

You have to earn the right to ride

Classical dressage in Moffat

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BERNADETTE WARD

There is no mistaking a love of all that is horse at the Tillanna farm and homestead.

From the rolling, pastoral 96 acres in Moffat that house the barns, rings and paddocks to the artwork on the walls, there is no doubt that the horses come first.

"It's the love of the horse that we're all in it for," agrees owner Christine Taggart. "There's nothing quite like it."

A warm and engaging woman still carrying the lilt of Ireland in her voice, Taggart has known horses all her life. She took her first lesson at four and competed at the International Horse Show in Dublin on a Black Irish Sport Horse mare named Miss Imp.

Her competitive equestrian career along with her place on the Irish Water Ski team came to an end after a severe accident in the mid 1960's.

It was not however, the end of horses in her life.

Following an urge to see more of the world, Taggart and her husband left Ireland for Canada in 1973, eventually settling first in Mississauga and then in Burlington.

Some things just seem to be in the blood and despite an urban setting, Taggart's young children, Conor and Seaneen, soon followed in their mother's footsteps, developing an interest in horses and so a chestnut mare named Nicki was purchased.

Seaneen, now 22, says that it was seeing the horses at Santa's Village on family trips to the cottage up near Parry Sound that stirred her.

She has clearly inherited the family's competitive spirit and has set her sights on the Olympics.

"I'm going to make it one day," she says.

For now, her days start early with turning out stalls at Tillanna followed by three to four hours of lessons and practice for herself at trainer Jon Costin's farm. It was a pivotal moment for Seaneen when Costin sat her on a 16.1 horse called Rudyard.

"She just lit up. She'd never been on a horse like that before," said Taggart.

The family sold six of their horses in order to purchase Rudy. For Seaneen, having Costin take the family under his wing has been priceless. She understands

the value of his experience and knowledge.

The remainder of Seaneen's day is filled with horses on the training board and teaching basic riding skills.

Classical dressage, which is what she both teaches and trains for, is an ancient form that goes back at least 2,000 years.

The ancient Greeks are credited as the first to use dressage when preparing for war. Today, the objective is to show the horse in a calm, flexible and supple manner.

"It's all about making the horse free and presenting itself in the most natural and beautiful state with a rider on its back," says Seaneen.

She also competes - at the third level this year and onto the Pre-St. George level in Dressage next year.

"Next year I'll be showing more seriously," she says.

Taggart speaks with obvious pride while Seaneen carefully unveils her black velvet hat for show.

"You have to earn the right to ride in one of those," says Taggart.

Along with her Olympic goals, Seaneen also plans to move deeper into teaching - training and riding horses up to the Grand Prix level. She plans to bring in some Norwegian Fjords in the near future for the younger children to train on.

Brother Conor, 24, is also involved with the farm; he handles much of the physical farming and the breeding of the horses.

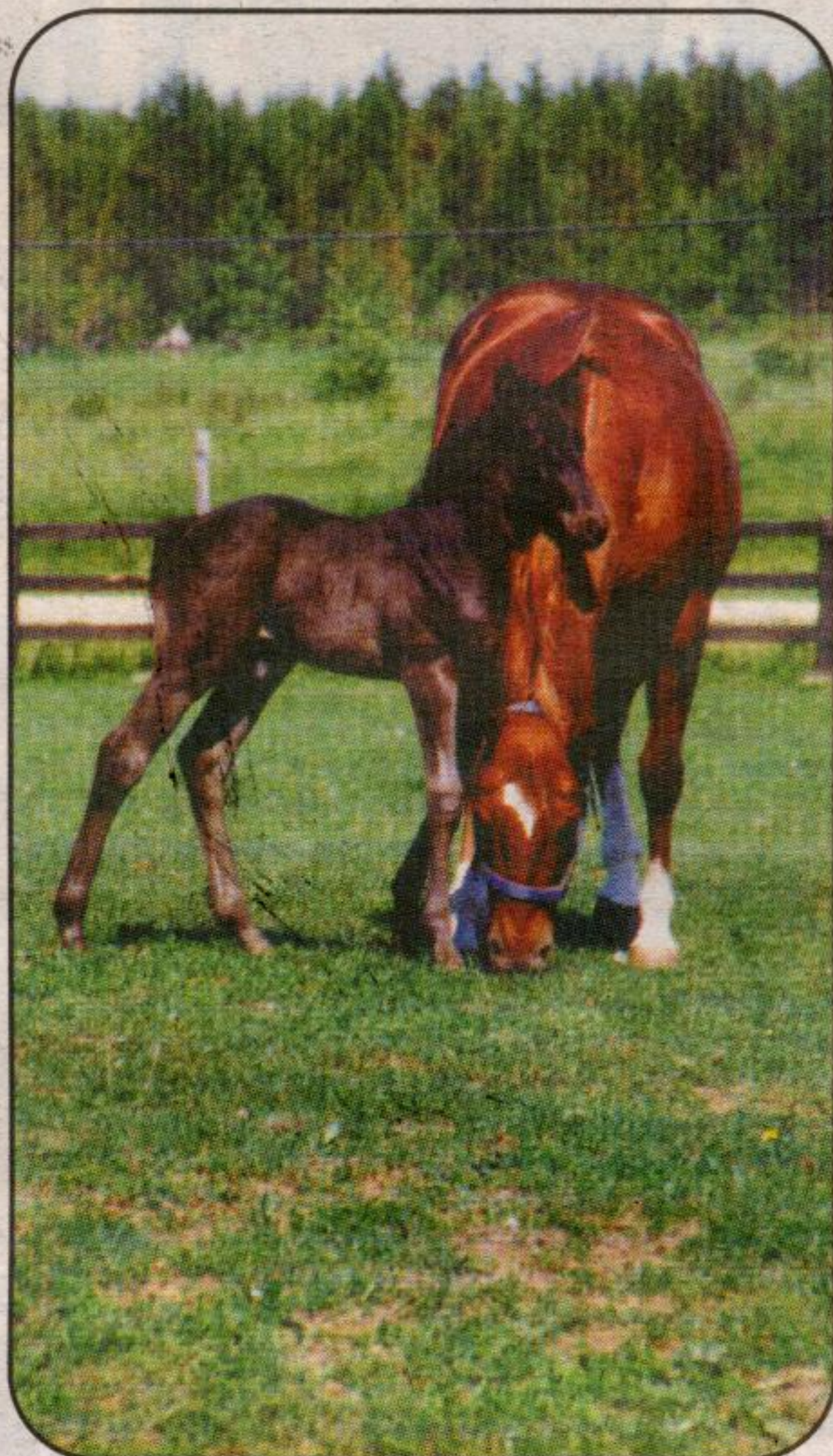
Taggart laughs when she points out that although they're Irish, they have no Irish horses yet.

