

West Coast Turnaround

Coudray shines from Calif. base

BY KATY CARTER

Tiana Coudray is one of those lucky few whose first horse is still with her, actively competing and leading a productive career. Of course, when your first horse is King Street, having it any other way would be ridiculous.

Coudray and her longtime partner (known as "Danny" around the barn) had plenty to celebrate in 2007, which culminated in the United States Eventing Association's Young Rider of the Year Award.

"This past year was incredible," said the 19-year-old native of Ojai, Calif. "Going to Rolex was definitely the high point. I have always wanted to get there, but to do so at age 18 was unreal. And winning the CIC three-star (at Galway Downs) was pretty special, too."

Although eliminated on cross country at Rolex, Coudray is able to reflect positively upon her first four-star experience.

"I think the most rewarding moment of the year was our dressage test at Rolex," she stated without hesitation. "Danny and I went in some pretty adverse weather conditions and I was very proud of him."

King Street and Coudray began their career together four years ago at the novice level, after Coudray purchased the now 12-year-old Irish Sport Horse from Peter Green in Virginia. According to Coudray, Danny was special from the beginning.

"He's very forgiving and has earned himself several sets of angel wings," she said. "We figured everything out mostly through trial and error, and he just went along and did his job."

Coudray began riding while enrolled at the Ojai Valley School.

"I was incredibly lucky that the school I went to had a riding program," she said. "I gave it a try for P.E. credit and was hooked." Several years and a North American Young Riders Championship silver medal later, she joined the Santa Rosa Valley Pony Club. "I joined pony club late, but it's been a great experience."

Coudray didn't have access to regular instruction in her hometown, and competed through the CCI* largely on her own.

"There isn't much going on where I am from, so I mostly rode on my own at home," she said. "We were going intermediate before we started getting regular help, and that made a huge improvement."

Since then, she has spent the last two years as a working student for Derek and Bea di Grazia at their farm in Carmel Valley.

"I feel so fortunate for the opportunities and the horses," said Coudray. "It's wonderful."

As to working with King Street, Coudray sees the partnership as a highly complementary one, their strengths and

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Young Rider of the Year

weaknesses balancing out.

"I have a pretty good dressage foundation, and dressage is hardest for Danny," Coudray said. "He's a worrier and tends to get flustered if he thinks he has made a mistake, where as I'm more of a cool competitor."

Despite his perfectionist tendencies, King Street's still a very funny horse.

"He really can't be bothered by unimportant things, such as putting his ears up for photos," she said. "He'd rather take a nap than be bothered by silly human beings."

Coudray is particularly excited that King Street has realized he is not just a babysitter but a true athlete.

"Danny's outlook on competition changed this year," she said. "Even going intermediate and advanced, he thought his job was to pack me around. But now he's realized what an athlete he really is, and has transitioned from packing me to respecting me as a rider."

Although King Street took most of the accolades, Coudray also had a bright 2007 with her 6-year-old Ringwood Magister, who won the Twin Rivers CCI* and the Galway Downs CCI*, finished second at Woodside Spring Horse Trials and placed third at Copper Meadows.

"He's a really talented horse and have big hopes for him," said Coudray. "He is incredibly playful and can get too hot in dressage, so I have to keep a lid on it. The challenge is to not push him, even though I know what he is capable of."

When asked if she has any plans to move east, the California girl was reflective.

"There are a lot of advantages to riding and competing on the West Coast," Coudray said, citing consistent footing, good courses and a virtually year-long season that doesn't force migration to more temperate climates. "Having to travel long distances to competitions is the huge disadvantage we have on the West Coast, and the lack of a CCI three-star is another. This has allowed me to become really good through the two-star level, though."

While the transcontinental move has crossed her mind more than once, it would require special circumstances.

"I think about it," said Coudray, "But to make it worthwhile, I'd have to have a string of top horses. The costs are a huge disadvantage for one or two horses."

Coudray wishes to put her past experiences and future endeavors to work in creating a professional career.

"Right now, I'm mostly doing my own thing, riding and working for Bea and Derek and trying to finish up school," she said. "I definitely want to pursue the horses full time and keep my sights set on a solid future in the sport."



Shannon Brinkman

Tiana Coudray and King Street fly a fence at Rolex in April.

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