

healthy and I had the opportunity that people wanted to send me some horses to train," he reasons. And so Noel came home to Montford. He built a training track and a racehorse barn. "And so I stepped out on a good note and started my next career training flat horses and steeplechase horses."

An important part of training is going to the sales and developing an eye for horseflesh, sizing up racehorses based on watching them walk towards you, away from you and past you. "You're looking at the individual. You're looking at the angles of his shoulder and his hip, the way he walks, if he walks good and straight to you, if he's toed out or not toed out. You're looking for that athletic ability in the way he walks." Noel says patiently. "Some of them walk clumsy, floppy. Some of them walk just like they're walking across a bed of eggs and never even crack one. It's that fluid ability that you're looking for." He pauses and adds, "AND, you're looking at the pedigree, the bloodlines. That has a lot of weight to it."

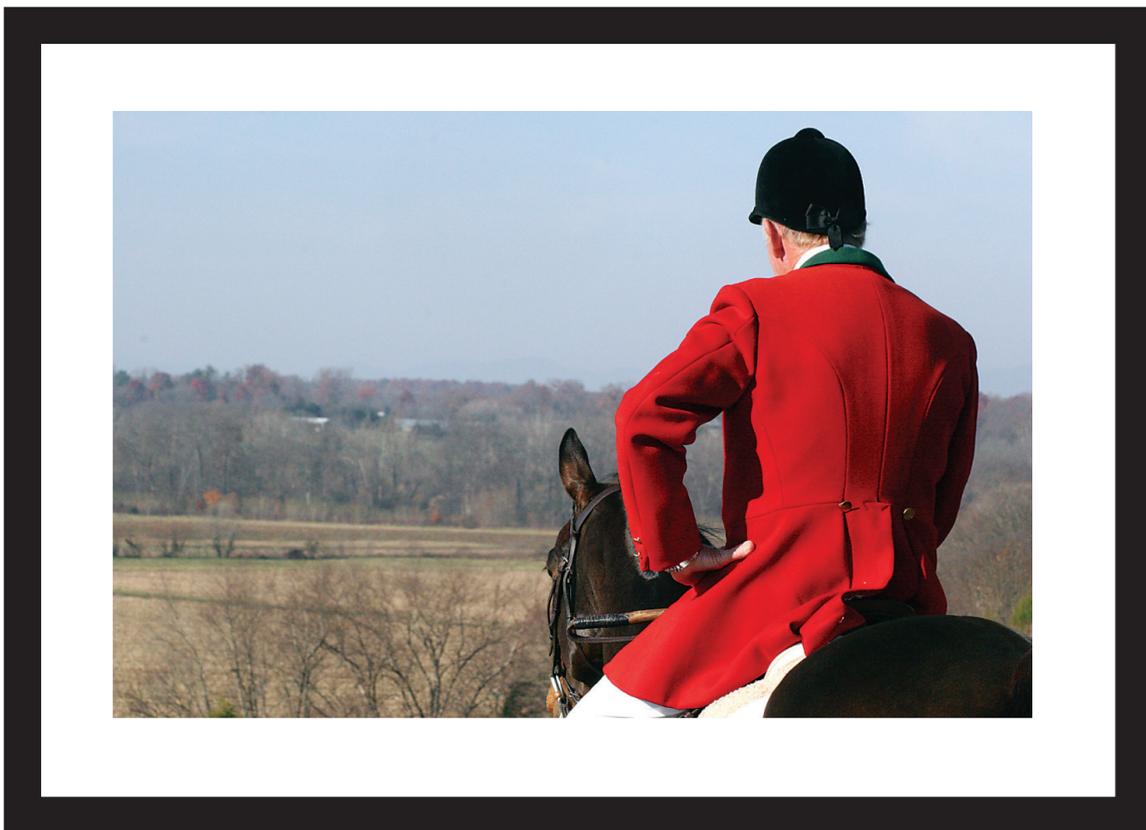
But you'll never know how he'll perform until race day. "The only way you can figure out a horse's heart is the day you race that son-of-a-gun. He can be training like a demon every day and have really good workouts, and you think he's going to be a really nice horse, but you don't know until he gets in that competition with 10 or 12 other horses. And if he runs his first race and tries...then you might say 'well this horse might be alright.'"

The telling moment is how he does in the next race. "If he doesn't improve or goes back, well then, he doesn't have too much heart because when you're in competition, another horse looks him in the eye, a lot of them will just hang right there and not go on," explains Noel.

And then there are injuries, not just to the riders but to the horses. "That's the reason I think a lot of horses come up with injuries is because their heart is bigger than their fitness was. Like any athlete...if you've got a little pain, a good football player will play through that pain. A good racehorse will run through that pain. It doesn't bother him."

Another part of developing good racehorses is developing good people. "I feel proud about all my guys because everyone that has worked for me has done a wonderful job for me, but they improved their life and moved up the ladder also. I feel I was part of that, helping young people, and I still like doing it."

About six years ago, Noel leased out



As a whipper-in for the Keswick Hunt Club, Noel Twyman keeps watch over some bottom land along the Rapidan River for the crafty fox. What he enjoys most about the sport is "being out in nature."

