

Susan Treabess: Taking Life by the Reins... One Hand at a Time

By Lindsay McCall

Susan Treabess of Winters, California, was born without a left hand, but that hasn't stopped the talented rider as she represented the USA at the 2010 World Equestrian Games in Lexington as a Grade IV para-equestrian dressage rider. "Having one hand always gets you double looks. And I wear a 'hook' prosthesis so if I'm in anything short sleeve it's a beacon. That's nothing new, I've experienced that my entire life," Susan said.

Susan is a new mother, and runs a dressage training facility called Winterhaven based out of her hometown. She is also in full competition mode and is looking forward to a hopeful position on the United States Para-Equestrian Dressage Team at the 2014 World Equestrian Games. Sidelines caught up with this amazing woman to find out more about her life and how she hasn't let her disability slow her down.

How do people react to the fact that you have a hook prosthesis?

The different responses from people are really interesting. Some are curious, some ignore it like it doesn't exist, some people feel pity but most people look at me for me once they see through the "one-armed-girl" glamour. It's to be expected, it bothered me when I was a teenager and first in college, but now I understand its human nature and frankly I respond the same when I see someone without a leg or in a wheel chair.

How have you dealt with your dressage training with your disability?

The subject of someone's disability, especially outward disability,



Susan and Money Penny at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games Selection Trial jog for the USA Para-Dressage Team.



Susan and Fugitivo XII at the 2012 Dressage Affaire CPEDI3 in Del Mar, California. Susan was born without her left hand, qualifying her as a Grade IV Para-Equestrian. She also competes and trains in high-performance able-bodied competitions.*

can be touchy. So in training I personally gravitate toward people who basically say "great, you have one hand, now here's what you need to improve." I like no-nonsense coaching, people who will push me past having one hand, but also modify certain things if need be. My main riding instructor and mentor, Ellen Eckstein, never let me play the one hand card growing up. When I first started towards international competition I used double bridle bit converters for a while which allowed me to have one rein instead of two. Until I went to Steffen Peters for a week and he told me point blank "you need to learn to ride without bit-converters, they aren't doing you or your horse any favors." Or Dennis Callin who pushed me to leave my professional job in the California State Senate, which I was very successful at, to ride and train full time because: "That's the only way you'll achieve the goals you set out for. You're a good enough rider but this can't be a hobby."

What is it like to compete with only one hand?

When I first started, I think some judges would feel sorry for me and give me pity points. I was really worried about that for my first few years. Then I started searching out more conservative judges, or judges that my dressage friends call "tough." I didn't want high scores, I wanted fair scores that would help me improve. I stopped giving show management my dispensation card, wore long sleeves past my hook so judges wouldn't notice and I wouldn't show the para-dressage tests in open shows. I showed PSG & 11 that year. A friend of mine scribed one of those classes and after

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