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BEVERLY BURNETTE

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YOU HAD

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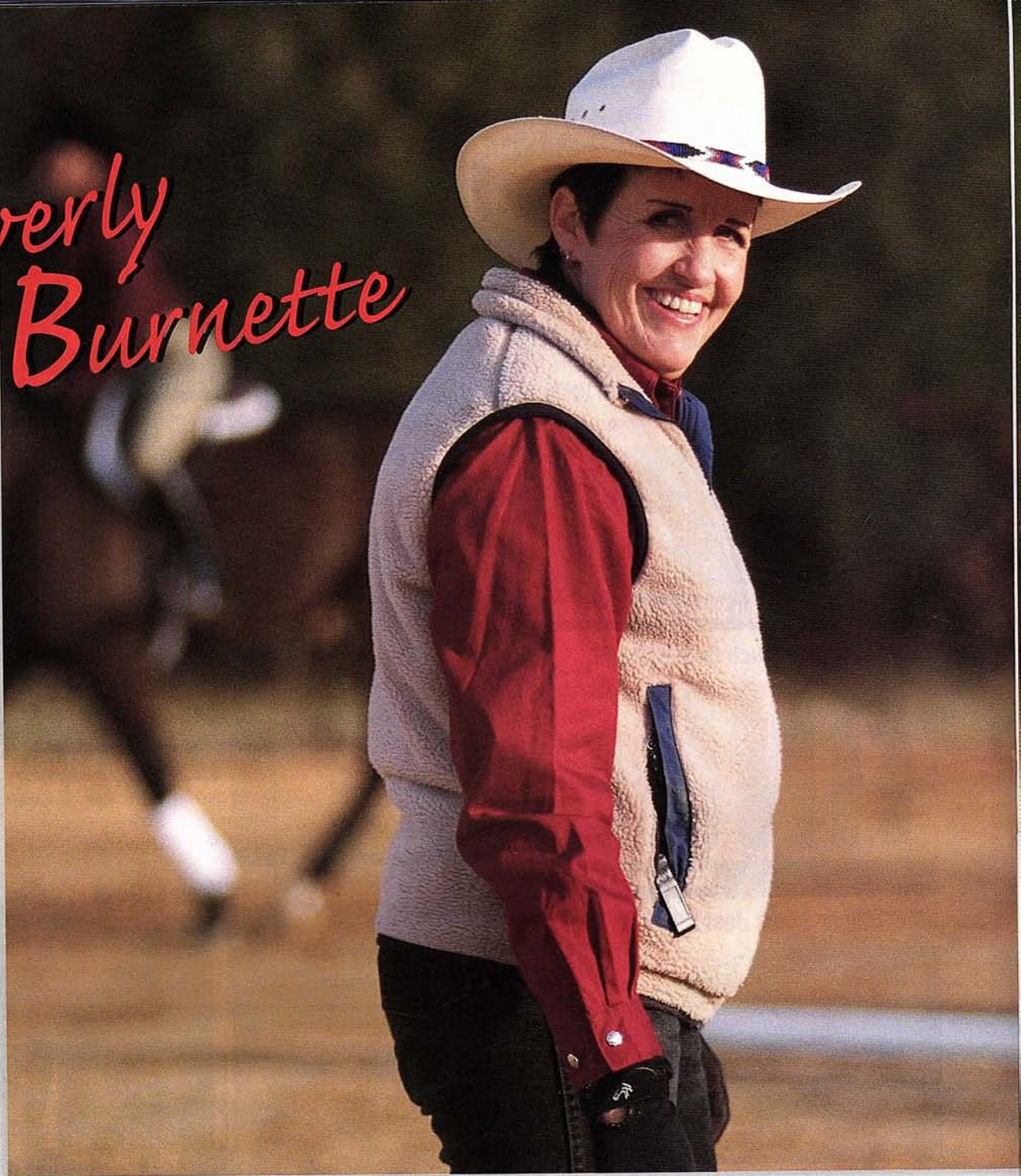
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Beverly Burnette



Kids, parents, college students, adult amateurs, even cattle drives benefit from North Carolina trainer Beverly Burnette's can-do energy.

By SANDRA COOKE

In the foggy predawn at a small schooling hunter show near Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Beverly Burnette's smile is better than a flashlight. And as she homes in on the nervous adult student she's come early to warm up, a ripple of greetings sounds from other exhibitors already unloading their rigs: "Hi, Beverly! Good to see you!"

