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Junior Perspective: Zazou Hoffman Interviews New Mexico's Guy McElvain

Guy discusses fox hunting, Holsteiners, and his business

Zazou Hoffman for PhelpsSports.com

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Guy McElvain and Airforce One

Zazou Hoffman is a fifteen-year-old junior rider from California. In 2005, she won

the Ronnie Mutch Working Student Scholarship, which led to an association with respected East Coast trainers Missy Clark and John Brennan. In January 2007, Zazou was one of seven elite riders chosen to work with Olympic Chef d'Equipe George Morris in Wellington, Florida.

Zazou was put in touch with grand prix rider and Holsteiner breeder Guy McElvain by NAYRC Zone 8 Team coordinator Corky Shaha. Mr. McElvain's farm Rancho Corazon is based on the Rio Grande River in Lemitar, New Mexico where his whole family is involved in showing and training horses. He is also the founder of the Grand Prix de Santa Fe.

Zazou: Guy, how did you start riding?



Guy: I grew up in New Mexico and Texas. I was born in Santa Fe, NM. My parents were very involved in horses, breeding, training, (and) a little showing. They helped to organize the Santa Fe Hunter/ Jumper in the old days. They rode with Pat and David Monroe. They then got involved with Rod Swanson (*far left, with Guy in the middle*), and together they started the first foxhunt in New Mexico called the Querencia Hounds. All this was before I was nine years old, so I rode a little on a pony called Lightning, and I had a pony mule called Cinnamon Beauty that we rode a little too, except we never really got her broke and mostly she broke us. She lived to be about 31 years old and was with us the whole time.

When I was nine we moved to a cattle ranch in South Texas, near Brownsville. There we continued breeding horses and working cattle, and my mother was giving English riding lessons locally. We all used to go up to Edinburg and take hunter jumper lessons from Carol Ann Lemaster once a week. (It was) the whole family: myself, my mother, brother, and father.



The McElvain Brothers, Mac and Guy, with their dad and Cinnamon Beauty

We took the hounds down to Texas, but it was too hard a country for them and so we started taking trips back to Georgia and South Carolina to fox hunt. Then Rod Swanson leased our old property in Santa Fe and held a riding summer camp for three years, which we attended and had a really great time trail riding, jumping, showing and fox hunting. It was called Adventures Unlimited and they really were. During the time in Texas, I had a wonderful horse named London Fog. We bought him in South Carolina, and he was a great hunter. I showed him a little and did very well, even though I really had no idea of what I was doing, but won a lot. You could literally point him at the first jump and then just hang on and he would do the rest; he was awesome. I also used to fox hunt him, work cattle, whatever. He was a great horse.

Zazou: How did your parents' involvement with horses influence you, and how did your mother get interested in breeding Holsteiners?

Guy: My mother is very horse crazy (in fact she took her very first lesson way back when in Detroit from Violet Hopkins), and she began investigating breeds.

Zazou: May I interrupt you for a moment? Please tell me about Violet Hopkins. I think I remember George Morris mentioning her name, but that's all I know about her.

Guy: Violet Hopkins was a well known trainer outside of Detroit at Outland Stable. My mother took up/down lessons from her before her family moved to New Mexico when my Mother was a young girl. "Vy" Hopkins went on to become a bigwig in the dressage world and started the Trainers Program for the USDF. We went on a trip to Germany and visited the Holsteiner Verband and fell in love with the horses. She then bought a stallion, Columbus, and a few mares and never looked back. She started breeding on a big scale then helped to start a breed registry here in the U.S. She was on the Board of what is now the AHHA for many years and helped to found the organization.

I then went to boarding school at Fountain Valley School for high school in Colorado Springs. They had a riding program, and I did it a little. At the time Carole O'Brien was the riding director. But there I got into Lacrosse and mostly concentrated on that. I went on to play that in college at the University of Arizona and once I

graduated, went to work in Santa Fe.



While I was in high school, my parents moved back to NM and bought a farm in Lemitar, which is on the Rio Grande south of Albuquerque. They moved the breeding operation to the farm. At the time my parents were studying classical dressage from Nuno Olivera.

My mother gave me a horse for graduation named Corazon. I had him in Santa Fe and mostly rode in the mountains and started fox hunting with Juan Tomas Hounds. After a while I became the huntsman for Juan Tomas and then when I got married to Sharon, we decided we wanted to work

with horses full-time since she had always wanted to do that.

After Sharon and I moved down to Socorro, we started into the Holsteiner breeding business with my mother (Elizabeth or Betty). In the meantime we had two kids, Chenoa and Clayton. Chenoa loves horses and began riding before she could walk. During this time with my mother we built our own farm, Rancho Corazon. My mother's is called Rancho La Querencia. We bred horses on a large scale, usually about 60 mares a year. We sold hundreds of horses, so mostly we just green broke the horses. Becky Warner used to come and jump them once a week, and she started giving Sharon and I jumping lessons. Then there was no stopping us.



Chenoa, Guy, and John Snyder

We started going to shows, and we had a great time. Paying for them was another story. I can remember borrowing money to go to the show in hopes we could sell a horse, which did not always have the outcome we hoped for.