They do have 50 stalls which they use in their labour intensive boarding and training business.

"You don't stop with live animals," says Taggart. "You work from six in the morning until ten at night."

There is ample room for the horses with nine outdoor paddocks, four large individual turn-out paddocks and a cross-country training course.

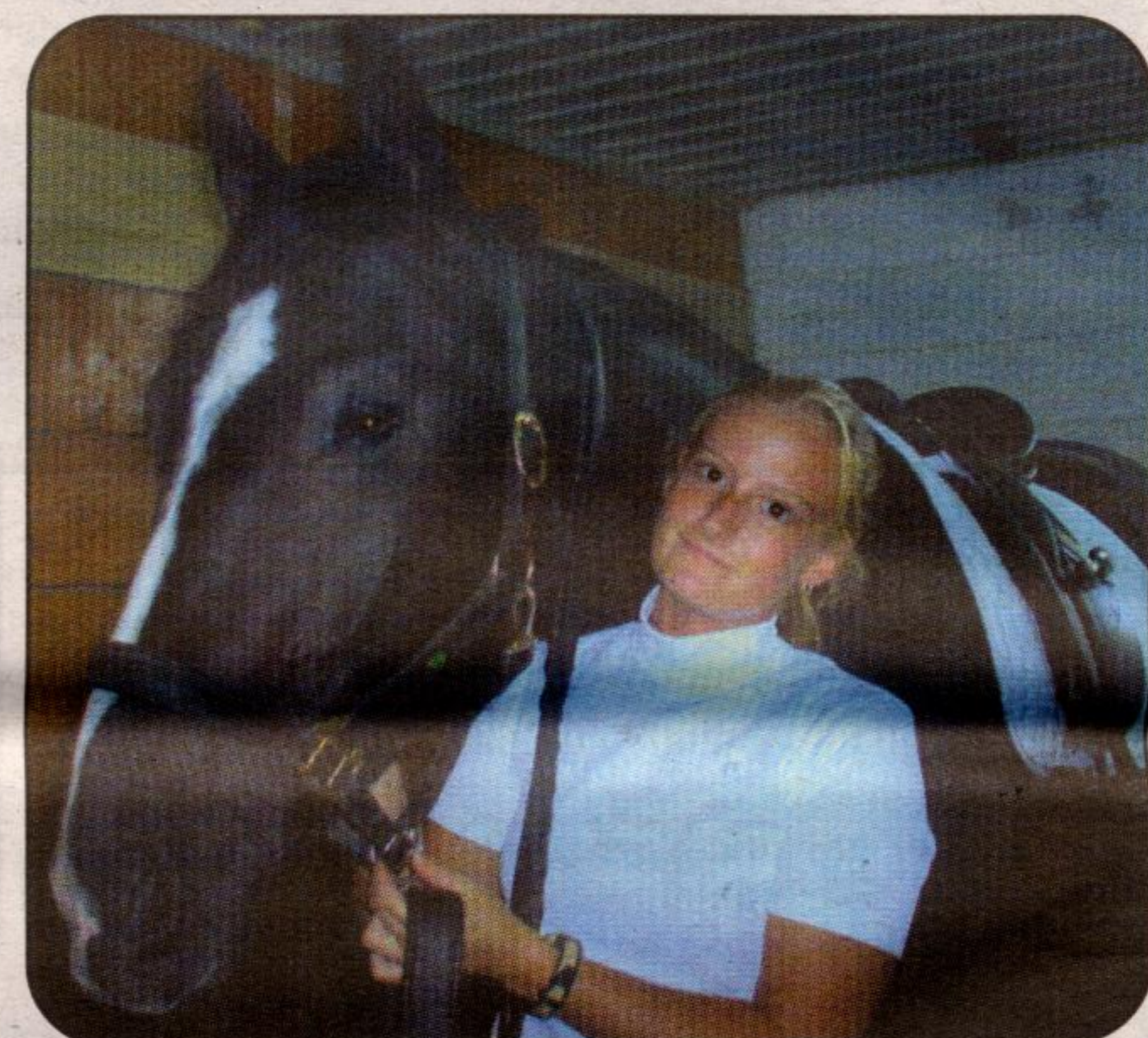
Indoor facilities include large box stalls, an indoor jumper ring, heated tack rooms, washrooms, a quaran-



