

Banner Year for Sally Cousins
Current US Leading Lady Rider Sets Her Sights on 2010 Games

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It has been only five years since Sarah “Sally” Cousins, 44, of West Grove, Pennsylvania, USA made the move into the professional ranks of eventing, and already she tops the ranks for Leading Lady Rider in 2008 and is second only to US Olympic team member Phillip Dutton in the Nutrena Rider of the Year Leader Boards.

Since she rode as an amateur previously, Cousins had a lot of depth as a competitor by the time she entered the professional ranks: she competed in her first advanced event by age 18 and had completed the four-star events at Badminton and Burghley (UK) by age 22. She also kept competing at the upper levels as an amateur during the 16 years that she spent working in her father’s Merrill Lynch investment firm as a stock broker.

“It’s easier to make the top rankings when you’re riding full time,” she said. “I already had the experience to make it possible.”

It was an easy decision for Cousins to make the transition to professional trainer. “I decided I wanted to give it a shot as a professional,” she said. “I think that the horse business has changed so that it’s easier to make a good living at it.”

Currently Cousins has five horses at the upper levels and more at the lower levels and in training. Her two three-star horses are Tsunami and Robber Baron, who recently placed third and fifth, respectively, at the Bromont CCI*** in Canada. Kestrel Key, Tell Me Why and Troy compete at the intermediate and advanced levels. Troy, owned by longtime supporter Mrs. Penny Wilson, has competed at Rolex in the past; Cousins hopes to move Kestrel Key and Tell Me Why up to three-star level next spring. Other than Troy she owns all of her horses, and is considering syndicating Tsunami in the fall.

In Pennsylvania Cousins and her husband of 17 years, Nathaniel, base their business out of her parents’ farm in Oxford. Nathaniel rides too, competing at Training level, and manages the farm including dealing with the vet and farrier and doing most of the maintenance on the property. The couple is very supportive of each other, with Sally primarily instructing and riding the upper-level horses.

“I think the horse business was a huge thing for me to learn,” she said. “I do a lot of teaching and I keep in mind that when I am teaching, I work for the student. At Merrill we primarily worked for the clients, and I try to do that in my business now. I teach a lot of amateurs, from starter level to advanced. I like to see everybody progress.”

A student of Cousins for the past ten years or so, Kerry Torrey, 46 of North Salem, New York has developed into an advanced competitor with Cousins’ instruction. “I think she’s probably one of the most intuitive people I’ve ridden with,” Torrey said. “She has so much experience, you can walk a course with her and it rides just as she says it well. She’s a naturally talented rider so I think it used to be hard for her to relate to inexperienced students, but her teaching is very sophisticated now. It’s been fun watching her develop as an instructor over the years. She’s also tremendous at matching horses to riders – she’s helped me pick out a few horses and they have all been incredible.”

Excited with her own current success, Cousins hopes to keep advancing as a rider. “I’d like to take Robbie and Sue to Rolex, probably first to the three-star at Fair Hill this fall,” she said. “I’d also love to go back to Bromont – [the organizers] did a great job.”

She is also setting her sights on representing the United States in competition. “I’d like to make the team for the 2010 Worlds,” she said. “It’s a change for me to have that as a goal – when I turned professional, the first thing was to grow my business and get it on firm footing. I have done that, financially and with the horses, so now that kind of goal feels more attainable.”



PHOTO: Sally Cousins and The Robber Baron on cross-country at the 2008 Bromont CIC*** in Quebec, Canada.

