

SHOW HUNTER

Horseman of the Year



Meredith Taylor



At the beginning of her final year as a junior rider, Meredith Taylor's main goal was to prove she was a capable rider so she could secure a professional riding position before year's end. No rider could have given a more convincing performance—Taylor virtually dominated the fall's equitation finals.

Taylor took the fall indoor circuit by storm under the guidance of trainers Ken Berkley, Gary Zook and Missy

Clark. Because of unforeseen circumstances, Taylor rode a different horse at all three equitation finals—horses she barely knew, if at all—and won the first final, then finished second in the other two.

The fall season began inauspiciously for Taylor when she entered the final round of the Rolex/USEF East Coast Talent Search in the top five, only to have her mount, War Nation, stop at the grob and eliminate her from the competition.

So it may have been a "twist of fate" when War Nation, owned by Clark, was hurt a few days before the Eisers & Pessoa/AHSA Medal Finals. Taylor hopped aboard Clark's Keratin for the first time the day before the class and rode him to the biggest win of her junior career.

The next week, Taylor continued to juggle horses and guided Clark's Grand Finale to second place in the Washington (D.C.) International Equitation Classic. And one week later, Taylor finished second in the Rolex/ASPCA Maclay Finals aboard Clark's Four Wins, whom Taylor began riding that week.

When her reserve championship performance in the 1994 Rolex/USEF East Coast Talent Search Finals is taken into account, Taylor is the only rider to have won or finished second in all four major equitation finals since the fourth (Washington) was added in 1992. And she did it on four different horses—she rode Clark's Bob in the 1994 USEF finals.

But riding new horses is second nature to Taylor, who catch-rode during her junior years. She qualified for the AHSA Medal Finals and ASPCA Maclay Regionals for the first time when she was 12, her first year as a working student for Berkley and Zook's River's Edge Farm in Flemington, N.J.

By the time she was 16, Zook and Berkley trusted Taylor to manage the barn while they were away. To earn her way, she lived there during the summers and traveled to the farm once a week while she was in school. Taylor fed, groomed, tacked and untacked horses, drove the van, showed horses to customers, and kept the barn organized at home and on the road.

"She's well aware of what a hard day's work is and gets pleasure out of doing it," said Clark, the *Chronicle's* 1994 Show Hunter Horseman of the Year. "What takes another kid six

Personal Profile

Age: 18

Hometown: Southampton, N.J.

Family: Parents Hunter & Denise (professional trainer), brother Brad (15) and sister Devon (13).

Employer: Patty Harnois' Holly Hill Farm, Marston Mills, Mass., since December 1995. About 45 horses at home. Travels to teach clients in Rhode Island one day a week.

Favorite horse: Bob, her mount for the 1994 Rolex/USEF East Coast Talent Search victory. "I actually had a whole year with him."

Favorite pastime: "I just hang out with my friends. We always come up with something to do whether it's good or not!"

months to do takes her five minutes. She's one of the few that can go out and ride successfully as a professional. She doesn't mess up very often."

By year's end, Taylor did what she set out to do—found a job riding for Patty Harnois' Holly Hill Farm in Marston Mills, Mass. The transition from junior rider to professional is difficult for many young riders, but those who know Taylor best are certain that she is one of the few who will make it.

"She was always comfortable on a horse—probably too comfortable," said Zook. "She could ride forwards, backwards, sideways—it didn't matter. But she needed discipline. She was a little rough around the edges."

"Even when I was little, I knew this is what I wanted to do. When everyone else was choosing colleges, I had to choose a road—I chose the horse route," said Taylor. "And the outcome of it all, my final year. . . I guess it was the right path," she added. "I just want to be a strong, well-known professional. Not just a face in the crowd." □

Karyn Grubb

MEREDITH TAYLOR'S 1995 HIGHLIGHTS

Winter Equestrian Festival (Fla.) Circuit—champion large junior hunter on Amanda Hoche's Knee Deep. Devon (Pa.) Horse Show—AHSA Medal—second, ASPCA Maclay—second on Missy Clark's Scout. Vermont Summer Classic—won 20th USEF class and earned USEF gold medal. Newport (R.I.) Jumping Classic—junior/amateur-owner jumper reserve champion on Tammy Lightner's Dakota, small junior hunter champion on Alimed Corporation's Degas. Autumn Classic (N.Y.)—grand and small junior hunter champion on Degas. Pennsylvania National—Eisers & Pessoa/AHSA Medal Finals—champion on Missy Clark's Keratin. Washington (D.C.) International—Washington International Equitation Classic Finals—reserve champion on Clark's Grand Finale. National—Rolex/ASPCA Maclay Finals—reserve champion on Clark's Four Wins. Eastern States Exposition (Mass.)—Eastern States Equitation Classic—champion on Magic Brew.