

"Spittin' Image"

by *Suanne Wamsley*



See page 11.

Ezra's Expedition

by *Dan Talbot*

His registered name is Just A Gelding, but that seems too modest for a horse that has walked across America.

Nicknamed Big Red, the 16-hand Solid Paint-bred carried Ezra Cooley on a meandering two-year expedition from California to New York.

In mid-May, they were south of Austin, headed for Brownsville, at the tip of Texas.

Ezra, a young man on a mission, hopes to conquer Australia next, then ride across Africa, South America and Europe over a 10-year period. Through supporters' donations, his world travels will benefit Children's Miracle Network, an international medical charity based in Salt Lake City.

"My given name comes from the Hebrew word for 'help,'" he explains. "I'm ridin' for the kids."

Ezra, 28, grew up in Chico, Calif., and had "never known a day without a horse." In his early twenties, he was self-employed as a general contractor and for fun competed in wild horse races at rodeos.

One day, though, after a long father-son ride and talk, Ezra decided to chuck it all for the adventure of a lifetime.

He had acquired Big Red in a swap for a debt, and there was an instant chemistry between the two. The long-striding sorrel was soon to prove "the toughest horse I've ever owned."

Ezra cinched up the roping saddle his father had made for him, loaded his "survival stuff" onto Jahob, his

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In English

Claddagh Sport Horses

It must be a throwback gene from my Irish heritage," says Bridget Brandon of her attraction to horses, a trait shared by no one else in her family.

When she was eight, her Irish grandmother gave her a Christmas gift of riding lessons. Growing up in Little Rock, Ark., Bridget remembers happy summer days catching horses in a family friend's pasture and riding them bareback. There wasn't much English riding in Arkansas, but she did participate in the Jubilee Horse Trials (profiled in the May *Horse Report*) on a horse coincidentally named Jubilee.

Her father told her she could go to any college within 300 miles of home. He relented for an extra 15 miles, and Bridget attended SMU in Dallas, where she studied photography, painting and drawing and earned a BFA in 1984. After graduation, she worked in public relations and marketing for Republic Bank (later acquired by Bank of America) and then for GTE (acquired by Verizon). As a young mother, with one child at home and another on the way, she left the professional world in 1998.

In her late twenties, Bridget began formal riding lessons at Willow Bend Polo & Hunt Club in Plano. Through the years, she has been a student of such well-known area trainers as Alana Featherstone, Stacie Goodson, Russell Frey, and Belinda Bond.



Bridget Brandon and CR Andiamo, her 12-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding, on their way to winning the Level 6 Open Jumper class at Brownland Farm in Nashville, Tenn., last spring.

Since 1990, Bridget has competed with notable success as an amateur on the hunter/jumper circuit. A couple of changes she has seen over the years are the refinement of the sport horses bred in the U.S. and the trend in the hunter ring to more natural-looking jumps, like birch logs and vine-covered coops.

In 1996, she began breeding Oldenburgs, a German warmblood originally developed as a coach horse in the 17th century and today increasingly used for show jumping. She hosted several approved inspections for the German Verband (registry) at the Bartonville farm where she and her then husband lived for 10 years.

With her children now older (Maddie is 12 and Reeves is nine), Bridget

has recently joined Justin Insurance, owned by a partnership with nearly 100 years of equine insurance experience, to serve the English market in Texas and the surrounding states. She is also a certified equine appraiser, providing valuations for high-dollar purchases, donations, legal proceedings, and insurance claims. A former director of the North Texas Hunter/Jumper Association, she has judged such area youth shows as the Dallas Scholarship Riding Club.

This spring, she moved her children, her horses and her three dogs (a Giant Schnauzer, a Corgi, and a toy Yorkie named Elf) to a farm just east of Argyle, where she has set up her practice jumps and is remodeling a Mediterranean-style house.



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Bridget Brandon at her Argyle farm, with daughter Maddie, son Reeves, and canine family members Elf and Luka.

She calls the 10-acre property Claddagh Sport Horses. Claddagh is a ring design (two hands clasping a heart, surmounted by a crown). Attributed to an old Irish legend, it signifies friendship, loyalty, and love.

Bridget continues to compete on hunter/jumper circuits in Texas, Kentucky, Georgia, Tennessee and Mississippi. Back home, she enjoys taking her show horses on trail rides, sometimes with a Western saddle, to "clear their minds."

Her jumper is CR Andiamo, a dark brown Dutch Warmblood she describes as a "once in a lifetime" horse. "He's not
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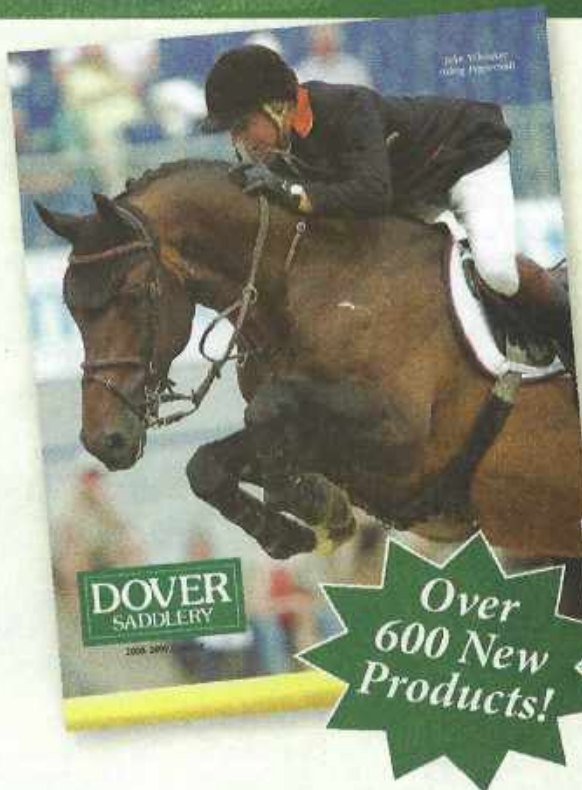
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Claddagh Sport Horses

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the easiest to ride," she says, "but he has tons of heart. He'll give you 150 percent if he feels like you're giving 90."

Her hunter is Sinners Prayer, a Bavarian Warmblood mare. A National Conformation Hunter Champion, she is currently for sale.

Kiss This is a bay 16.3-hand homebred Oldenburg mare that Bridget describes as "one of the bravest horses I've ever ridden." She's excited about starting her in eventing this fall, learn-

ing the ropes with her friend Jackie Chalk.

Ava is a big-striding yearling warmblood, sired by Ariadus, a Premium-rated Holsteiner, and out of a Selle Francais international competitor once ridden by McClain Ward. The filly lost her left eye in a freak pasture accident, but Bridget is confident that her strong athletic promise will compensate for the handicap.

The "steady Eddie" of Claddagh Sport Horses is Cognac Gold, a 36-year-old Holsteiner. On him, Bridget won the Zone 7 championship three years in a

row and the Southwest Show Jumping Series, among other honors. "He takes care of my weaned babies now," she says.

Journey is a "super athletic" two-year-old Oldenburg now in training with Roger Daly of Aubrey. Equine photographer Gloria McDonald, Bridget's former neighbor in Bartonville, took a picture of Journey as a foal, galloping alongside his dam, which appeared on the cover of the *Horse Report* in May, 2007. ★

For more information on Claddagh Sport Horses or Justin Insurance, call (817) 454-4537.

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