



# INTRODUCING THE 2013 DIARIST: **ALLISON SPRINGER**

*After placing second at Rolex and sixth at Burghley last year, Allison Springer, international competitor and USEA Board member, lets us in on her journey through the 2012 season.*

BY ALLISON SPRINGER

**H**ello! I first want to thank the USEA for the opportunity to share my upcoming year with you. I would like for you all to fasten your seatbelts for this ride, as I know this year will be like every other year: full of joy, heartbreak, tears, and smiles. As Clayton Fredericks said at Burghley this year, “You spend more time picking yourself up in this sport than you do actually celebrating.” I cannot agree with him more, and I promise to give you an honest inside view of what “living the dream” is really like. Admittedly, this article is going to be a bit fluffy as I feel so inspired by the recent USEA Convention. However, I promise I will have much more to share once the competition season begins!

I am certain most of you know that I am an aspiring Team USA rider. What many of you may not know is my commitment to bettering our sport in this country on every level. A few years ago, when the going was a bit rough for eventing in the U.S.—when the media, blogs, and chat rooms were flooded with untruths and toxic sentiment—I realized I not only wanted to but

I needed to do something to both help our amazing sport get back on solid ground and to make it better

Allison Springer and four-star mount Arthur during the dressage phase at Rolex 2012, where they scored a 39.8. HANNAH BENNETT PHOTO



for every person and every horse. I was very concerned about the growing lack of community I was feeling, which is usually the biggest draw to our sport. I believe eventers are the friendliest and most fun group of equestrians out there! I was not sure where or how to get involved, but by just raising my hand it was actually very easy. I now sit on the USEA's Board of Governors (yes, I am a Governess—I love saying that), and am active in the following USEA committees: the Professional Horseman's Council, the Membership Committee, and the Young Event Horse Committee; I am on the USET's Eligible Athletes Committee, and I am one of the original founders and the current Vice President of the Professional Riders Organization (PRO). I cannot tell you how great it has been to become this involved. There are so many spectacular people working behind the scenes for a common goal that I feel truly blessed to be a part of the team. It has been incredible to work with and understand others points of views be they officials, organizers, course designers, builders,

breeders, amateurs, owners, etc., and to learn how we can all work together to create a better sport. The best part is that it is working!

## AN ENCOURAGING CONVENTION

Wow, what a great Convention we just had in Colorado Springs! You could not help but feel the great excitement and incredible sense of community about our sport on every level. David O'Connor definitely played a starring role in this excitement. I am pretty certain that he has a couple of clones because I am not sure how he spoke at nearly every meeting and found time to sit down individually with so many High Performance riders. David, our new Chef d'Equipe, unveiled his plan for the future and his commitment to bettering the education of all our riders from the ground up. In the past, our High Performance lists were picked by who is hot now, they were given some lessons on only their top horses, and sometimes were given grants to see how

they did at whatever major competition the U.S. was gearing up for in the immediate future. There never seemed to be any true forward thinking, and I always felt that we were not as strong as we should be because our foundation at a very basic level was not correct enough. I love that David is very committed to addressing these issues. He is asking a huge amount of sacrifice from the riders and support from the entire eventing community to help put the USA on top.

Several individuals have made incredible financial contributions to help achieve David's High Performance goal as it truly is not possible to achieve without money. I am so encouraged by the huge new support of both the Future Event Horse and Young Event Horse programs. I believe we have amazing horses in this country that can be our future team horses; I love that there is now a better avenue for breeders and riders to come together and see these horses through to their highest potential. Thank you to Tim Holekamp, Christine Turner, and Ms. Jacqueline Mars for backing

these programs and helping them to develop into something incredible.

I also cannot thank the Event Horse Owners Task Force (EHOTF) led by Mark Hart (another man who has at least two clones running around) enough for all the great work they have done. The EHOTF has helped to bring new people into our sport and educate them on the joys and importance of horse ownership in this country and has also helped to make syndication a much more accessible avenue for horse ownership in this country. I met one of Arthur's owners, Lisa Mason, for the first time in person at the Convention in Colorado thanks to the EHOTF. Lisa was at Rolex this spring and heard an announcement about the EHOTF informational meet and greet at the Kentucky Horse Park where she then learned about *experienceeventing.com*. From that website she found out about how easy and inexpensive it is to become a part owner of a top horse. I cannot thank the EHOTF enough for connecting us. I of course desperately need the support, but I am thrilled to have such a great new friend for life!

Beyond the excitement of David's new plan for putting the U.S. on top, the USEA continues to make incredible strides in improving the safety, education, and enjoyment of our sport for our entire membership. We will see the American Eventing Championships move to Texas Rose this year, and hopefully it will find a permanent home there and evolve into a true national championship that is on every rider's radar. Thanks to Adequan and all the many other wonderful sponsors for their continued support. I am certain we will see an influx of Advanced level combinations beginning this year, something that the AEC has unfortunately lacked in the past.

