal job putting the polish on Megan's riding. They developed a solid relationship, and she took her natural talents to the next level."

### **It's Always Summer Time**

Last July, at Spruce Meadows (Alta.), good fortune and luck brought a mare named Summer into the picture. Porter was looking for a horse for Ellison when she tried the mare, then trained by international competitor Norman Dello Joio.

"When I sat on her as a horse for Barb, we just looked at each other and thought, 'Hmmm, there's a little more in this tank,' so I continued to ride her with myself in mind. I was like – once again – right place, right time!" said Porter.

A short six months down the road, Porter and Summer were sitting tied for fifth in the U.S. League West Coast standings for the FEI World Cup, only 23 points behind leading rider Richard Spooner. She'll need to move up to third place to qualify for the Budweiser FEI World Cup Final in Las Vegas, though.

"Mandy is a great rider, and Summer is an awesome horse. The two of them are a perfect match. I think Norman knew that mare would excel with Mandy, and he was right," said Francie Steinwedell-Carvin.

Porter said that she's "still getting to know" Summer.

"In the warm-up ring and in the show arena, we're learning together what works," Porter explained. "We're just fortunate to have found such a fabulous horse. She has exceeded our expectations already."

Certainly one of Porter's goals is to compete in the World Cup Finals, if not this April then in the future. But Porter keeps it all in perspective.

"Being in the ring and winning is great, but another win I truly enjoy is when a young horse or a horse and rider make a break-through in their training. Setting goals, from short term to long term, small steps or giant ones, and the process of achieving these goals, that's a victory," she said.