

TODD, Mai-Liis



Ralston Purina official Bill Murray and Mai-Liis Todd with horse April.

Feed firm makes a dream possible

By MARGARET HAYLOCK
Staff Reporter

STIRLING — Feeds and Seeds has made a Christmas wish come true for Mai-Liis Todd, co-owner of the Equinox Training Centre on Marsh Hill Road.

On Dec. 29, she will fly to Vienna, Austria, where she will spend approximately eight weeks at the stables of Johann Riegler, a trainer with the world-renowned Spanish Riding School.

"I was just floored by this opportunity. When I first got the news, it was a combination of excitement and complete frustration," says Mrs. Todd, describing her reaction to Riegler's invitation.

While she wanted to accept such an offer for professional advancement, both she and her husband Christopher Todd felt it would be financially impossible.

"Then I thought of Purina (Stirling Feeds and Seeds) and I dropped in, not really expecting anything but feeling I had to try," Todd says.

As a result of her visit, the feed company has agreed to sponsor her with a cheque for \$500, that will cover the bulk of her travel expenses.

Bill Mallory of Wooler, farm consultant with Ralston Purina, says the sponsorship is "unusual".

"We do other sponsorships, such as awards and trophies, but not to this degree. I feel this is a special event and a special situation."

"Ralston Purina is always interested in advanced technology, product and service. This fell into that line. I feel very proud on behalf of

Stirling Feeds and Seeds and Ralston Purina, to be a sponsor."

Todd's invitation to pursue her career in Austria, followed a five-day clinic, presented at the Equinox Training Centre earlier this month by Arthur Kottas, chief rider of the Spanish Riding School.

"Kottas was more than pleased with me as a rider. I have reached the stage where I am comfortable teaching the horse the higher levels of medium work," she says.

After his return to Austria, Kottas spoke with Riegler and recommended the young Canadian rider for an apprenticeship in his stables.

"I hope to gain more professional experience and to come back with a better feel for the advanced work and establish myself as a professional in my own right," she explains.

When she returns to Canada in mid-February, she hopes to describe her experiences in Austria through articles in several equestrian magazines.

She says Riegler receives so many applications from riders who wish to study with him that he no longer advertises for apprentices, preferring to "pick and choose."

While in Austria, Mrs. Todd will ride at Riegler's private stables outside Vienna, receiving three lessons, each week. She will also assist him in backing young Lippizan mares and schooling other horses. Once a week, she will visit the Spanish Riding School to observe the work in progress there. Only one Canadian woman has trained, previously, in Riegler's stables.

"Usually, it is young professionals

from England, because it is just an hour's flight from there to Austria."

Mrs. Todd will arrive in Vienna just in time to take a taxi to the Spanish Riding School to watch a full performance. The following day, she will be allowed free time to rest after her flight and will celebrate New Year's Eve in Vienna.

On New Year's Day, there will be a traditional ride through the Austrian countryside, with visits to many small villages. The following day, she will begin work with Riegler.

Todd credits her husband, British rider Christopher Todd, with providing the solid training that qualifies her to accept an apprenticeship in Riegler's stables.

She observes her riding career did not really begin until she started studying with him, seven years ago. Together, the couple has operated the Equinox Training Centre for the past eight years, first in Kingston and now at Marsh Hill Farm.

"Kottas says lots of people can ride trained Grand Prix horses but only a handful can train a Grand Prix horse. I'd like to train a horse to Grand Prix. I'm in love with the process - to me it's more like an art and the finished product is a bonus."

Intell Dec. 28/89