The Hall of Fame dinner was beyond extraordinary. Whoever thought to put a Kleenex box at each table deserves an award themselves! I sat with two of my sponsors, Charles Owen and Point Two, and I hope that I did not scare them off. I certainly do not cry like a movie star; it is really not pretty and I definitely sound like an odd creature from another species. I think I used half of the Kleenex

box; Erin Kellerhouse used the other half. It was a superb night of celebrating some of the greats of our sport. If you have never been to a Convention, I encourage you to go to one, especially on a Hall of Fame year.

## COMMON GOALS

Some of the greatest work that I am most proud to be involved in is the work that PRO has done for this sport. I know that the name has been a bit confusing for some as our organization is not just for the elite riders within our sport but for all professionals (riders, trainers, grooms, organizers, farriers, etc.), and I think there is a general lack of understanding why we are an organization operating outside of the USEA and USEF. Although we operate outside the USEA and the USEF, it does not mean that we are working against them. We all have a common goal of creating a better overall experience for everyone involved in this great sport, and the areas where we, the professional riders, could have the greatest immediate influence fell outside of what the USEA and USEF could draw attention to and accomplish. PRO does in fact work closely with the USEA and USEF. We partner with the EHOTF, a working group within the USEF, to provide amenities and a much more enjoyable experience for our owners. Our members are also active in many of the USEA and USEF committees, and we have had great influence in developing many new rules and programs to

help increase the safety and standard of competition within our sport.

David's great goal for the future of U.S. eventing is a goal that we have shared with him for a long time. The reality of achieving that goal within the current U.S. eventing structure is near enough impossible. To be an elite rider in this country, you do have to be a professional, which means you spend the majority of your time running your business which includes hours of teaching lessons and clinics and training and selling horses just to get by. We do not have a lot of time to dedicate to our own training and pursuit of our Olympic goals. This is very different for the riders in Germany and England who truly are professional event riders; they spend the majority of their time training, producing their own competition horses, and competing. The only way we can dedicate the amount of time needed to put U.S. eventing consistently on top of the podiums and leaderboards is through better financial support of our riders. This financial support will either come from a few wealthy individuals that love our sport or it will come through corporate sponsorship as it does for other sports. The latter is something we have woefully lacked, as our sport has done very little to promote itself and attract new people in the past.

To get better sponsorship we need more spectators, to get more spectators our competitions have to be something

## An Update on the Horses

As far as my horses go, there is not much to report right now as everything is a bit quiet. This is one of my favorite times of year where I am not worried about getting to the next competition, and I have plenty of time to work on the basics. We have been doing a lot of strengthening and suppling flatwork (not test work), gymnastics, and a rider position "hell week" with Jim Wofford. Arthur's goal for 2013 is to do the Luhmühlen and Aachen trip in June and then

Pau CCI4\* at the end of the year in preparation for the 2014 World Equestrian Games in Normandy. Going for Gusto, my Intermediate horse, will do a spring CCI2\* and make the move up to Advanced. I am really excited about "The Big Goose," and he does not seem fazed about the big shoes he has to fill. I have a couple of young French girls, Sophia and Tonique, that really love the sport, and I am looking forward to seeing how far they can go.

that people want to go to. They have to be fun, have family activities, and be much easier to understand. Yes, there are a few competitions that have figured out how to do this on their own (e.g. Rolex and Red Hills). However, the majority of our competitions struggle with this. Where PRO felt like we could have the most immediate affect on the sport was to help produce the sort of competitions that would create this better overall experience, and what great improvements we have seen in the competitions we have partnered with to form the PRO Tour Events. PRO cannot change every event in our country, but hopefully we can form a model that other competitions can use to help improve their events. I also believe it should not just be the upper level competitions that are attractive to spectators and sponsors; our sport needs to be more accessible at every level in every region. I love the initiative Fox River Valley Pony Club Horse Trials in Illinois has taken on creating a

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destination event out of a local Pony Club horse trials. By making our sport more attractive to spectators, media, and sponsors, we not only give our elite riders a chance of actually achieving U.S. eventing success, but we also are able to improve our sport for horses and riders at every level within the sport. With more money in the sport, organizers should be able to afford better footing, courses, and competition for horses and riders at every level.

I am so excited about the future right now! I did have a fantastic year in 2012, but the disappointment and confusion surrounding the Olympics made it difficult for me to keep my spirits up about the future of High Performance eventing in the U.S. I cannot put into words my gratitude towards the entire eventing community's efforts to boost our sport. The renewed enthusiasm and direction is exactly what we need. I look forward to the journey ahead with all of you by my side! 🐾



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