



Courtenay Fraser Gambled And Won With Against All Odds

It took persistence and a special bond, but this horse of unusual breeding proved he can compete in the Grand Prix.

Sara Lieser

Anyone out there who believes only expensive warmbloods can compete in upper-level dressage needs to meet Courtenay Fraser. A talented rider who grew up on Vancouver Island, B.C., Fraser defied all expectations and took an ordinary grade horse up the

levels to Grand Prix. It took patience and persistence, but the aptly named Against All Odds has held his own at the top levels for years.

Now Fraser has her sights set on an even bigger goal: trying to qualify for the 2008 Olympics for Canada. While it might

seem foolish to attempt that with a Belgian Draft-Thoroughbred-Quarter Horse mix, Fraser's been called foolish before, and it never stopped her from aiming for her dreams.

"I shoot for the stars. I always think that we should try for as much as we can



(Carolynn Bunch Photo)

"He's really wanting to show it off now. It's not so hard for him, and he's starting to enjoy what he knows," said Courtenay Fraser of her unconventional Grand Prix mount, Against All Odds.



"He's an exception and a hope for many," said Courtenay Fraser of her Grand Prix partner Against All Odds.

and see where it gets you," said Fraser. "We just keep chipping away at it."

Fraser first met "Quincey" as a naughty 3-year-old. Believed to be a product of the Pregnant Mare Urine industry in Canada, Quincey was purchased by Cindy Amoie as a yearling, and she intended him to be a trail horse for her mother, Donna Knowle.

Roanne Tyson, Fraser's trainer at the time, started Quincey but soon decided he wasn't going to fit the bill as a trail horse.

"His attitude wasn't so good back then, and he was a bit of a monkey," said Fraser. "She ended up having me ride him instead because he was a handful."

Just a teenager herself, Fraser never doubted she'd be able to work through Quincey's behavior and turn him into a dressage horse. The fact that he was 15.2 hands and built downhill didn't bother her.

"When he goes, he doesn't look downhill," she said. "He's got incredible sitting power for being built the way he is. He's got a really good engine."

Fraser set her first unlikely goal—competing Quincey at the North American Young Riders Championship—and checked that off her list in 2000 when Quincey was just 7.

At that point Knowle wanted to sell Quincey, but Fraser wasn't ready to let him go.

"Dietrich von Hopffgarten really urged me to purchase him at that time. He said, 'You're almost at the Grand Prix, and you should buy him.' He even said he'd help me to buy him," recalled Fraser. "We ended up buying him when he was 8 years old. I've had him ever since."

Quincey started competing at Grand Prix two years later and has continued at that level for the past five years.

"Every year he gets better," said Fraser. "At the start he didn't have enough strength, but over the years he's gotten stronger and



(Amelia Butler Photo)

stronger. This year is going to be his best."

▶ Little By Little

Although Fraser firmly believes that any horse with three good gaits can reach Grand Prix, Quincey has a few qualities that helped him along the way.

"He was quite obstinate, but he never got frazzled about anything," she said. "His brain takes pressure really well, even though he's not always the most willing to go forward. He never got worried."

The most difficult thing Fraser had to overcome was his feisty attitude as a young horse. He reared, and he was constantly testing her. But she believes that same aggressive spirit has helped him conquer the most difficult dressage movements.

"He was quite the fighter. Now he's put that into a positive spin," said Fraser. "He's a real



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DRESSAGE

A longstanding partnership between Against All Odds and Courtenay Fraser enabled the horse to go from rogue to Grand Prix schoolmaster.

trier. He feels no pain and grits his teeth. He has a pretty big heart to do what he does.”

One reward for Fraser’s hard work with Quincey is the improvement she continues to see in his gaits and way of going.

“If he went naturally, he’d be a lot more on his front end,” she said. “I think dressage will end up making him last longer, because it trains him to use his body more efficiently.”

For the past year Fraser, 26, and Quincey have trained with Jeremy Steinberg in Carnation, Wash. Both Steinberg and Fraser rode extensively with von Hopffgarten, so they had a similar background.



(Photo courtesy of Courtenay Fraser)

The Benefits And Drawbacks Of The Less-Than-Ideal Dressage Horse

Courtenay Fraser wouldn’t trade Against All Odds for the most perfectly bred dressage horse in the world, but working with a horse that isn’t built for upper-level dressage certainly has its ups and downs.

Fraser’s ridden fancier horses than “Quincey” and enjoyed them, but she said she’s learned a lot by making her first journey to Grand Prix with a less talented mount.

“Dietrich [von Hopffgarten] really installed in me a lot of learning to compromise with their limitations and how to work around it. I don’t think I would have realized that if I was riding something more gifted,” she said. “I can recognize what not the ideal could offer.”

Her coach Jeremy Steinberg has also struggled with horses that don’t initially look like they have upper-level potential.

“Many times you have what you have to train,” he said. “You don’t have the cream of the crop. If you wait for the horse, you could wait forever, and you’ll never get in the show arena. If you have a horse that is correct and has the right attitude, you should show.”

