

stand back, amused, as I watch a Hall of Fame Champion submit to the loving, if awkward, ministrations of his young handler. I am near Corvallis, Oregon, helping supervise a United States Pony Club Tetrathlon competition; Muffy is here to help two young riders through the jumping phase of that competition. The kids have already run a cross country course (on their own two feet), swam, and shot a pistol. All that remains is the riding and they're nervous.

"He makes them work," a Pony Club volunteer says, grinning in response to my question. "The kids have to look ahead, plan their ride, and think. If they do their job, though, he'll do his."

It was a gradual thing, Darla Westlake says, explaining Muffy's transformation from world class athlete to Pony Club mount. "I used to take jumping lessons on Muffy in the off season, and he always loved it. He's done both tetrathlon and combined training rallies. We call him our "D-2 Specialist," because we don't let him jump any higher than two feet, but that's all these kids need."

Indeed, it seems a perfect fit. Both kids have clean rounds on Muffy and they're delighted. They're on top of the world. They can't wait 'til the next competition.

But I find I'm having a hard time swallowing. It's a long way from the North American Championship; a long way from the Race of Champions and the agony and glory of the Tevis Cup, but an aging champion is teaching, by example, a lesson I hope I handle well when it comes my turn. Something about



Photo courtesy Dawn Hill

grace and acceptance—that there's no shame in stepping off the world stage and on to the next phase of life, wherever that may lead.

Though no longer blazing down the trails, leaving his competition in the dust, Muffy is still leaving his imprint on the horse world—it's just a smaller world. But who knows? Maybe the ultimate impact will be just as great.

"Here, Muffy." The kid reaches over the stall door to hand the chestnut a well-deserved carrot. "Good job, boy. You helped us win."

Always a winner, RT Muffin graciously lowers his head and accepts the offering.

USET Endurance Rider Darla Westlake is also District Commissioner of the Jumps and Jodphurs Pony Club in Eugene, Oregon. Our condolences to Darla and the Westlake Family on the loss of Muffy in the fall of 2002.

Karen Moore—Dressage

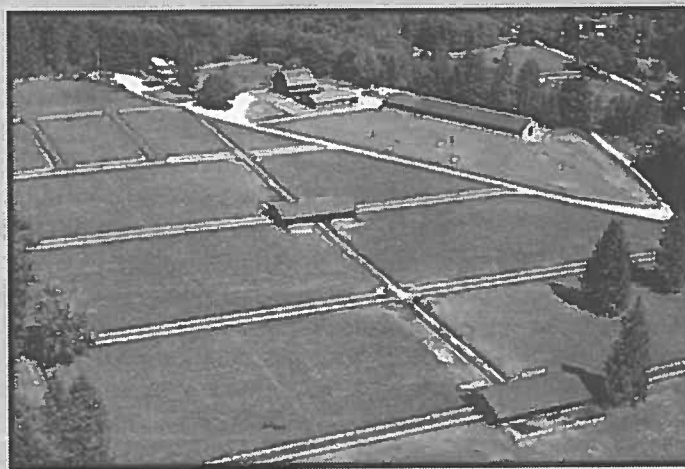
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