

# Born Again

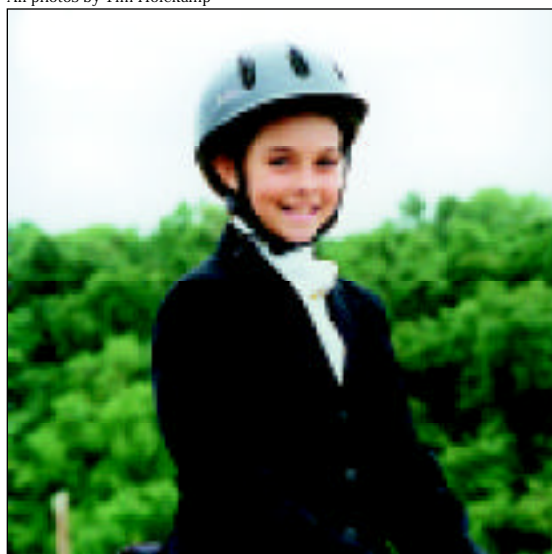
By Tim Holekamp

**AMETHYST**— a horse that conjures up the image of the Black Stallion: hard as nails, fast and strong enough to run clean on the most challenging Advanced level cross-country courses in North America, masculine breeding stallion with proven exceptional fertility and prepotency, hardy enough to stand up to ten years of three-day competition.

Foaled in Germany in 1980, **Amethyst** (by Amor II, out of Aschenbrödel by Schabernack) is the grandson of the great **Maharadscha** (by Famulus, out of Marke by Marktvogt). He was imported to Canada in 1985 and soon proved his worth, winning at all eventing levels, including the Bromont CCA in 1990, literally as a catch ride by Peter Gray. Purchased by a syndicate of ATA members, Amethyst moved to the U.S. in 1991 and was entrusted to rider Darren Chiacchia. That same year, he finished third at the Radnor CCI\*\* at the US Intermediate Championships, missing the win by a rail. Aimed at the 1996 Olympics, injuries prevented him from reaching his goal, but not before proving his Advanced level mettle with numerous wins and placings, earning him five ATA Horse of the Year awards, the Cäsar Cup five times, and the Förderverein Award once.

Finally a severe flexor tendon injury ended Amethyst's competition career in early 1995, worrying all of us as to his ability to breed and be comfortable. Darren parted with him reluctantly, and at the request of my wife, Cheryl, he came to our farm near Columbia, MO, to rest. The number of participants in the syndicate gradually shrank and now we are Amethyst's sole owners. A

All photos by Tim Holekamp



One happy trooper — Victoria "Tori" Holekamp.

year of relative inactivity brought him back and he has continued his breeding career, attaining the distinction of third most used ATA stallion over the last three years. His foals are just reaching the age for competition, but, in hand, his fillies have already won many ATA Mare Show honors.

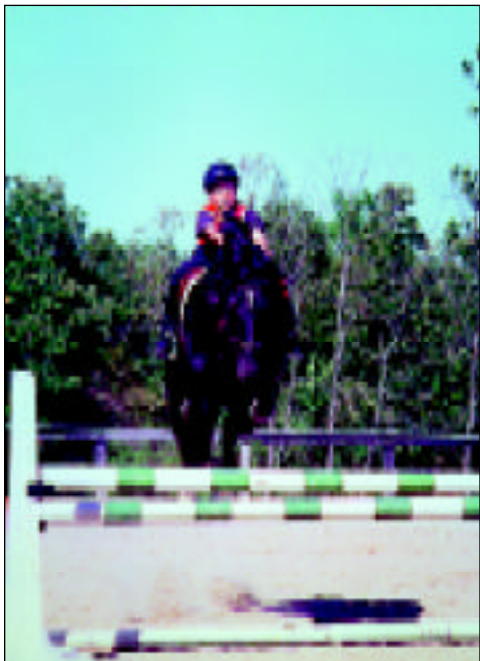
Meanwhile, back at home, we noticed several interesting things. Amethyst managed to keep himself in excellent flesh without regular work. His lameness went from intermittent to almost nonexistent. Breeding him (both natural and phantom) was so easy and safe almost anyone could help. The local veterinarians marveled. Kids could groom him. He bit no one. Yet he ran the farm from his paddock. Ten mares, spread out over our 110 acres, begged him to

pay attention, checked in by voice every day, responded to his calls instantly, and stood quietly for him at breeding time. This is one very "alpha" horse. All his life he had been ridden by big strong men, so we assumed this was necessary. And yet, with humans there was not a feral move to be seen.

It was pretty clear all along that he deeply missed the horse show world. Watching the four-horse trailer being loaded with other competitors and tack sent him trotting back and forth in his pen, speaking his mind vehemently. So one day last summer, when our youngest daughter, Tori, asked about riding him, Cheryl and I looked at each other and shrugged. Why not? Well, in retrospect,



Nothing can stop them— Amethyst showing Tori how the big kids play.



*Tori talks to Amethyst all the time — the excellent communication between horse and rider is evident.*

fourteen hundred pounds of 17-hand event stallion matched to an eighty pound eleven-year-old was why not. Yet, when she clipped a halter and lead on him and led him out to

be brushed and tacked, it seemed alright. We have thirteen years and four kids worth of Pony Club behind us, so we feel our safety judgement is reasonably sound. This looked okay and it was. Two weeks later, Tori's daily routine included leading, grooming, tacking, schooling, cooling, and putting Amethyst away — entirely unassisted. The first time I watched her walk him down the barn aisle right past two mares in full flaming heat it took my breath away. Shrieking and arching his neck, he placed every foot carefully, watching little Tori so closely she had no fear. A touch on the lead and a strong word from her and he instantly converted from "Big John" to "Mr. Milquetoast."

And so it went. By the start of the school year, they were in obvious love with each other. He watched for her to come, doted on her constantly, stood stock still while she crawled up a rail jump to mount him, and listened with his whole body when she rode him. Permission was granted for a Training Level dressage outing on September 14, the big autumn St. Louis Area Dressage Show two hours away. When he stepped into that trailer after more than two years at

home, he was reborn. Tori was spinning like a top.

The first ride was before a local judge, earning 66.8% and the comment, "Fun pair to watch!", a bit of an understatement according to the crowd's response. On their second try, this time in Test 2, Elizabeth Searle scored them at 69.2% with eights spread through halts, trots and canter circles. They won the biggest open class and a lot of admiration. Cheryl and I cried a little.

Now Tori and Amethyst mostly play together at home. For them that includes some ring jumping on ideal footing, not over 3'9". His legs are holding up fine and his heart is so happy you could not fail to notice it. They hack through the woods and even jump in the field once in a while. Tori talks to Amethyst the whole time. He listens. May he live forever!