In 1997 my father was looking to plan for retirement from his business, and he offered to let me start working there and then if it worked out, he would sell his share to me. So I did that and began showing as an amateur, and we slowed down on the sales and breeding end. During the next five or so years it was a very hectic time for us trying to work full-time, build a farm, run a farm, and show horses. It was very hard on the whole family. Not to mention, Sharon home schooled the kids the entire time. Eventually it all came together and is still coming together.

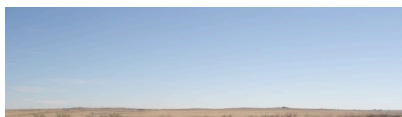


Chenoa McElvain on Charley Chaplin

My daughter Chenoa is riding in the grand prix and probably rides the best of all of us. Clayton also rides (and he's) not as excited about showing, but loves fox hunting, trail riding and shows in the pony jumpers. Sharon has three great horses in the A-O Jumpers, some more on the way and lately has been pursuing her career and university training as a fine art photographer (*right*).

We continue to fox hunt, in fact now we have started our own hunt called Caza Ladrón that we started several years ago. We co-founded and organize (with Brian and Phyllis Gonzales)

a horse show in Santa Fe every year, called Grand Prix de Santa Fe that is now a non-profit event that has been very successful and grows every year. Recently we have hired veteran grand



prix rider and trainer John McConnell. We are very excited to have John. He has been a long-time friend and has helped us more than anyone throughout all these years at the shows. Now with John aboard, we intend to really take advantage of all our combined lives' hard work coming together and as a team take our horses to the highest level. I am very excited about that!



Zazou: What do you and your mother look for in a young prospect?

Guy: One of the best times to look at a young prospect is when they are weanlings. There is a period in their growth when they look and move very much like they will when they are full-grown. If you couple that look with what you know and trust about the bloodlines, you can be fairly sure of what you will end up with if you have the time. In a full-grown young sport horse prospect, the most important thing to me is the attitude. Once you get past the basics of conformation, scope, and (being) careful, the most important is attitude. That is because that usually does not change, no matter how much training you do. You might change it slightly, but not much. Attitude is personality, and that is a unique preference for everyone. So if I don't get along with a horse or something about the way it acts under saddle frustrates me, then it is not for me and I try not to fight that, even if the horse is super talented.

Betty McElvain (Guy's Mother): As I am most familiar with them, I like to buy young Holsteiners, weanlings or yearlings, and usually colts or geldings. I am primarily interested in athletic ability and character. In the interest of life-long soundness, I will not buy any horses that have not been raised in big pastures from age 5 days to 5 months.

Zazou: You mention Nuno Olivera - how much dressage, if any, do you incorporate into your flat work, and have you incorporated any of Oliveras's training methods into your own?

Guy: It comes second hand to me from my mother. I met Nuno only once when he came to Arizona to do a clinic, and I met my parents down there as I was in school at the time. I did not ride with him. But after my wife and I moved down to Socorro and started working with my mother on breeding, training, and selling Holsteiners, we started riding and training using his method. We worked very hard at studying classical dressage methods. I still use these methods most of the time I am riding, especially in breaking and training a young horse. Without those tools I would be lost; it is a matter of instinct for me now.

Betty McElvain: At Rancho La Querencia LLC, we train all of our horses in dressage basics and continue to train them as long as we own them. The genius of Nuno was that he knew "one hundred ways" to teach each exercise, and he used the exercises (such as shoulder-in or piaffe or transitions) to train the horses. This produces sensitive horses which go forward in self-carriage and are round and very easy to ride.



Guy and Airforce One

Zazou: Which of your horses are you most excited about, and what is your competition plan for them?

Guy: Right now I am most excited about an 11-year-old Mecklenberg Gelding I imported. His name is Airforce One. I have had him for 8 months now, and he keeps stepping up to new challenges without hesitation. I started in the A-O Jumpers, then did a few \$25,000 grand prix, then we hired John McConnell this summer and we set off on trying to step up the schedule and do some bigger grand prix classes. This summer I did the three Grand Prix in Parker, then we went to Kentucky for two weeks, then to Del Mar and did two weeks there including the World Cup Qualifier (*below*). Everywhere we went people told me what an amazing horse he is. I agree, although we did not have many clean rounds; it was always a few minor

mistakes on my part, and in each of those 7 grand prix, a clean round would have been in the top three or four. But he is the easiest horse I have ever had, and I intend to settle my ride a little to accommodate his and then I hope to start riding in the big classes clean. If that happens then I would like to try and qualify for a World Cup competition. You don't get too many of those opportunities so I will go for it if I get it.



Zazou: Do you have any advice for young riders who are just getting started?

Guy: My advice is to take the time to learn the basics if you want to be involved in the sport long-term. I see so many talented young people get involved with the sport and start jumping bigger and bigger. Finally they get to the level where the basics matter and since they don't have them, then they get scared or frustrated and quit because they don't know how to quit hitting the dirt or stopping.

When I say the basics, I mean if you want to ride in the grand prix successfully, then yes of course, you need to be able to see a distance, but also you need to know how to train a horse from halter breaking to grand prix dressage, then you will never run out of answers or at least know where to find them. My problem has been that I started jumping seriously pretty late in life, and it has taken me a very long time to learn how not to miss and then, if I do miss, what to do to give myself a chance. I still don't get it right all the time. But without my background in general horsemanship, then I would have quit a long time ago.

Zazou: Guy and Betty thanks so much for taking the time to answer my questions.

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