



Erynn Ballard, with Gakhir owned by Esperanza Imports and Ian Ferder, in Wellington, Florida.

Erynn Ballard

CARRYING ON THE FAMILY TRADITION

By Cheyenne Lord
Portraits by Melissa Fuller

Inheriting her grandfather and parents' passion for riding at an early age, Canada's Erynn Ballard has always wanted her life to involve horses. Her grandfather, Bob, rode on the Canadian Equestrian Team in the 1940s and '50s while her parents, Sandi and Dave, have run their Looking Back Farm in Tottenham, Ontario, since 1985. It was there that Erynn started riding at 5 years old. A year later, she entered her first horse show—and hasn't looked back since.

"I'm not sure if I was inspired to get into the sport or if it was just the only thing I ever wanted to do," Erynn said. "It hasn't always been easy, and sometimes it still isn't, but it's definitely rewarding. It's a family business, and to this day, I wouldn't trade it for anything else!"

CATCH-RIDING TO JUNIOR SUCCESS

Supported by her family, including a sister who isn't involved in the sport, Erynn rode a variety of horses during her Junior career and quickly established herself as one of the top Junior catch-riders in the country. Under the tutelage of her parents and Missy Clark, she earned a team bronze medal in the 1996 North American Young Rider Championships (NAYRC) with Ordinary Man, won the \$15,000 Junior American Invitational in Tampa, Florida, in 1997 with Aremex, and

became the first rider to sweep the Junior/Amateur division at the 1997 Royal Winter Fair in Toronto, Ontario, with Raphallea.

Erynn started her 1998 season on a high note, earning the Christie Conrad Perpetual Trophy for Equestrian Excellence at the Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF) in Wellington, Florida. She then became the second Canadian ever to win the ASPCA Maclay National Championship that year aboard Bennington.

"My grandfather's favorite shows were Devon and Madison Square Garden," Erynn said, "so when I was able to compete at both venues and win the Maclay Finals at the Garden, it was a really special moment for all of us."



When Erynn was young her father told her that if you treat every horse like it's the best horse you've ever ridden, you are always going to get the most out of them, and Erynn has lived by those words.



Erynn inherited her grandfather and parents' passion for riding.

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL

Erynn returned to the NAYRC aboard Leacock to claim the individual gold medal in 1999, and followed it up with winning silver in both the \$10,000 Individual and Team Young Rider Championships at the Mayor's Classic in Florida the next year. Then she moved right into her career as a professional with her family's support. "Since riding was the only thing I wanted to do, it was very much a natural progression from being a Junior to going professional," she said.

Erynn continued to work with many types of horses and added to her list of accomplishments with various year-end awards and championships in the Young Horse classes. She made her Nations Cup debut at the 2006 Spruce Meadows Masters tournament in Calgary, Alberta, helping Team Canada capture victory for the first time, and was awarded with that year's Dr. George Jacobsen Trophy as the Canadian National Federation's Equestrian of the Year. In March 2007, she helped claim another win in Nations Cup competition at WEF, and she has yet to slow down.

"I've never really taken a break," Erynn said. Even when a fall broke her collarbone and left her shoulder with nerve damage in May 2013,

