



Another Man's Treasure

by MARCIE HEACOX

Ever since she was seven, 14-year-old Harper Gray has wanted nothing more than to ride horses, especially her California-bred gelding Deep Pockets.

Deep Pockets is an eight-year-old son of In Excess (Ire) and Danzig's two-time winner Zigland. In February of 2009, he broke his maiden at Santa Anita Park in his fifth career start for his breeders and owners, the late Betty and Larry Mabee of Golden Eagle Farm. In his next race, trainer Kristin Mulhall claimed him from Bob Baffert, but the team couldn't win from five more starts that year.

Mulhall then retired Deep Pockets and went through placement organization The Second Race to find him a new home. He was adopted by a woman who found him to be incompatible and gave him to the Gray family for free, per Second Race stipulations. "I really liked how he was built like a sport horse, and his personality, because he's very sweet," Gray said.

Since taking riding lessons at a summer camp seven years ago, Gray's only occupation besides school is riding and caring for her horses at Willow Creek Horse Park in Woodland. "We found her a trainer and she started riding, and that was sort of it for her," Gray's mother, Julie Salley-Gray, said. "It was all she wanted to do."

Salley-Gray said her only relation to horses besides supporting her daughter's endeavors is through her position as a consultant for California's Assembly Appropriations Committee. Her husband, Nicholas Gray, worked in construction management until the economic recession hit, and their daughter's involvement in horses inspired him to change professions and become a farrier.

Harper Gray got her first horse when she was 11 years

Deep Pockets: Big Plans

old—off-track Thoroughbred gelding Mightiest Titan, nicknamed Taz. She adopted the 13-year-old because he was badly injured in a riding accident and his former owner was going to euthanize him. Gray dedicated herself to his rehabilitation and has returned him to working at low levels of three-day eventing.

She added "Pockets" to her stable about a year ago. "She was spending all her time rehabilitating Taz," Salley-Gray said. "Her riding and her training were suffering, so she needed a healthy horse so she could compete."

Christine Scarlett's been training Deep Pockets and Gray in three-day eventing. To switch disciplines, Scarlett said a horse needs to relearn the basics, such as how to be more responsive to leg and hand cues. She said she's a fan of Thoroughbreds in particular. "I think they're a light, rideable horse that's used to doing a task. They get to their chore and do it," Scarlett said. "They'll go the extra mile and they work hard for you."

Both Scarlett and Gray said Deep Pockets is an intelligent horse, which can only help in the diverse disciplines of dressage, cross-country and showjumping. "He's really smart, so you teach him something and he'll remember it forever," Gray said.

"If you don't have a plan, he has a plan for himself," Scarlett said. "It'll certainly teach (Gray) to be disciplined in the use of aids and consistent with her work with the horse, which I think is extremely valuable for a young rider."

Gray may be young, but she plans on riding horses for the rest of her life and has set her goals high, saying simply, "I want to go to the Olympics." She hopes Deep Pockets is the horse to get her there. 🐾



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California-bred Deep Pockets, who won at Santa Anita Park for trainer Bob Baffert on February 8, 2009 (left), is now enjoying a second career in three-day eventing with 14-year-old Harper Gray in Northern California.