Beverly — the North Carolina Hunter/Jumper Association (NCHJA) 1996 Horseman of the Year — is "a special spirit," says Shirley Orban, a professional videotaper who's known her for a dozen years. "You arrive tired, in the dark, and there's that smile. . . ."

Beverly makes riding and showing not just something

THE TRAINER YOU WISH YOU'D HAD . . .

PHOTOGRAPHS by CAPPY JACKSON

people *want* to do, but something they *can* do. She finds affordable horses and provides upbeat instruction to meet riders' needs. She's an organizing dynamo who runs lesson programs at several barns, coaches a thirty-member intercollegiate riding team, and can keep all those plates in the air while conjuring up a successful horse show at a rented facility using loaned horses and volunteer workers. And, says another local trainer, "When we have a problem, Beverly's the one we call."

Though still looking for a farm on which to create her own home base, Beverly has knit together a widespread network of riders, trainers, and just plain horse-lovers.

NO ROOM FOR ANYTHING BUT RIDING

Beverly's determination to stay accessible to students and friends stems from the way her own career was forged: "I wasn't talented," she says. "Somebody taught me everything I know." After her first riding lesson, at ten, with a local trainer in her home town of Danville, Virginia, "there wasn't room for anything else," although she had to wait for her first "real teacher" until high school, when she started riding with local huntswoman and trainer Virginia Wiseman. She graduated from nearby Averett College with an equine-science degree; then, with the encouragement of Averett equine-studies director Carol Nichols, she completed a British Horse Society assistant-instructor program in England.

When an early marriage broke up, leaving her on her own, Beverly naturally turned to training and teaching — "the only thing I knew how to do." She took a job running a small Columbia, South Carolina, riding school. There an adult student with a fancy show hunter introduced her to A-circuit hunter-trainer Danny Robertshaw, who was looking for someone to flat his horses.

Their first encounter showed Beverly she was still on a steep learning curve: "Danny said, 'What are you doing during Indoors?' I said, 'What's Indoors?'" She soon found out, leaving the riding school in 1980 to work as a ground person for Danny and run the on-the-road part of his Camden, South Carolina-based business. "It was fun, but it was hard."

In 1990, more than ready to get off the road after ten years, Beverly moved to North Carolina's Chapel Hill/Raleigh/Durham "Triangle" to start a business with another trainer she'd met. Although that arrangement didn't work out, the relocation turned out to be a perfect fit — both for Beverly herself and for many others in the active local horse community.

These days, while trying to figure out how to buy a farm in the Triangle's rarefied real-estate market, Beverly runs the "Mobile Unit" of lesson barns, taking her teaching program to her students. She keeps her day organized by pager and cell phone while driving from one lesson to another — her answering machine's "Hello, I'm so glad you called!" sounds as if she

Beverly schools Kendra Gaeta of UNC's team on former team member Kim Henderson's With Prestige; later, (below) team co-captain Millie Long (left) talks to Beverly and adult student Debbie Blake (mounted) about how Debbie's horse Ranger went when loaned for an earlier team lesson.



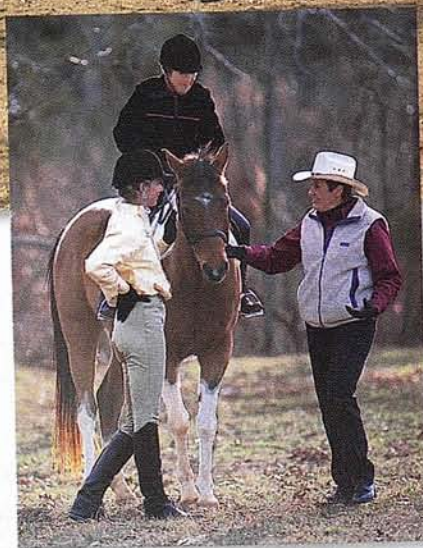
really means it — and keeps her metabolism in overdrive with quarts of Southern-style sweet iced tea.

"KIDS GET CONFIDENCE FROM THIS"

Many of the students waiting when Beverly's Dodge pickup pulls up are teenagers and young adults. Her vivid memories of frustrations in her own early riding years — "I got thrown out of classes regularly for getting run away with" — make this age group special for her. "I live vicariously when they succeed," she grins, adding that she makes it a point to "go overboard telling them they're good. Some kids get a lot of personal confidence from doing this; they take it into other parts of their lives, where it makes a big difference."

