



A Mutual Tip of the Hat:

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH SHANNON PETERS



By Patti Schofler

Without doubt, Shannon Peters is an accomplished equestrian. She's also the woman that stands beside dressage Olympian and husband Steffen Peters. It's for Shannon that Steffen's eyes comb the stadium after he finishes a ride. It's to her that he points when he rides out of the arena. It's Shannon he hugs after he dismounts, because she's his wife and sweetie, but also because she's his coach.

Many married couples wouldn't survive a game of tennis together, much less working and living together 24/7. Love may be a many splendored thing, but how does it survive the complexity of an equestrian business partnership? Competition in most sports complicate emotions and reason, but when you add the ripe passions of the horse community, the challenges for a long-time, full-time relationship only become greater.

Playing Nice

The Peters can indeed play tennis together. And they can successfully run extremely active businesses separate and jointly while living parallel lives in the competition arena.

Husband Steffen, who is a USET team member and three-time USEF Equestrian of the Year, is the more familiar of the two. Shannon's name is not as much on the tip of the tongue. Yet she is a U.S. Dressage Federation bronze, silver and gold medalist. She is also a two-time national championship competitor, first on Luxor in 2007, when the two were crowned Reserve National Champions Intermediare I, and second on Flor de Selva in 2009 when they took home fourth place in the Intermediare division.

She loves to train young horses through the levels, one of the most successful being Weltino's Magic, with whom she

won Reserve National Champion at the 2008 Young Horse Championships.

Today Shannon and Steffen run their separate training businesses from a facility they have shared and managed for eight years in southern California. They have been a couple for more than ten years, married for eight.

When they met, they each had a viable horse business. After growing up in Michigan and completing college at

the University of Colorado, Shannon ran a dressage training business in Boulder at that time for 17 years. For several months she was wait-listed to ride in a clinic with Steffen. Finally she got a space.

When she at last rode with him, they became friends, seeing each other at Arizona and California shows. "I was divorced when I met him. He wasn't. After his divorce, I saw him at a show and we started talking, and things went from there," Shannon recalls.

After a two-year long distance relationship, they set up a trial run with Shannon moving to San Diego. Her reluctance to move was due to her concern about leaving

a successful business. "I was

lucky. I had a couple of clients who moved out here and I brought 13 horses with me," she says.

She ended up staying. Today the pair shares the 65-horse Arroyo Del Mar stable where they each run their own active training business. They both have a busy competition and clinic schedule that takes them together and separate around the country.

For the Good of the Horse

When they are at home, their mornings begin with working their individual horses at the same time. "Because our riding and training styles are so similar, it was a natural evolution that we coach each other. There are never any questions.



Shannon Peters riding Flor de Selva in 2009.

When one of us is out of town, the other rides his or her horses. You have to check your ego at the door and allow yourself to get help and receive it. For us it's not a problem, I think because we have the highest respect for each other," Shannon says.

That respect was tested in 2007 when Weltino's Magic's arrived at the ranch.

"We definitely have our strong suits. He's better with some horses than I am and we can admit that. Even though we have separate businesses, the principle we follow is to work out what's better for horse, rider and owner," Shannon says.

Weltino's Magic was purchased for Shannon as a coming five-year-old. He was a Westphalian gelding by Weltino out of Diva by Diamond Boy, owned by Jen and Bruce Hlavacek. At the time he was a 16.1 hand, short-

coupled horse that seemed to be a fairly uncomplicated ride. By the time they got to the 2008 Markel/USEF National Young Horse Championships where they ended up reserve champions, Magic was well over 17 hands and 1,600 pounds. After he did so well at the championships, she turned him out for time off

because he had grown so much. When she brought him back, he was even bigger.

"I told the owner I loved the horse to pieces, and I'm the last person to give up the ride, but for everyone's sake, he was a better ride for Steffen. I could have gotten it done at some point, but as big and strong as he was, he was better with Steffen—who did an amazing job with him," Shannon continues.

The big Westphalian and Steffen won gold at the 2011 Pan American Games.

This is not to say Shannon and Peter aren't each "go for it" people. Both admit to being extremely competitive. "Ultimately we have the same goals in the ring. But as for each other, we are always rooting for the best for the other. We certainly are not competitive with each other at all," she says.

"We have so much the same philosophy on how we treat the horses, our staff and our clients. Our respect for

one another transfers into how we are with our clients and horses. It's how we run our daily life and treat each other. It starts out with a common belief system and everything falls into place from there," she adds.

Although their businesses are separate, clearly their accomplishments rely on one another's help.

After Hours

If they can arrange it, afternoons are earmarked for escape from the barn, often on separate paths. They might work out together, but then Steffen can be found in a field maneuvering remote control airplanes and helicopters, on the road aboard his motorcycle or on water skis or a wakeboard.

Shannon is an avid tennis player and serious bike rider. In full gear, she is seen six or seven days a week on her road

bike eating up the miles. At one time a competitive rider on two wheels, today it's about fitness. "I like having a peaceful couple of hours on my bike. Because we do other things, we can really focus on the barn when we're there. We have a separate time during the day to do things that are enjoyable and

to keep us from becoming overwhelmed by the whole thing," she explains.

In the horse world, personal and business decisions often blend. "Because so much of what we do with the horses is personal and we are so very passionate about it, it's hard to separate the personal life from the business life," says Shannon. "We have found a good way to do it and keep a good business head, not letting the personal take hold."

During evenings the Peters hold pow-wows on how to run the business and the farm, usually without any drama. While Shannon attends more to the management of the staff and the day-to-day running of the farm, decisions are a joint activity. "We don't have a hard time in that department. We agree 99 percent of the time."

At night Shannon also attends to staffing paperwork and to her other business, ShowRingShine, the boot care kit that she created, produces and markets.

Photos by Carole MacDonald



Both Shannon and Steffen were the clinicians at the NEDA 2010 Fall Symposium where they worked together to help numerous dressage riders.



Striving for Simple

Both Shannon and Steffen pursue a management style that is organized and disciplined, and they expect the same from those around them. The result has been a well-oiled machine run in a family atmosphere. Employee turnover is rare. Barn manager Kate Gillespie has been with Shannon for 14 years. Their newest employee has been with the Peters three years.

"I oversee the barn, but it's a group effort," Shannon says. "When we're gone, we know everything is 100 percent. Everyone knows their role and is proud of what they do and what we have here."

"And we don't take ourselves too seriously," says Steffen, who agrees that they laugh a lot. "Pretty much all day, at ourselves and at each other," Shannon adds. "We're always cracking jokes and love what we do—we love each other and that shows in what we do."

Because their lives include travel often in separate directions, they make a concerted effort to schedule clinics so they are home on the same weekends.

Carole MacDonald



Those weekends home together may include barbecuing for just the two of them, or with a few friends.

"We try to keep simple lives," explains Shannon. Ever since Steffen's success at the 2006 World Equestrian Games when he and Ravel led the U.S. team to the bronze medal, there have been "temptations to make our lives bigger," she adds. "That would be a mistake for us. When you make your life complicated, things can spiral out of control. We keep things simple and straightforward in our business and personal lives.

"We so much enjoy our lives and the way we do it, that it is not a temptation for us. We know how much that would change our lives, and we aren't interested in that. We enjoy the simple life, and each other and we don't need outside influences. It's pretty simple."

If it was all that simple to make a 24/7 relationship successful, wouldn't so many more couples be playing doubles tennis at Wimbledon? 