But Steinberg also said you make fewer compromises in the training process when you’re working with a horse bred and built for dressage.

“Whether it’s an emotional or temperamental discrepancy on the horse’s part, whether it’s conformational, movement or a combination of the two, there are certain things you have to do at home that are not what you would do in the test with the horse,” he said.

“With Quincey there are lots of times where you go posting and let him stretch, take a time out,” he continued. “There are times where his poll doesn’t have to be the highest point all the time. With his hollow back, he couldn’t support that forever. If you have one with ideal conformation, movement and a super temperament, there are fewer compromises you need to make in your day-to-day training. The transition from the training to the showing becomes a lot easier.”

That doesn’t mean Steinberg’s going to be turn down rides anytime soon, though. “Many top trainers suggested that Parocco wasn’t going to make it to Grand Prix. If I’d listened to that, I would have missed the defining opportunity of my career,” he said. “Courtenay felt something in that horse that she wanted to push through. There are so many horses that get overlooked that just need that extra chance, a little extra time.”

“Dietrich used to take on these horses that you never thought would be able to do it, and his perseverance and patience always proved out in the end. They all ended up getting somewhere,” said Steinberg.

But von Hopffgarten focused more on training than showing, so when Fraser arrived, Steinberg knew he could help her improve Quincey’s scores.

“It was exactly that stage where the Grand Prix movements were so solid, and it was time to up the ante and make that transition from doing all the Grand Prix to putting a real test together,” he said.

“I shoot for the stars. I always think that we should try for as much as we can and see where it gets you.”

—Courtenay Fraser

Quincey had moments of brilliance, but Steinberg wanted to work with Fraser to teach him to carry himself beautifully for the entire test.

“It’s the difference between riding a half-pass to ride the half-pass versus riding the half-pass and making the trot so impressive that it gets an 8,” said Steinberg. “He’d have moments where he’d have a spectacular trot and then moments where he’d trot like his breeding. He was very correct but not always having that extra snap to him.”



► Compromise

Reaching that goal hasn't always proceeded smoothly. "One of the hardest things is to really get him uphill. To get the best feeling through his back, you have to make him a little long and a little rounder in the neck to get his back loose. His poll isn't always the highest point—not curling but not fully uphill," said Steinberg. "He needs a lot of stretching moments and a lot of time-outs to let his body soften again."

Sometimes Steinberg and Fraser would disagree about whether or not Quincey needed a break.

"She knows him better than anybody, but there are times where he has to work through some things to move to the next level," said Steinberg.

"It was so neat to see a run-of-the-mill backyard guy do the advanced stuff."

—Courtenay Fraser

But Fraser doesn't mind compromising. "Dietrich was really good with training ways that aren't necessarily by the book, but it was a compromise to make it more comfortable for my horse at the time with his training and his muscling," she said.

Those compromises have paid off as Quincey grew stronger and more correct over the years. Not only can he do all the Grand Prix movements, but now he can also do them with a little extra spark for a few more points.

"He's really wanting to show it off now," said Fraser. "I put him up in passage, and he sort of takes over. That's neat for me to feel him desiring it more as he gets stronger. It's not so hard for him, and he's starting to enjoy what he knows."

Fraser isn't the only one to notice the improvement. "It's quite amazing to see Quincey trot in the warm-up and then see him 15 minutes later when you have him a little bit lower in the croup and he's closed up more," said Steinberg. "He just eats up the ground. It's interesting how the dressage work has changed and developed his movement."

Quincey's also developed quite a fan club. One of Fraser's biggest highlights was riding in a symposium with Swedish Olympian Jan Brink.

"Jan was really complimentary, but at least 40 people came up to me from the audience," recalled Fraser. "So many had tears in their eyes. They said,

'This is amazing; your horse is amazing.' They were so over the moon that it wasn't a super fancy, imported horse. It was so neat to see a run-of-the-mill backyard guy do the advanced stuff."

People have e-mailed Fraser from all over the country encouraging her to continue and telling her how she's inspired them to do more with their PMU-bred horses.

"He's an exception and a hope for many," said Fraser.

► It's All In The Training

Quincey doesn't usually receive high marks on his gaits, but he often receives 7s and 8s for individual movements.

"That shows that it is in the training. He's not a huge mover, but he's trained as correctly as we can train him," said Fraser.

