

H O R S E S H O W

Hap Hansen – Still Horse Crazy After All These Years

Hap Hansen rides hunters and jumpers with a touch of genius. His style, smooth as silk, makes even tough horses look easy. He's also one of the nicest people on earth. A popular horse forum archived a Hap thread that posted all sorts of positive messages about him. One recounted the time Hap spotted her trying to walk a course alone, invited her to join him and discussed how to ride it. Another recalled how he volunteered his plane and pilot to fly her to where her mother had been hospitalized for a medical emergency. Some talked about how he sorted out problem horses and riders. Others just raved about his riding.

It all began in California where he continues to teach, train and compete.

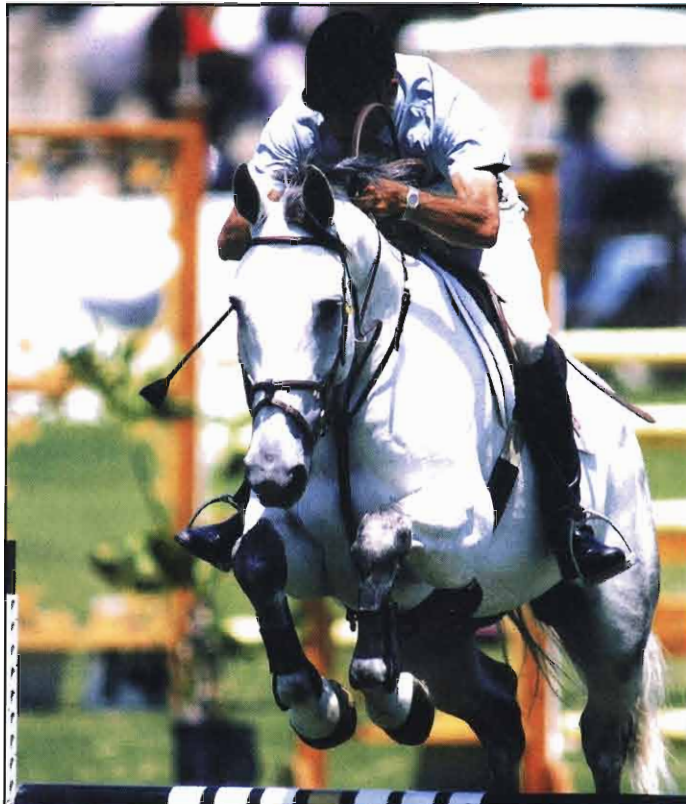
"My family was very supportive once I got the bug to do it," says Hap. "My parents both tried to ride - a little bit on the trails and just trotting and cantering around on pleasure horses."

Hap lucked out: 10 when he started trail-riding on rented steeds, his not-horsey parents decided that lessons might be a good idea. When Hap didn't outgrow his passion for horses, they joined a nearby riding club where their progeny spent five years learning from the legendary Jimmy Williams, Flintridge's Riding Master. In 1978 Jimmy started putting together West Coast teams, utilizing his protégés to represent the US, and Hap rode several times in the Nation's Cups held at Spruce Meadows.

Over the years Hap distinguished himself as California's premier show rider. He has earned more than two million dollars in prize money, and in 2006 scored his 98th Grand Prix win. Is he going for 100? Bet your boots on it, but he's cagey: "I have a new ride, so we'll see how that turns out."

In 2004 Hap got the ride on a stallion imported from Germany where it had won the Young Hanoverian Jumper Championships. Barbara Gualco bought Sir Caletto from Olympic gold medalist Paul Schockemohle with the intention of establishing this horse as a premier sire of hunters at her Silverhorne Farm.

"He was such an exceptional horse," recalls Hap. "He



Hap Hansen and Puccini S in action August 2004 at Blenheim in California.

Photo by www.JumpShotUSA.com

was a fabulous jumper - just a joy to ride."

According to the owner, it was a thrill to watch horse and rider put in hunter rounds. They notched up championships and reserves in Regular Working Hunters, cleaning up at Indio (to name just one series.) But destiny called: Sir Caletto returned to the farm and a full book.

"Hap can really finesse a ride, which is important for Sir Caletto, being a jumper and a stallion," says Barb. "Hap's incred-



Hap Hansen showed Sophia Loren (by Sir Caletto) in hand, winning the Sallie B. Wheeler 2yo Breeding class in the IHF at Del Mar. Owner Barb Gualco holds the cooler, accompanied by their entourage.

Photo Courtesy of Silverhorne Farm



Hap and Sir Caletto show their winning form over fences in the Regular Working Hunters.

**by Flying Horse Photography/Todd Sutherland -
www.proimagesoftware.com/flyinghorse**

ibly smooth and sensitive in his approach to the horse and the fences, which are pretty stout in the Regulars. Paul had told me the stallion for sure makes good hunters and jumpers, and Hap really brought out the horse's natural athleticism, changing him from a jumper to a polished hunter. That led me to working with Hap with a second horse. I had aspirations for Puccini S, because of his jumping caliber, but I never dreamed that Hap would take him all the way to Spruce Meadows where he won a meter-30 class with 70 horses. That's a pretty glorious venue with Hap tooting around on your jumper - for an owner it doesn't get any better. I thought the pinnacle was Hap at Indio with Sir Caletto, but the Spruce Meadows' gig was amazing."

Flying fences on horseback isn't Hap's only outlet. He also enjoys flying his own twin-engine six-seater airplane. The longest flight he's made was California to Tampa.

"You're always learning when you're flying," he says.

Obviously, there are parallels between piloting a plane and riding horses. He makes it look so easy, which appeals to his clientele. Hap works with juniors, amateurs, hunters and jumpers with quite a few adult amateurs. He also shows young horses for Linda Smith.

His teaching approach reflects the years he spent riding lots of outside horses for Jimmy Williams, who individualized his method to suit each horse and rider.

"Some horses you have to be stern with, some you need to have a lot of finesse, and sometimes you don't figure it out," admits Hap. "It's the same with people. They're all individuals, horses and riders, and you have to figure them out psychologically. Most of the clients are there because showing is their hobby and enjoyment. It's nice to figure out how they can enjoy that horse better."

Which is exactly what Hap sets out to do. He's happiest when he's finessing a half-ton or so of equine athlete around a course of fences. He's also a good sport and philosophical, to boot.

"I enjoy both the riding and the coaching," says Hap. "It's fun to work with a good horse and fun to work with a talented rider."