

FOCUSING ON PERFORMANCE



Seeing Triple

Three women and three horses seek show jumping success

You might remember when Nicole Shahinian-Simpson rode the wonderful mare, SRF Dragonfly, to win the Olympic Show Jumping Trials in 2008. What some people don't know is that Dragonfly took a brief hiatus from competing to pass her talents on to another generation.

It all started when Katharine (Katie) Polk was about to leave for college. Dragonfly had been her mount. But with new, exciting challenges on Katie's horizon, she wanted to give Dragonfly a chance to fulfill her potential as well. Katie and her mother, Carol Rosenstein, elected to turn the reins over to Nicole Shahinian-Simpson. Dubbed "The Catch-Riding Kid" as a junior rider, Nicki adapted easily to the mare, and the two became a great team, eventually being selected to the Olympic Show Jumping Short List.



Carol Rosenstein,
Owner



Katharine Polk,
Owner



Nicole Shahinian-
Simpson, Rider

“Dragonfly stood at the in-gate in Wellington time after time with such confidence. It was amazing to have a horse that I had just started riding rise up to all of my hopes, dreams and expectations, impressing me every time she went into the ring.”

— **Nicole Shahinian-Simpson**

The Breeding

"Dragonfly had such heart. It was so emotional riding her and watching her show because of the effort she made every time she walked in the ring. That's not something you teach a horse, it's something that they either have or they don't have. Because of that I wanted to breed her, "

said Polk. Knowing how special a mare they had, Rosenstein immediately agreed. They decided to pursue embryo transfer with the foal being carried by surrogate, so Dragonfly could continue to compete with Nicki aboard.

Having never bred a horse before, Katie and Carol studied carefully and made deliberate choices about what they believed would make a great cross on Dragonfly. They thoroughly researched bloodlines, as well as traits that the stallions often passed onto their offspring. They were also looking to produce slightly finer-boned, lighter offspring. They settled on the thoroughbred stallion Quinar (son of Quidam de Revel), at the suggestion of Buffy Oas of Pollyrich Farm. Polk was particularly interested in the research and selection of the stallion, "knowing we had a great mare I knew we could find a great stallion to complement what she made up for in heart that she didn't have physically. Quinar was fine boned, compact, built uphill, and had blood. He bred scopey offspring and we thought they'd make for a good cross!"

So, Dragonfly was bred, and to everyone's surprise, she produced four embryos, which were implanted into four surrogate mares. Dragonfly went back to work, and after 30 days, three of the surrogates were still pregnant. Horse breeders know that these first-time breeders bucked the odds when they got not one, not two but three foals from Dragonfly's embryos. A few short months later, 12 happy hooves hit the ground. That was seven years ago. "We've owned horses for a long time, but when you breed one, you are so invested in it personally from the very beginning. It makes the experience even more fulfilling," explained Rosenstein.

It's clear from comments by Rosenstein, Polk and Shahinian-Simpson, that this is a "team project". With a smile in her voice, Rosenstein says, "and it always will be". After all, it takes the owner, the rider, veterinarians and a whole support staff to breed, raise, train and show any horse. In this case, it takes a very busy team.

Raising the Babies

After the foals arrived, the team embraced a concept of letting the foals "just be horses" while they were growing up. At Nicki's suggestion, that would happen at Parkland Farm in Lexington, under the direction of Samantha Will, a former jumper rider, now thoroughbred breeder. The weanlings were handled daily but were also turned out into an 11-acre paddock with several other older, wiser horses to keep them company and show them the ropes. "The three of them grew strong on the Kentucky bluegrass and Platinum Performance," said Rosenstein. The triplets were allowed to grow, get exercise and develop good bone.

Rosenstein also doesn't discount the effect their raising had on the fillies' temperaments. She says, "The horses were able to experience the elements of their environment, and were exposed to so many things like weather, other horses and room to roam and graze. None of them are spooky. They are all very calm, mellow horses and I think those early days as weanlings in Kentucky played a part in that."

After three years of daily care and contact, Samantha arranged for the fillies to be started by a western rider that used gentle, natural horsemanship techniques. He carefully eased the trio through the process of getting them under saddle.



Akuna Mattata

2nd Place USEF 2015 7 Y/O Jumper, 3rd Place in 2015 7 Y/O Jumper Championship Standings

Nahla is a streamlined, much taller version of Dragonfly. The thoroughbred lines from both sides show up more predominantly in this triplet. This fast, scopey, smart horse gets it done with a lot of flash. She has Quinar's characteristic head toss, and an amazing ability to jump. She was



April Moon

Winner 6 Year YJC Mid-West Final, 2014 USEF Reserve Champion 6 Y/O Jumper

April is the one that looks most like Dragonfly, although she is much bigger at 17 hands high. She has an enormous stride and is very light. Like Nahla, she is a flashy mover. She also resembles Dragonfly in personality with her old soul. April is very mellow, like she's done it all before. Also, much like her mother,



Abbey Road

2014 WEF Circuit Champion 6 Y/O Jumpers, 2015 WEF Reserve Champion 7 Y/O Jumper

People underestimate this technically beautiful mare with impeccable looks, much like they did Dragonfly in the beginning. She may be the smallest of the three, but she is fast and efficient around a course with plenty of jump. In fact, she has the highest clear-round percentage of the three

brought along slower to allow her to mature mentally. Seems like that was the right move. As a 7 year old, she's currently sitting 3rd on the Young Jumper Championships Leader Board in the Eastern League.

this mare rises to the occasion whenever called upon.

sisters. She does just what you ask of her, often making it look effortless. Abbey is winning in the 7 year old speed and the Jr. Jumpers. Keep an eye on this sports car — she's not going to stay under the radar for long.

The Training Program

When Nicki started their training, she took it slow and steady, working them on a line, letting them find their balance and allowing each horse to develop in it's own way. "Focusing on each one of them as individuals was always a priority for me," said Nicki. "Accepting that they were triplets and have the dynamics of those characteristics present, it was always very important to individualize their needs. Allowing them to express themselves individually has kept their spirits very positive."

She was not only training them technically, but wanted to allow them to develop mentally, moving slowly so they would continue to enjoy what they were doing. In fact, during this time, Nicki jumped them very sparingly. The result was three horses who learned how to find their own distances and maintain their passion for jumping. It's evident when you see how excited they are to go into the ring. "The best part of all three of them is their desire to win. It's almost like they are competitive with each other, which makes it that more special as the rider to walk through the in gate on each one."



"Accepting that they were triplets and having the dynamics of those characteristics present, it was always very important to individualize their needs."

Nicole Shahinian-Simpson

Going to the Show

In the barn, all three of them are sweet, curious, playful and have very good ground manners. Just like their mother, all three horses are very people-oriented, and will lick you as long as you let them! In the ring, they are all very focused, like Dragonfly. But that is where the similarities stop. Each of these mares has their own distinct approach to competing.

At the 2015 Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF), the “girls” ended up 2nd, 3rd and 4th in the WEF circuit standings for 7 year olds. So it seems that the team approach Rosenstein mentioned is working for these three horses and for these three women. As Polk said, “we hit the trifecta, and it’s a dream come true watching our babies show and come along. I see their mama in all of them, and Nicki has done an unbelievable job letting them be individuals and come along slowly.” Rosenstein added, “the horses love what they do, and Katie, Nicki and I love what we get to do too. We all love being part of this amazing adventure.”

See Nicki's Formulas for Success



Akuna Mattata aka
"Nahla"



April Moon aka
"April"



Abbey Road aka
"Abbey"



by Amy Quintana, Platinum Performance®

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