"I always questioned whether I could do things, but Beverly brings up people's strong points," says Meredith Valenzano, a University of North Carolina junior and co-captain of the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA) team that Beverly coaches. "I've seen girls start riding with her as total beginners and become confident, ready to try anything. As for me, *nothing* really scares me any more."

Confidence-building includes sharing responsibility for disappointing decisions as well as triumphs. At one small barn, Beverly and junior rider Katie Baker decide together that Katie's new junior hunter won't show the next day; he was



slightly but definitely off in front during the lesson Katie shared with another junior rider who hacked through the woods from a neighboring barn. As Beverly leaves for her next appointment,

Katie — who's already called the farrier and veterinarian — is quietly hosing her horse's leg.

Such successful role-modeling has earned Beverly the trust of parents, who send juniors with her for the occasional trips to big shows in Virginia or Florida that are high points of the year. Cooperative shipping — between adult students who have trailers and juniors who don't — helps keep costs down, as does making do without a groom. "Everyone does their own care; they help each other." Beverly keeps show trips as busy as possible; her young charges "get to the show with me at 5:00 AM and have to stay 'til I'm done; they're much too tired to get in trouble!" For those who can stay awake, after supper she may show instructional riding videos from such A-circuit trainers as Karen Healey.

KNOWING WHAT ADULTS NEED

If young riders thrive on Beverly's treating them like competent adults, many adult students say she's "the trainer I wish I could have had when I was a kid," according to fellow local professional Elise Anderson Cash. Beverly herself says, "I like teaching adults because I can explain why they need to, for instance, keep their heels down, and they'll really try — although sometimes I'm not strict enough with them because I want them to enjoy it!"

And they do. "Beverly has made me want to do this again," says Mary Ann Hannan, the fortysomething student from our opening scene's predawn rendezvous. A local tack-shop owner who rides in adult hunter classes, she'd lost her nerve after having some scary stops with a former children's hunter from an A-show-oriented barn — "I wasn't ready for that." With Beverly, she's rediscovered the joy of competing at local events, like that opening scene's low-key NCHJA-recognized Triangle Circuit show, on a reliable mare Beverly found for her. "I'm not the bravest person, and Beverly's a good confidence-builder for me. I still think, 'Oh my God! Is she gonna jump it?' But she always does." After an encouraging warm-up and ribbons in two classes over two-foot-six fences, Mary Ann takes Beverly's advice to savor her progress and leave the two-foot-nine classes for another day. "I'm happy," she says as she loads her mare for the drive home.

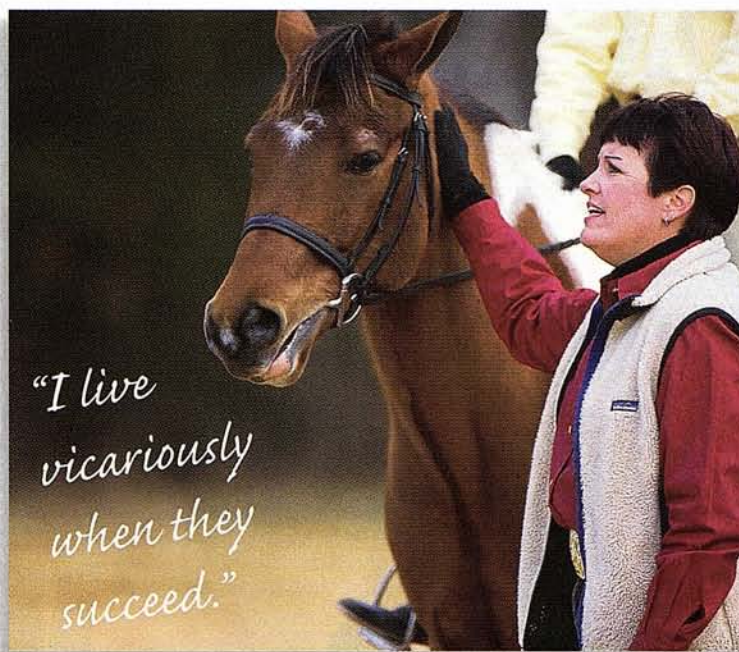
For Sue Back, a commercial real-estate broker in her mid-thirties, the issue is not so much competitive confidence (she and her horse ranked fourth in the NCHJA standings by last fall) as it is fitting riding into a demanding career. "But if I *don't* ride," she laughs, "you don't want to be around me!" She sometimes leaves the office to ride in the late afternoon, then goes back and works all evening. "Beverly understands what I do and knows what I need. I can get to the horse show, and my horse" — hauled by another student who boards in the same barn — "is ready to go in the ring."