Mare and new foal enjoy the Autumn sunshine.



Practice ring at Tillanna Farm.



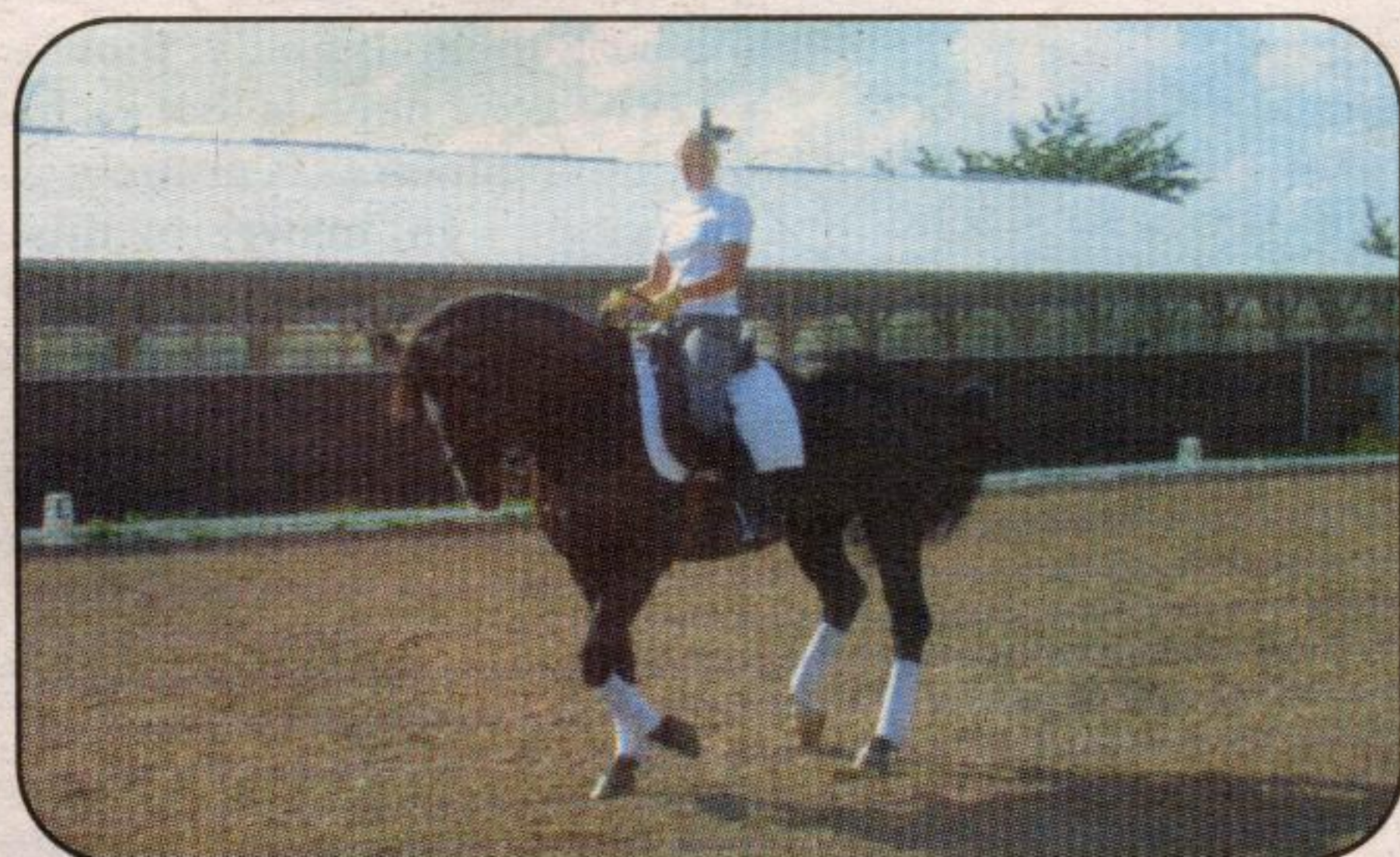
Seaneen prepares Rudy for a day's work.



Seaneen competing in a show jumping event.



Christine Taggart with Rudy Rudyard.



Seaneen Taggart practices the ancient art of dressage in Tillanna's outdoor sand ring.



Seaneen puts Rudy through his paces in competition.