

Kerrigan Makes A Comeback At The Royal Winter Fair

Years after a debilitating injury, she fulfills a lifelong dream with Strong Suit.

By **Kieran Paulsen**

Photos By **Cealy Tetley**



Tennille Kerrigan can remember a time when her main goal was to make it through a day without nausea. She and her husband, Dwayne Kerrigan, were on a snowmobiling trip with friends in 2014 when she hit a buried tree and was launched forward on the machine, which then accelerated into a tree.

“I hit my head quite badly, passed out, and had a severe concussion and whiplash that caused daily migraines and nausea for well over a year,” Tennille said. “There was a lot of medical testing and treatment over the years, and even as the symptoms subsided, riding was one of the things that triggered headaches, especially jumping.”

But five years later, she’s found her way through those challenges and realized a dream of winning the J. Elliot Cottrelle Royal Grand Champion Amateur Hunter title at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Nov. 4-10 in Toronto.

“It’s a little surreal; it really hasn’t sunk in yet,” she said. “This is everyone’s dream, to be able to compete at the Royal, but we definitely didn’t plan to win the division, and we never guessed the partnership would come together as well as it did.”

Tennille, 37, tried dozens of treatments over the years—everything from chiropractic work to pulsed magnetic therapy—to relieve the symptoms of her concussion.

“I wanted to live a normal life and not have to go to a million therapy sessions a week just to live without headaches and nausea,” she said. “Even if I couldn’t ride, I just wanted to be able to operate and go to work.”

Tennille Kerrigan rode Strong Suit to win the J. Elliot Cottrelle Royal Grand Champion Amateur Hunter title at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

Tennille is the president of Senior Helpers Canada, a company that provides home care for senior citizens. “We had that experience with a family member, and we felt like this was a great way to provide back to our community,” she said. “I enjoy the business; I enjoy the busy lifestyle.”

About a year ago, Tennille’s symptoms stabilized. She started hacking on friends’ horses to see if she could ride without triggering a headache, and she progressed faster than she’d imagined, so she set her sights on getting back into the show ring.

“Once I had gotten to the point where I felt comfortable being able to ride, I wanted to give it a season where I really went all in, not just a few shows here and there,” she said.

Tennille began leasing Strong Suit from owners Christian Sorensen and Quincy Hayes in February 2019. She’d been looking for a steady partner to support her in her first show season since she’d now been out of the tack for years.

“Darcy [Hayes] and Quincy [Hayes, of Hayes Ltd.] are, in my opinion, some of the best in our industry,” Tennille said. “I approached them to see if they would be willing to take me on as a client and help me find something to lease for the season.”

That request led Tennille to Wellington, Florida, where she partnered with Strong Suit in the low adult amateur hunters.

“That week in Florida was our first week all working together, and it went extremely well,” Tennille said. “Quincy and Darcy took me on, and that was the first serious week of training I’d had in years. I’m a lot more careful about the horses I sit on now. I don’t put myself on anything I think I’ll have a chance of falling off, but I was more excited to get back into it. I’m super grateful for everything they did to make this season what it was.”

Tennille’s lease on “Boss,” an 8-year-old Dutch

Warmblood gelding, expired at the end of November. She’s in the market for a horse of her own, but she’ll never forget the season Boss gave her.

“I love that horse to death,” she said. “I’ll be sad to see him go. He’s taken care of me from the start. I was weak and making a lot of mistakes when I first sat on him, but he was super willing and able to take care of me. When I got more accurate and stronger physically, we really just came together. We were certainly not expecting these results, so it was a gift as it came. He’s an exceptional horse.”

Tennille began riding as a child on her family’s hobby farm in Brooklin, Ontario. Her mother and aunt both rode western, but Kerrigan gravitated toward hunters and jumpers. She worked her way through the local

Pony Club and started showing on the rated circuits as a teenager.

Today Tennille lives on a farm in Pickering, Ontario, and is the owner and director of the Stonewood Riding Academy. “We have a riding school there—about 100 clients,” she said. “It’s a great opportunity to introduce the sport to a new generation and keep it prospering. We renovated the farm eight years ago, and the school has been open for four years.”

But she said Boss was the first fancy hunter she’d had the opportunity to show.

“I prefer the hunters; the quest to have the perfect trip is more important to me than jumping bigger jumps or going faster,” said Tennille.

Boss’ Royal Winter Fair debut was also a milestone for Quincy, who’s been working with her mother, Darcy, out of Hayes Ltd., based in King City, Ontario, for four years. This is the 28-year-old’s first time owning a Royal champion.