The judges note that he needs to be more uphill with more engagement for higher marks, but they aren't negative about his ability. He can score 8s on his

A Perfect Union



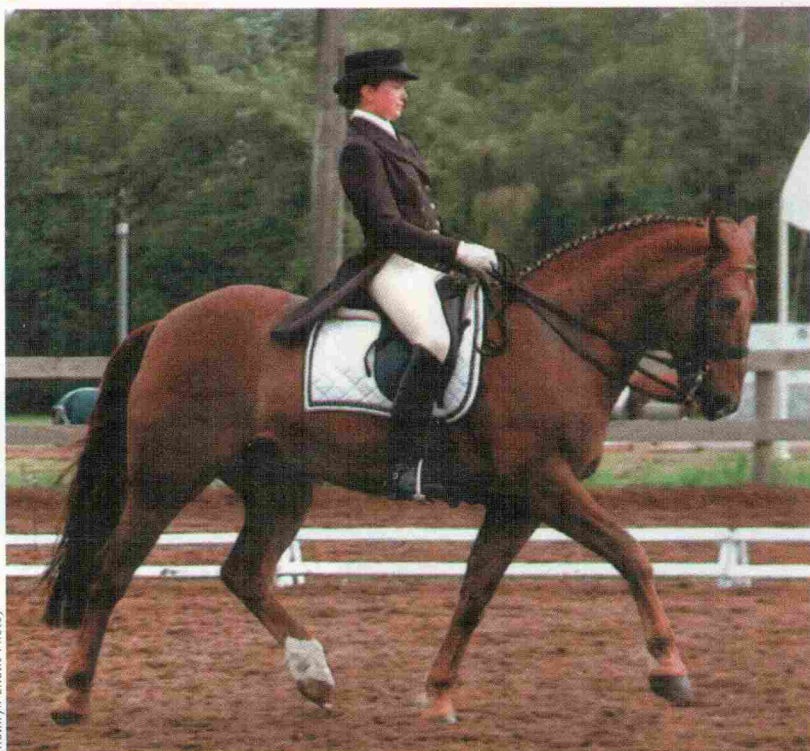
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(Kathryn Eituis Photo)

Riding for Canada at the North American Young Riders Championship was just one dream Courtenay Fraser fulfilled with Against All Odds.

pirouettes, has an excellent piaffe and good ability for passage and tempi changes.

"All timing right, cards right, we can get her to hit some of that in the test, and the scores will come up," said Steinberg. "If you get all 6s and a few 7s, then you're already at a low 60 percent. If you do that a couple of times and get a really solid feeling for what you can push and what you can't, then you can bump a few of those up, and your score does go up."

"Grand Prix horses don't grow on trees. You have to cherish them."

—Jeremy Steinberg

Fraser plans to campaign Quincey in California for the next few months. She has until June 23rd to send her scores to the Canadian Federation, but first she'll have to qualify to show in CDIs in the United States.

"At the first two shows I'm going to try to get over 64 percent with Quincey in front of an FEI judge. Then I'll attempt to do the next three CDIs to try to get scores for the trials," she explained.

Steinberg is behind her all the way to try for her dreams. He too has experienced showing a limited horse at Grand Prix.

"It creates a funny frustration," he said. "You can go in and have the test of a lifetime and come out with 59 percent. There are negative aspects of showing you can get into, but there's so many positive aspects. You get a good gauge on your training. How do you compare to other people out there? How does your horse compare? It goes back to the comments instead of the scores."

A lot of Steinberg's encouragement stems from his desire to see an up-and-coming rider like Fraser gain experience at Grand Prix, no matter the horse.

"She needs to understand the process, see how the horse shows work, meet the management and get involved in that circle while she has the horse going," he said. "Steffen Peters said to me once that Grand Prix horses don't grow on trees. You have to cherish them. You have to take care of them, their health, their sanity, but you also capitalize on the fact that you have one. The next one isn't going to get dropped in your lap." 🐾

More Than 60 Years Of PMU Foals

Since 1942 ranchers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Canada, and North Dakota have bred mares to create pregnant mare urine, a substance from which the scientists at Wyeth Pharmaceuticals create hormone therapy drugs.

The industry hit its peak in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s when more than 400 ranches existed with as many as 40,000 broodmares.

Over the years horse lovers and animals rights groups called for more humane conditions for the mares and foals, such as fresh water and adequate stall size. Government investigators and officials from the American Association of Equine Practitioners visited the farms, regulations were created, and in 1990 *The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Horses in PMU Operations* was published. The North American Equine Ranching Council was created in 1995 to assist education, breeding and marketing better foals.

Finding good homes for the offspring of PMU mares has been a continuing issue for members of this industry. In 2003 the Women's Health Institute cut short a study when researchers discovered that taking combined estrogen and progestin drugs increased the risk of heart attack, stroke and breast cancer in older women. At the same time the Food and Drug Administration approved a version of the hormone therapy treatment that used 1/3 the original dose of hormones.

Most recently researchers from the WHI published a new analysis of data from two hormone trials. While the risk of heart attack from hormones may not be increased in women who start the hormones less than 10 years after menopause, there is increased risk in women who are more distant from menopause, and the risk of strokes increased for women taking hormone therapy regardless of when they started menopause.

As demand for the drugs decreased, Wyeth officials cut back on contracts for PMU production. Currently 5,600 mares live on 72 farms in Manitoba and produce approximately 5,600 foals yearly. All PMU foals are microchipped, and ranchers may not sell the foals to slaughterhouses, auctions or rescue groups.

PMU foals are mainly Quarter Horses, CanAm Sport Horses or draft crosses, and ranchers have made the effort to improve the quality of their breeding stock so that the foals will easily find a market.