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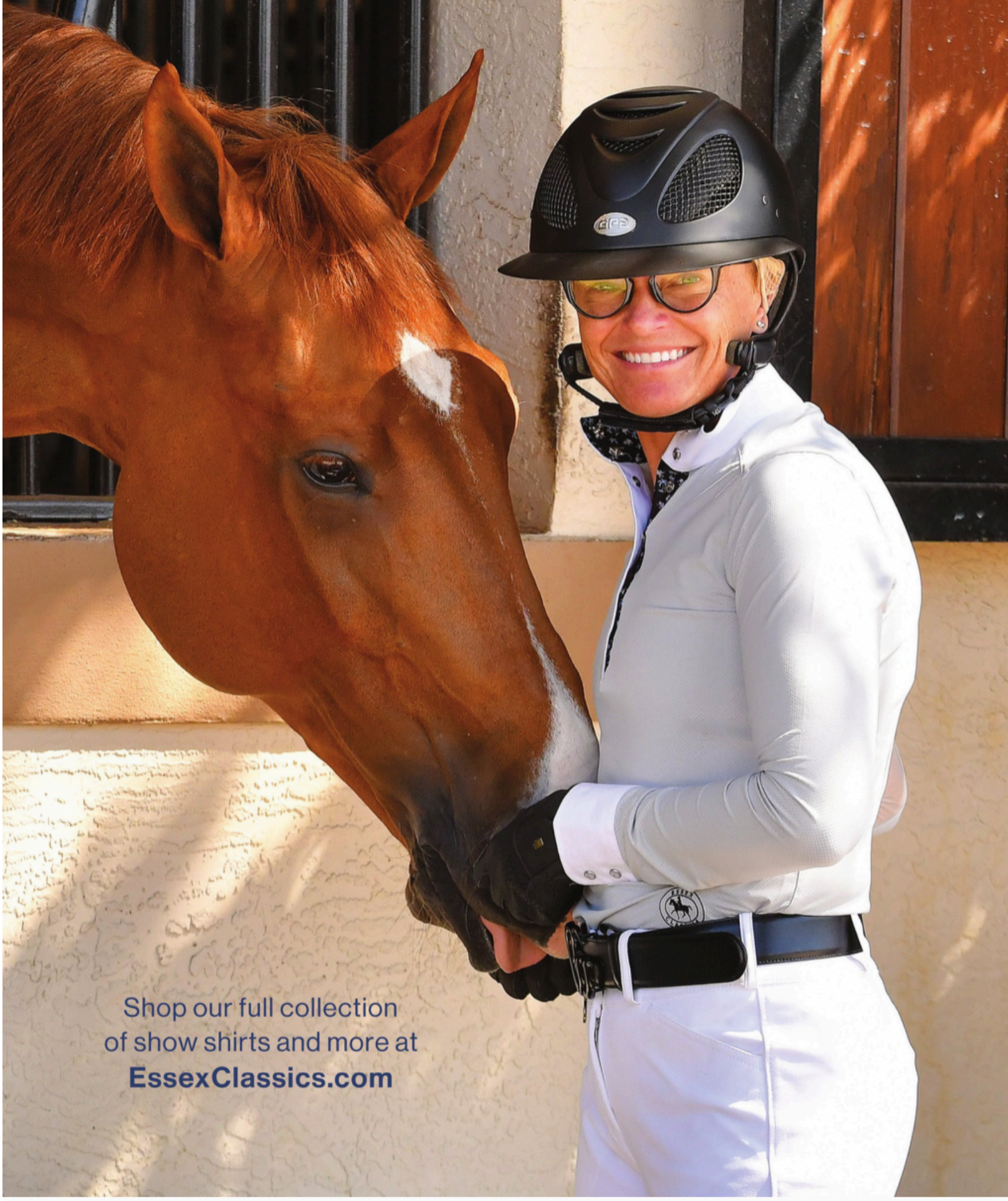
she was back in the saddle competing by the end of the year, despite the doctor's suggestion to consider another profession. "With that

injury, I didn't ride for four months, and it just made me want everything more. It put my dreams into perspective and made me fight harder to achieve them."

Erynn credits her family and her horses for allowing her to be so competitive on the world stage. "I've always had the support to pursue my dreams," she said. "From training with Missy Clark in the equitation to joining the family business, and most recently leaving the business to ride for Ilan Ferder, my family has allowed me the freedom to become who I am. I owe a huge amount of my success to the opportunities they've given me, as well as the training and support from Ilan, which is more than I could have ever dreamed of."

Five years ago, Erynn was given the opportunity to ride for Ilan Ferder Stables, working with the large training and sales business based in Wellington. "It was something I couldn't turn down. At the beginning, I was going back and forth between Canada and Ilan's, but during COVID, it wasn't possible to travel that way. So I made the decision to work with Ilan full time."

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GETTING THE BEST OUT OF HER HORSES

Erynn's natural talent, motivation and dedication to the sport are clear not only in the hunter and jumper championship titles she's collected but in the achievements her students have also made on the circuit. As a trainer at Looking Back Farm, she has ridden 20 to 30 horses a day and coached numerous Junior and Amateur riders to championships in the hunter, jumper and equitation rings.

"My dad told me when I was very young that if you treat every horse like it's the best horse you've ever ridden, you are always going to get the most out of them," Erynn said. "Every horse is different, and they ask for different things. It's so easy to keep everything the same because it quite often works, so it can be difficult to take a step back and really understand if the horse needs something different from what you're asking. If a horse feels like you don't have that connection with them, they're never going to give you their best."

Erynn applies this mentality to each student's way of learning and keeps each training technique the same across all horses and riders in her barn. For her, switching between the hunter and jumper rings is no big deal, with the only real difference coming from the speed at which she rides the course. "Hunters and jumpers both need to be connected, so we work on striding, balance and the overall shape of the horse," she said.

This spring, Erynn's training took her to Europe for six weeks in preparation for the World Equestrian Games in Denmark. With her sights also on the 2023 Pan American Games in Chile and the 2024 Paris Olympics, she continues to work on her consistency at the five-star level and hopes for more clear rounds and top finishes. Her hard work has already started to pay off; she was recently the highest-ranked female rider on the Longines World Rankings list.

While some riders have pre-show routines that help them prepare to compete, Erynn puts her faith in her hard work. "I go through phases of lucky things, too," she said. "If I'm having a bad day, I will go buy a new riding shirt or pants midday to try to change my luck!" In what little free time she finds outside of the saddle, she also loves yoga, pilates, cooking and relaxing with her dogs, Moe and Lu.

After working with her family, students and supporters for so long, Erynn knows that passion is the key to riding and competing at the top. "It's such a hard life and if you don't love



Erynn with her dogs Moe, left, and Lu.

it, that makes it harder," she said. "It takes hard work and dedication no matter what ring you show in. And no matter what, make sure you love, love, love your horses!" **SI**

Follow Erynn on Instagram @erynnballard and @ilanferderstables

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