

THE ROAD TO THE TOP

By Lindsay Berreth

PHOTOS BY ANDREW RYBACK PHOTOGRAPHY

PROGRAM:

Building the Future of Show Jumping Through Opportunity and Education

Four-time Olympian Laura Kraut (USA) has worked with many young and developing riders throughout her decades in show jumping. When legendary rider and trainer Katie Monahan-Prudent approached her about an idea for a mentorship program four years ago, she was quick to get involved.

The Road to the Top program was created to provide mentorship, training and opportunities to carefully selected young talent aspiring to reach the top of the sport.

"I thought that it was a really important idea and I wanted to support [Monahan-Prudent]," said Kraut. "What we're looking for in Road to the Top are those kids who are in this because this is all they want. They want to get to the Olympics and they



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"It's something I wanted to be part of because this sport has given me so much," Kraut continued. "It is my life and it's been wonderful. I am

really happy to have a way I can give back. I'd love to see 10 or 20 kids get the opportunity to have the life I've had. It's something I

never would have dreamed of when I was young, so if I can give that opportunity to others, that makes me feel good."

Road to the Top launched in 2024 with the selection of two

candidates by an athlete selection advisory committee — West Coast rider Trent McGee, who is based with Monahan-Prudent, and Carlee McCutcheon, who is based with Kraut. McGee and McCutcheon are part of the Tier I Level, which was defined once an Apprentice Level was added and recently launched. The Apprentice Level provides a six-month apprenticeship for emerging show jumping professionals who



have already proven themselves in competition. These athletes will train inside an elite program, receiving consistent coaching, feedback and a formal evaluation at the end of their term.

The program is reaping huge rewards for McCutcheon, who was a highly successful junior rider, winning the 2023 ASPCA Maclay National Championship. She was given the ride on the 15-year-old Slovenian Warmblood mare Aralyn Blue (Chacco Blue x Apienne), owned by Road to the Top.

On January 10, 2026, they won the \$120,000 Florida Coast Equipment Grand Prix CSI3* at World Equestrian Center—Ocala, the first three-star victory in the 20-year-old rider's career.

"When I aged out, I was still deciding which path to take—whether I wanted to go to college or turn professional immediately.

When this opportunity came up, it became clear to me what I wanted to do," McCutcheon said. "I think it has helped me grow a lot as a person and as a horse trainer. Having the chance to ride with people at the highest level of the sport gives me a huge advantage. I've learned so much from them because they've been doing it for such a long time."

Under Kraut's tutelage, McCutcheon moved up to the four-star level this winter with Aralyn Blue.

"This time last year, I was competing in the Under-25 series with Aralyn Blue in Wellington and it definitely took me some time to get to know her," she admitted. "[Her previous rider] Harry Charles (a British Olympic team gold medalist) is obviously one of the best riders and she is so experienced at a high level. She's such a big, strong, scopey horse, but in the last six months,

our partnership has really come together. She's just a wonderful horse in every way. She's so kind and forgiving, and I think that she really enjoys her job. She's amazing at it. Having a horse like her has really changed my career."

In addition to riding and competing, the Road to the Top program teaches riders about horse care and management, like shoeing and veterinary care. "It's down to the tiny details that make the difference," said Kraut. "It's teaching them to be

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aware of those things and notice them on a day-to-day level.”

They are also learning how to run a business, how to interact with and cultivate owners and clients and how to collaborate with other professionals. “It’s all those things that, as you get older, you realize are important,” said Kraut. “Being a great rider, that’s sort of the first step. But there are another 100 steps to get you to the place you would call ‘the top.’ There’s no set curriculum — it’s learning, mainly by osmosis.”

Carlee is based in Ocala, Florida, with Kraut and her team, which includes her sister Mary Elizabeth Kent and Julie Welles.

“I thought it was a great idea for Carlee to base in Ocala this year,” Kraut explained. “She has a wonderful mare who I thought would be very suited to the three- and four-star grand prix classes there, which allow Carlee to hopefully have some success at that level. The World Equestrian Center facility there is beautiful, and so far, I couldn’t have asked for a better outcome. I think it’s



The Road to the Top Program

just going to add to her resume and also add to her confidence.”

Carlee had already ridden there with Mike McCormick and Tracy Fenney as a junior during the first summer the facility opened.

“I have Aralyn, who allows me to step up into the higher level, but the rest of the horses in my string are either younger or they need to be developed, so being at a facility that accommodates every level of horse is just amazing.”

Kraut is excited to see where Road to the Top goes next as the program heads into its third year.

“Long term, we hope our riders become excellent horsemen and horsewomen and strong advocates for the sport and that they



eventually represent our country as riders, which is really what the whole program is about,” she said. “But if that doesn’t happen, as trainers or in whatever capacity

they choose, they’re exposed to the highest level of the sport and they can be a part of it. It’s all a work in progress, but we’re very excited about our results so far. 😊

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