"For me," says Debbie Blake, "showing is just a way to measure progress. I like the way Beverly discusses how much we learn at a show even if we don't get pinned. She never asks you to do something you truly don't believe you can do." A petite, soft-spoken nurse, Debbie loves the small, quiet paint horse that Beverly found for her. "He can be a bit of a slug — but for me, his being quiet was the determining factor. He's sweet; that's what I need, not some forward Thoroughbred."

"The first thing I look for in a new horse is a temperament that matches the student," says Beverly. In contrast to Debbie's quiet horse, she points out another student's more aggressive mare that suits *her* because "she knows it's going to take her down the line."

CONNECTIONS AS A WAY OF LIFE

Day's end, at home or away, often finds Beverly sharing a meal and some laughs with friends who also happen to be students or fellow trainers. "Everyone who rides with me knows everyone else; it's a real good group. We do a lot of dinners at



*"I live
vicariously
when they
succeed."*

Beverly soothes her homebred Sugar through a moment of agitation during a lesson with team co-captain Alison Brown.

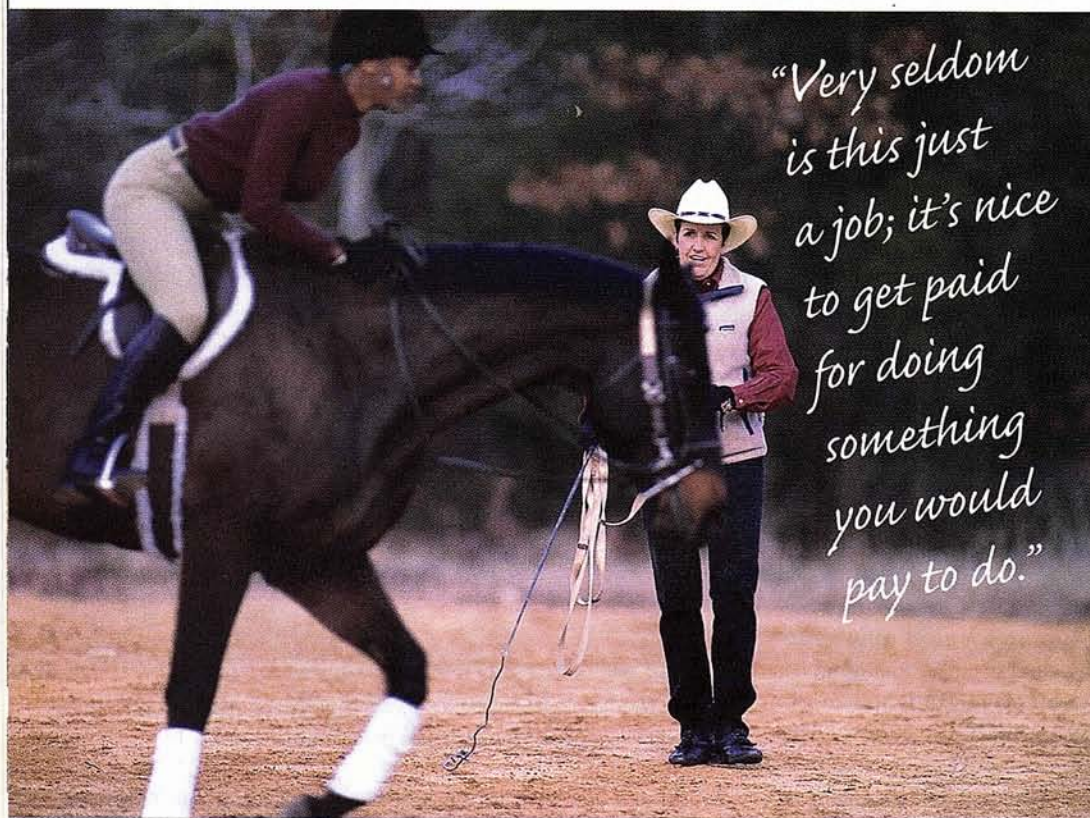
each other's houses, I have two or three cookouts during the year, and there's a Christmas party. The teenage students got together and cooked dinner for me on my birthday last year."

