

Five Questions for Katie Riley

By Jan Westmark-Allan

Katie Riley is not only a dressage rider and trainer, but she is the senior trainer at Cesar Parra's Pialle Performance Farm. As Cesar's "right hand gal," Katie has been given incredible opportunities in the dressage world, from coaching Cesar at international shows, to riding and training with the best of the best. While Katie spends her days teaching and training, she also has a variety of "super horses" to ride and show. "I am riding a five-year-old and an FEI level horse, both of which I am really excited about. I'm also riding a seven-year-old that we have had since he was four," Katie said. "I feel like a proud parent with him growing up. He will be ready for Prix St. Georges very soon."

Katie said she enjoys riding so many horses because each horse is different and she falls in love with their individual personalities. "I have been blessed with riding some very special horses over the years. Probably one of my favorites from the past was the stallion Adonis. I won my first CDI class ever on him and he taught me so much. I am forever grateful for the time I had with him."

Sidelines: How did you go from being a Pony Club rider to being the head trainer at Cesar Parra's farm?

KR: My mom blames my horse obsession on herself because she would take me in the stroller up the street to see horses when I was little. I started taking western lessons when I was young and by the time I was in sixth grade I was cleaning stalls in exchange for riding in Pony Club and doing lower level eventing. At that time I thought dressage was boring. Kelly Weiss steered me toward dressage when I went to him for a jumping lesson because I was having issues controlling the horse between fences. That was the beginning! I met Cesar years later when he came to the United States and was living and training in Maryland. I was so impressed by the job that he did with the horses he had in training that I knew I would learn a lot working for him. That was 11 years ago and, wow, was I right!

Sidelines: What is it like being Cesar's "right hand gal?"

KR: One of the things I enjoy most about my job is that it's different every day. In a given day I will teach lessons, manage the office, coach Cesar and ride several horses. I also travel on horse shopping trips and have successfully matched horses and riders that have gone on to international and national success. It's a busy job but I'm so fortunate to get to do what I love with a group of fantastic people and horses. I have traveled all over the world riding and coaching; I have ridden and trained with some of the very best in the dressage sport worldwide; I have been taught not just how to ride but how to teach



Katie and Fireblade compete

Photo by Susan Stickle

others to ride and I ride amazing horses every day. I am a lucky girl!

Sidelines: What do you like about being a trainer?

KR: I think the training process is absolutely fascinating and it's one of my favorite parts of my job. I really love the feeling when a horse all of a sudden "gets it" and learns a new skill. I am so proud when a student conquers a skill that has been giving them a problem. And I love coaching and helping to develop riders, whether it's at home or shows. Seeing progress is so much fun! I recently traveled with our younger riders and they learn so quickly and really absorb information. Their improvement from show to show was tremendous and it was a fun thing to be a part of.

Sidelines: What are your plans for the future?

KR: I look forward to competing more internationally in the future. I would love to show in Europe and would be thrilled if I could one day represent the United States in competition. In the meantime, I am working hard and enjoying every day!

Sidelines: If you weren't a dressage rider and trainer, what do you think you would do?

KR: If I weren't riding, I think I would be either a teacher or a psychologist. I really love the challenges and rewards of teaching, and knowing that you have had a positive impact or influence on another person's life is an amazing feeling.