



ON VICTOR DAKIN, DENNY EMERSON CLEARED THE COFFIN AT LEDYARD (MASS.) IN 1977, THREE YEARS AFTER THEY'D HELPED WIN THE TEAM GOLD MEDAL AT THE 1974 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS.

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DENNY EMERSON

After nearly 40 years of participating in eventing, almost no element of the sport hasn't been touched by Denny Emerson's keen mind and charismatic personality.

As a competitor, he and Victor Dakin provided the third score that clinched the gold medal at the 1974 World Three-Day Event Championships, finishing 14th behind **Bruce Davidson** and **Mike Plumb**. Since then, Emerson has also won the USET three-day championships at Radnor (Pa.) and Chesterland (Pa.).

As a trainer, for more than 25 years he's run an active business teaching horses and riders at his Tamarack Hill Farm in Strafford, Vt., and Southern Pines, N.C.,

with May, his wife of 29 years. His list of former and present students includes such stars as Dorothy Crowell, Kelli McMullen-Temple, Nancy Bliss, Gale D'Amanda, Tara Prince, Jonathan Elliott and Chad Geeter. He also conducts an exhausting series of clinics all around the country.

As a breeder, Emerson now stands three Thoroughbred stallions, chosen for their endurance-oriented pedigrees, soundness and courage. He was also a leader of the now-defunct Performance Horse Registry throughout its lifespan.

He runs a horse trial at his farm, for which he designs and constructs the cross-country courses. (His son Jamie is now a course builder; son Rett is a rodeo rider.) He has twice been the president of the U.S. Combined Training Association, seeing it through a re-evaluation of the levels of competition in the early '80s and overseeing the move of the USCTA office from its entrenched home in South Hamilton, Mass., to Leesburg, Va., and hiring new staff in 1991. And since 1993 he's been the eventing vice president for the U.S. Equestrian Team, playing an integral role in the team's resurgence from its 1985-1992 doldrums.

Emerson, 58, has never been afraid to ask why not. So his two terms as USCTA president were marked by a steady stream of thought-provoking meetings and discussions as he sought to make eventing the best sport it could be. Emerson has written a Between Rounds column for the *Chronicle* since the series began in July 1989, and he's used it as a lively forum to challenge, recommend, encourage, describe and sometimes to laugh.

Often, his focus is on the domestic scene. In February 1993 he wrote: "I think 1992 may be a pivotal year for American eventing in that we are finally acknowledging and facing up to some of our serious challenges. These challenges included simplifying the lower levels and making them fairer and less expensive. Another

is coming to grips with the great inconsistencies of our cross-country course design, both at the lower levels, where horses and riders should learn confidence, and at the top levels, where they are tested to see what they have learned. We know that a sport that's generally perceived as abusive to horses cannot be a viable part of the U.S. horse world. We have to change the reality as well as the public perception so that welfare of the horse is our highest priority."

At other times his focus is on the international scene. In February 1998 he suggested to American riders how they could break the dominance of the New Zealand and Australian riders around the world: "This isn't some national problem or national stranglehold. Countries don't win events, individuals do. The programs the various countries have, like our USET, can help, but a winner is ultimately a single individual who makes it happen. A winner rides better than the other riders. A winner trains horses better, sees a distance to a fence better, raises more sponsorship money, gets horses fitter, stays more focused, and wants it more than the other riders.

"When three or four of these individuals happen to be citizens of the same country, we say that country is a top eventing power. It isn't America that's getting beaten, it's Americans. When even three or four American riders can make themselves into great competitors, the USET will put them together onto a 'team' that can once again win gold medals."