The connection runs deeper than socializing. When local Dutch Warmblood breeder Shirley Gaither, whose children also ride with Beverly, broke her back in a fall from a green horse, Beverly had students and friends mobilized within hours to care for the twenty horses in Shirley's barn. "And if anything happens to me or my crew, it's wonderful to know Shirley will jump right in."

Beverly also provides a contact point between local riders and upper-level trainers. She brings Ocala (Florida) professional Scott Hofstetter to give regular clinics and sometimes arranges for area professional Shep Wells to show a nervous student's horse as a confidence-builder for horse and rider. "Beverly will help you find another professional who can fix a certain problem; most trainers won't even *let* you do that," says Shirley.

And although most professionals are also reluctant to send horses to colleagues for trial, such A-circuit trainers as Patty Foster, Judy Young, and Jack Towell "know what I want, and they'll send me horses for my students to try," Beverly says. "It's a unique situation" — and one that sometimes turns out better than expected. "They send something they think will make just an OK three-foot horse, then see it getting ribbons in the three-six classes — because it's the only horse my student has, so she works harder."

As official East Coast travel agent for the Powder River Wagon Train & Cattle Drive (based in Broadus, Montana), Beverly — who fell in love with the Western experience on a vacation trip — has also become a contact point between East and West. The sleep-under-the-stars August cattle drive, a



sixty-mile ride in Western tack, has become an annual destination for her; she's also found some nice young horses through Montana contacts. The twenty-five tenderfeet she took West last summer included some of her students and their parents — "We had adults who'd never sat on a horse. They loved it!"

IHSA COMPLETES THE CIRCLE

When you really need something done, goes the saying, ask someone who's already busy. So when UNC's eight-year-old IHSA team (see August 1995's "Inside the IHSA" for more on this organization) needed a new coach in 1996, they tapped Beverly for the job — which included the challenge of finding horses on which to teach team riders weekly lessons. Of the five horses, ranging from green-broke to experienced, that her UNC students are riding this year, one is Beverly's; others are on loan to the program — the trust factor again — from clients who hope to sell them eventually. She found stabling and a ring for team lessons at a farm near campus where she has several adult students (although the property's recent sale means the horses must be moved this spring). And to help fund the club, whose members are responsible for most of their own expenses, she's turned to industry contacts for donations.

Although the UNC team's members are able to ride only once or twice a week, it was fourth in its thirteen-school region after Beverly's first coaching year. Last year the team organized and hosted its first-ever IHSA show at Raleigh's Hunt Complex; more than 150 students competed, using thirty horses loaned for the day by local riders and trainers (a great

"Very seldom is this just a job; it's nice to get paid for doing something you would pay to do."

A long session with Beverly helps UNC student Alicia Adams establish her position on fellow team member Jessie Labdon's horse Taylor.

demonstration of community support). The show ran so smoothly that UNC was nominated to host the IHSA Regionals this year and has been mentioned as a possible 2000 host for the Nationals — involving 250 college teams from thirty-eight states. And Beverly is spearheading a campaign to have intercollegiate riding elevated to varsity status at UNC, with dozens of alumni, parents, and area horsepeople writing to the university in support of the upgrade.

SELDOM JUST A JOB

Coaching UNC's team, especially if it receives varsity status, feels like a natural next step to Beverly — and a good use of her aptitude for making horse-world connections happen. Her contacts with upper-level trainers could help her recruit young riders interested in a school with a varsity team, she says, because her own shift away from the circuit lets other professionals be comfortable sending their clients to ride with her. And on a personal level, varsity coaching would provide some central job security in her free-lance life.

That's a hope for the future; and although no date has been set for a decision about varsity status, response from UNC has been positive. Meanwhile, Beverly continues to make things work by pushing herself: For instance, last fall she scheduled regular team lessons for first thing Monday morning, even after driving back from weekend shows late Sunday night. "We couldn't fit them in any other way. I did it last year; I can do it again."

What keeps the energy going? For Beverly, it's "having a beginner rider or a green horse *get it* — that flash when they feel it and they get it right, whatever their problem was."

And it's the love of horses: "If I don't smell the leather barn smell for a while . . . I went to Germany for two weeks with a friend; and after days of not seeing or smelling a horse, I was going nuts. When we got to Salzburg (Austria), I finally found some cart horses to pat."

In sum, Beverly says, "I don't have a lot of things, but there aren't many people who look forward to going to work every day. Very seldom is this just a job; it's nice to get paid for doing something you would pay to do." ■