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He Piaffes, He Jumps, He Gallops: Avatar's Jazzman Does It All

By: Lindsay Berreth
Dec 1, 2017 - 10:41 AM

Morgans are known as a versatile breed, and Avatar's Jazzman has been proving that in spades with Lauren Chumley. From the Grand Prix dressage ring, to the USEA American Eventing Championships (N.C.), to the jumper ring, the 14.1-hand wonder pony does it all, and sometimes in the same week!

"Jazz's" fall season has included the 1.10-meter jumpers at The Ridge At Riverview (N.J.), three dressage shows where he scored 60 percent or better at Grand Prix, the AEC, where he finished eighth in the training rider division, and ribbons at the GAIG/U.S. Dressage Federation Region 1 Championships (N.C.)—all with Chumley, a dressage rider who decided to step outside her comfort zone several years ago and try to make it to training level in eventing and "not die."



Lauren Chumley and Avatar's Jazzman at the USEA American Eventing Championships. Photo by Sportfot

he gets bored. I also get bored doing circles. We started doing some cross rails. If we're not showing on the weekend I like to do something fun. He was super keen and super brave. I didn't need to dressage him six days a week, so it's a good mental break for him. As we went up the levels in eventing we started doing some conditioning, which was awesome for him."

Chumley took Jazz to a hunter pace, then started taking jumping lessons and began eventing, all the while moving up the levels in dressage.

The gelding reached Grand Prix last year, and Chumley faced some pushback about his extracurricular activities.

"My dressage trainer at the time said, 'If you get him up to FEI then you'll have to stop eventing because that's just ridiculous. Why would you risk an FEI horse?' I was like, 'Yeah, that's probably true,' but he actually got there, and we were like, 'Why would we stop?' " she said. "I try to be careful with him. Maybe I ice his legs now more than I used to, but he's 15 too. But he just loves it. He's the best cross-country horse I've ever had. He tore around AEC; we came in like 20 seconds under time, and it was pouring rain. He was just awesome."

Jazz is a bit of a workaholic in all his jobs. "He does not think he's cute, nor little, nor precious," said Chumley. "He's very serious about his work. He drags you on the trailer. He loves to work. He has absolutely no idea he's 14 hands."

While Chumley has always been a dressage rider, growing up she went to the Rolex Kentucky CCI**** every year as a spectator. She never had an event horse until she started riding Fjords for a breeder she was working for in high school.

She ended up taking one of their horses, SNF Maarte, to the AEC in 2007 in Chicago and won the open beginner novice championship, but then a job change meant she was back to focusing on dressage.

Chumley also competes in dressage and eventing with Dowling's German Riding Pony Nikolas (Novalis T—Capina Mia). They competed in fourth level at Dressage At Devon (Pa.) this year in addition to picking up a 10th-placed ribbon at the AEC in the novice rider division and several ribbons at third and fourth level at the Region 1 Championships.

"I obviously have trainer schizophrenia and can't decide what I want to be when I grow up," she said with a laugh. "Melissa's awesome, and she lets me compete both of her really expensive ponies in both disciplines, which is unusual. Now I have a bunch of event horses because I'm super out of control!"

Chumley enjoys taking on horses of different breeds for dressage and eventing, as well as fancier warmbloods.

"He's really good with showing different disciplines in consecutive weeks," said Chumley. "He's actually better the more I do with him. He's such a busybody mentally."

Chumley, Pittstown, N.J., started riding Jazz, a 15-year-old gelding (KJB All That Jazz—Avatar's Cassandra), for his owner Melissa Dowling when he was a 4-year-old unbroken stallion.

A Morgan and pony enthusiast, Dowling found Jazz, who was bred by Chuck and Cordia Pearson, in the Midwest and had connected with Chumley, who'd been based in Cincinnati for 20 years. Neither she nor Chumley had any idea how far he would go, but Chumley worked with him for about 1½ years before she took a job in New Jersey.

In 2011 they reconnected in Florida when Chumley had one of Dowling's horses in training. Jazz was being naughty at home, so he came to her barn and "got his ducks in a row" pretty quickly.

They continued on in the dressage ring, but Chumley, who's main job is riding dressage horses, decided Jazz needed to do something other than work in the arena every day.

"Most Morgans are pretty high energy," said Chumley. "He's very high energy and very smart, and



Avatar's Jazzman showing off in the dressage ring with Lauren Chumley. Photo by Joanna Jodko Photography

"I grew up riding everything," she said. "We didn't have nice, fancy, well-behaved warmbloods for dressage. We had off-the-track Thoroughbreds and Arab crosses—just general random things that tried to kill you, so you had to get them to not kill you and go to the horse show."

"[When I became a professional] I never lost the want or drive to work with the off breeds," she continued. "I think they're a different challenge. We have Fjords, we have Morgans, we have warmbloods, we have Thoroughbreds, we have a Saddlebred cross, we have a Haflinger. I had two Knabstruppers this summer. I've had a lot of Friesians. Pretty much you name it, we've had it. I like that."

Chumley's philosophy is that dressage is for everyone. "Not everybody is going to go to the Olympics, but I think dressage is good for every horse," she said. "It's fun to take those different breeds and do something and try to make them competitive. Everybody expects you to do well if you spend \$100,000 on your 4-year-old. It's a different skill set to train a Fjord to third level!"

Chumley is working on a Grand Prix freestyle for Jazz and hopes to try a modified level event with him as well to see how that goes.

"My life goal as a dressage trainer was to get around a training level horse trial and not die," she said with a laugh. "I did that a bunch of times on a couple of horses, so I thought, 'OK, I need a new goal.' Now my goal is to get around a prelim and not die."

Categories: Dressage, Eventing



Lauren Chumley and Avatar's Jazzman at the USEA American Eventing Championships. Photo by Lindsay Berreth