

WineGlass Sherry – By Tim Kemmis

You're aware of how hard it is to take photos of people – blinking eyes, a moment's wrong expression, etc. Well, with horses it's even harder. Horses move fast, and if you don't get them at the absolute right instant, they, and their rider, look awkward and unflattering. As a racing car photographer, I'm used to fast moving subjects, so that helps in horse photography, but I can assure you that I've had more than a few throw aways.

And, as with people, we have a choice of what kind of picture we want to use to portray them as. I choose to try and bring out their best.

For today we have two pictures of Holly on Sherry, pictures that help bring out the beauty of the horse.



If you're interested, the story behind Sherry involves competitive distance riding, a convoluted 'it's a smaller than small world' story, a 'you can't make these stories up' theme, and an inspiring ending.

Let's begin. About competitive trail riding. They're 25-mile long rides that must be finished within a perfect' ten-minute window. Importantly, it's not only how fast you can ride to make the completion time, it's also about taking proper care of your horse. Vet checks mid-ride and at the end determine if the horse is being overworked, lame, or shows other signs of unhealthy stress, resulting in major penalties. Distance riding, then, takes training, strategy, science, and acute awareness of how your horse is doing so that it finishes in the best possible condition.



In the 'it's a smaller than small world' part of the story, Sherry was sent to Holly to train and compete in the upcoming summer ride season by my cousin-in-law/friend. My Mom's first cousin married a woman who, for simplicity's sake, I'll simply call, my Aunt. Sherry's owner is a cousin of my Aunt, so that makes her my cousin-in-law, or something like that. Making it even more convoluted, our parents were high school friends. Further, even though we are all from the same hometown, I was long gone to Wisconsin and my cousin-in-law married a veterinarian, moved to southern Illinois, and started a herd of Shagya-Arabian riding horses. The connection is all the fault of my Aunt, a multi-time endurance riding champion. My cousin-in-law, as she was growing up, learned horsemanship from my Aunt. Through these various connections, Holly eventually bought a horse from my cousin-in-law, and even though we live a long distance away, we've become good friends.

It was at this point that my cousin-in-law asked Holly if she would train and condition Sherry, and enter her in the next-year's endurance rides. Sherry arrived late Autumn, overweight, out of shape, and seldom ridden. Holly started working her in the arena with basic skills: walk, trot, canter.

Sherry detested arena work, so much so, that the barn owner/trainer, to whom arena work was paramount, dismissed Sherry as unimportant.

Holly kept working Sherry, and by Christmas break asked if I'd come and take pictures while she rode in the snow, today's pictures. Sherry may have hated arena work, but put her outside and she was in her element. She didn't just love the trail, she craved it, always eager to go, as today's pictures suggest.

Once the season got underway, it became apparent Sherry was a trail superstar, and if Holly and Sherry showed up, odds were they were going to finish on the podium.

On the trail, Sherry was fearless. On a Minnesota ride, the trail required them to ford a waist-deep river. With Holly's reassurance, Sherry forded the river confidently, leading a group of more timid horses and riders.

Holly and Sherry successfully completed 190 miles that season and were Reserve Champions. At the end of the year, Sherry went back home.

That was the beginning of Sherry's competitive career. A couple of years later, my cousin-in-law's daughter, an experienced endurance rider and a horse veterinarian, rode Sherry to the national championship.

Sherry's story demonstrates that horses, like people, have their own aptitude, which we have to recognize and bring out if they're to attain the very best they're capable of. The horse which the barn owner dismissed as a worthless arena horse turned out to be national champion endurance horse.

You can't make up stories like these!