“It was an emotional win for us,” Quincy said. “I’ve never really been able to afford my own horses. I’ve been a catch-rider growing up, and this is one I kind of took a

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—Tennille Kerrigan



Bertram Allen and GK Casper topped the \$159,707 Longines FEI Toronto World Cup qualifier at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

shot on. To see it come through was really awesome. The bravest horse in the world can go to the Royal and not know how to handle it. I told [Tennille] in the first class to be a little prepared for anything, but [Boss] never put a foot wrong. He never wants to let you down no matter what.”

**\$159,707
LONGINES FEI TORONTO
WORLD CUP QUALIFIER**
Toronto, Ontario, Canada—Nov. 9

HORSE/RIDER/NATION	FAULTS	TIME	PURSE
1. GK Casper/Bertram Allen/IRL	0-0	34.70	\$52,703
2. Igor/Jos Verlooy/BEL	0-0	35.41	31,941
3. MTM Vivre Le Reve/Brian Moggre/USA	0-0	35.83	23,956
4. Tic Tac/Ben Maher/GBR	0-0	36.32	15,970

►Also competed: 5. Blue Movie/R. Willis/AUS, 4; 6. Chacco Kid/E. Lamaze/CAN, 4; 7. Dicas/M. Goldstein-Engle/USA, 4; 8. Austria 2/K. Farrington/USA, 4; 9. GK Coco Chanel/C. Swail/IRL, 4; 10. Confu/L. Kraut/USA, 4; 11. Amsterdam 27/M. Deslauriers/CAN, 4; 12. Noche De Ronda/M. Ward/USA, 4; 13. Chameur 137/G. Bloomberg/USA, 8; 14. Fellini S/E. Ballard/CAN, 8; 15. Cat Ninja/A. Kocher/USA, 12; 16. Coach/B. Madden/USA, 12; 17. Lutz/A. Ramsay/CAN, 16; 18. Alejandro/S. Sweetnam/IRL, 16; Truman/A. Millar/CAN, E; Count Me In/B. Underhill/CAN, VW; Colestina H/D. Bluman/ISR, VW; Farrel/D. Coyle/IRL, VW.

ROYAL AGRICULTURAL WINTER FAIR
Toronto, Ont., CAN—Nov. 1-10

- SMALL PONY HUNTER CH:** Wray Acres Amythest, Kenzie Black.
RES: Crown Ridge Finnegan, Elaine Kilmer-Choi.
- MEDIUM PONY HUNTER CH:** Canterbrook Trimmed In Gold, Rachael Reynolds.
RES: Kiss Me Kate, Kailey Kaiser.
- LARGE PONY HUNTER CH:** 'R' First Noelle, Brenda Draper.
RES: Northwind Crispin, Prudence Richardson.
- CHILDREN'S HUNTER CH:** Cosmopolitan, Jamie Thompson.
RES: Enjoy Life C, Rosalie Gagnon.
- JR. HUNTER CH:** Blackilino II, Jillian Nicholls.
RES: Giorgio, Kaylah Carruthers.
- AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER CH:** Emir, Vimy Henderson.
RES: Damiro Van Ter Notelaere, Knightwood Stables.
- ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER, 18-35 CH:** Heavenly, MarBill Hill Farm.
RES: Wunderkind, Taryn Wunder.
- ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER, 36 & OVER CH:** Strong Suit, Quincy Hayes & Chris Sorensen.
RES: Know How, Christel Weller & Looking Back Farm.
- COMBINED WORKING HUNTER CH:** Me Too, Caren Morassutti.
RES: Salvo RSF, Cydney Paven.
- JR./AMATEUR-OWNER JUMPER CH:** Heat Wave 3E, Sierra Mark.
RES: Koning Boudewijn, Kendra Martenfeld.
- UNDER 25 NATIONAL CH:** Dynamite, Barbara Ruziska.
RES: Jewel 8, Lexi Ray.
- JR. JUMPER CH:** Virginio VKZ, Kim Farlinger.
RES: Cottica II RV, Suzanne Jain.
- PONY JUMPER CHALLENGE CH:** Royal, Tatum Horan.
RES: Pocket Change, Debbie Williams.
- LEADING CANADIAN RIDER:** Eric Lamaze.
LEADING INTERNATIONAL RIDER: Eric Lamaze.
LEADING CANADIAN-OWNED HORSE: Fine Lady 5, Artisan Farms & Torrey Pines Stable.
LEADING LADY RIDER: Margie Goldstein-Engle.

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