

A Few Minutes With Rich Fellers

by Erin Gilmore

With his shock of white hair and unmistakable “yee-haw!” expression as he skims over the tops of grand prix fences, Rich Fellers possesses a unique combination of success. A self-taught rider who trained his first horse up to the grand prix level, today he’s a constant among almost every major grand prix ranking list. With Flexible, the 16-hand Irish Sporthorse stallion owned by Harry and Molly Chapman, he finished second to Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum at the 2008 World Cup Finals, and earned a spot on the 2010 World Equestrian Games long list over the winter.

Rich is the only rider on the Rolex/USEF Show Jumping Ranking list from the state of Oregon, and while he does admit the obvious, that “the downside to having Wilsonville, Oregon as a base is the significant distance to most major shows,” he’s been based there for the last two decades, and wouldn’t call any other place home.

When the Chapmans asked Rich and his wife Shelley to move north from Southern California in 1989, they took them up on the offer. Rich trained privately for the Chapman’s Whip and Spur Ranch for 20 years, and began taking on outside clients last year. Built on the successes of his long partnerships with Flexible and the grand prix horse McGuinness, Rich has become an established and respected competitor. While northwest Oregon is not exactly known for its international grand prix riders, Rich is a native of the forested state, and champions the area.

“Wilsonville, Oregon is a great place for training horses,” he says. “The weather is mild. The grass is plentiful and green year round. The terrain is soft rolling hills and valleys,



Rich and Shelley Fellers sharing a moment in a bamboo forest on Maui during last year’s Spring Break vacation with their two children, Chris and Savannah.

Photo courtesy Rich Fellers

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 A photograph of a rider in equestrian attire jumping a brown horse over a white fence. The rider is wearing a dark helmet and jacket. The horse is in mid-air, clearing the jump.

which are helpful for developing fitness and balance. We put a lot of focus on flat work, jumping fundamentals and maintaining happy, fresh horses.”

Rich’s riding history might be unconventional, but it speaks to his natural talent and feel. He began riding at age 10 on his step-mother’s Arabian. By 11 he was jumping, and took his first horse, a racing Appaloosa, literally from the backyard to the grand prix ring at Spruce Meadows. He notes that the most valuable thing he taught himself was to never be completely satisfied or content with his riding or training.

Rich keeps his show schedule light, and is the best example of making each class count; despite showing just 16 weeks per year and logging many travel miles, he has qualified for and competed in five World Cup Finals. He made the 2010 World Equestrian Games long list this winter after jumping clear in trials 1 and 3 with Flexible. After nursing Flexible back from potentially career ending injuries in 2004 and 2006, the small, talented stallion has become Rich’s most dependable partner. Last fall they finished up the year by winning the \$50,000 FEI Del Mar International Grand Prix and \$75,000 Grand Prix of Sacramento, and in February Rich and Flexible led the West Coast League World Cup Qualifying Standings by almost 20 points.

With a certain berth at the 2010 World Cup Finals, and WEG on the horizon, it’s evident that Rich Fellers, Wilsonville Oregon, handles all types of obstacles with ease. Oregon can be proud to call him one of their own.