Photo by Phil Audibert

his facility to Randy Miles (See Insider, *Orange County Review*, Nov. 3, 2005) , and retired to take up a passion that he had not been able to enjoy for the 20 years prior...foxhunting.

In those days they used to hack to the meets. "Many a day, we'd go out early in the morning and when Rodney and Larry and Dale (Jenkins) and I would get back to the barn, it would be dark. And then we'd have to clean the horses up, get 'em fed, and only then we got to go in the house and get something to eat," he remembers. "You took care of that horse first. Then you got to go get soup. And that's the way it should be."

Nowadays, Noel keeps four hunt horses and whips three days a week for the Keswick Hunt Club. He knows the territory along the Southwestern Mountains from Gordonsville to Orange to Rapidan like the back of his hand.

What is it about foxhunting anyway? "Being out in nature, the music of the hounds is what I enjoy so much," he responds, adding when hounds are "running the fox and they're all packed

up, the cry of the music; it'll make the hair stand up on the back of my head...still."

He tells a story where recently a hound and a fox were locked onto each other jaw to jaw and the hound was getting the worst end of the deal. The fox turned the hound loose, arched his back like a cat with a bottle brush tail, and trotted off with an expression of mild disdain. They let the fox go. "We're not out there to kill the fox, because you get a good running fox, one who gave you a nice run and then gone to the ground. You leave him alone. You don't want to kill him because you want to come back to that area in another month and hopefully you'll get him up again and he'll give you the same run."

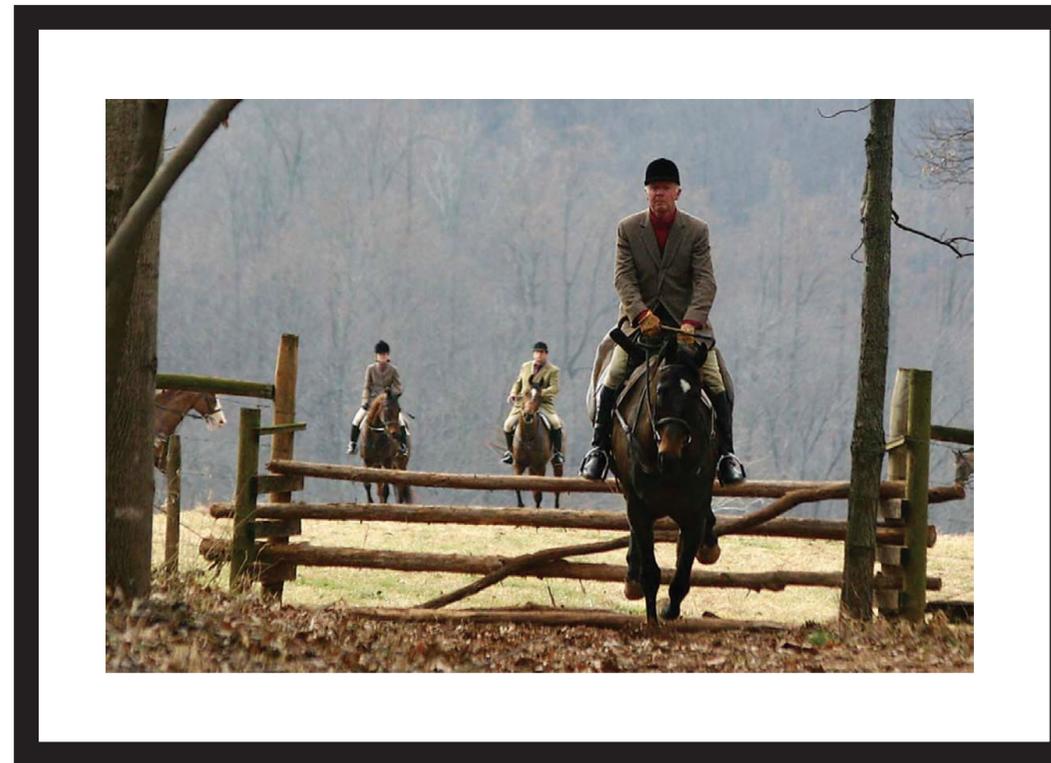
Some foxhunting days draw a blank, but Noel is never disappointed. "It's really not blank. You're out in nature. You're settin' on a horse. You're ridin' because you enjoy ridin'. You're goin' through the woods, lookin' at different things." He points to an imaginary deer. "There goes a nice deer." He looks down. "Look at what the turkeys have

been scratching here." He looks to the sky. "God, isn't that a pretty red-tailed hawk up there." He pauses. "They are the things that I enjoy, and so many people don't get the opportunity to enjoy nature, or they don't care about it...They should."

After a day of foxhunting, the weary horseman will come home, tend to his horse first and then kick off his riding boots, build a fire in the family room, and sit down in his favorite easy chair to gaze out at the view his 100-acre farm commands of the Blue Ridge Mountains. There's not a day when I come through that family room that I don't stop by that picture window and look at the mountains," he says reverently. "I'm lucky to have the whole family here on the farm with grandkids."

Future plans? "Just continue living the good life and be healthy...Dad worked right up to the day he decided it was time to turn loose, and that's what keeps us all going, is being active."

That and the memory of a little brown pony.

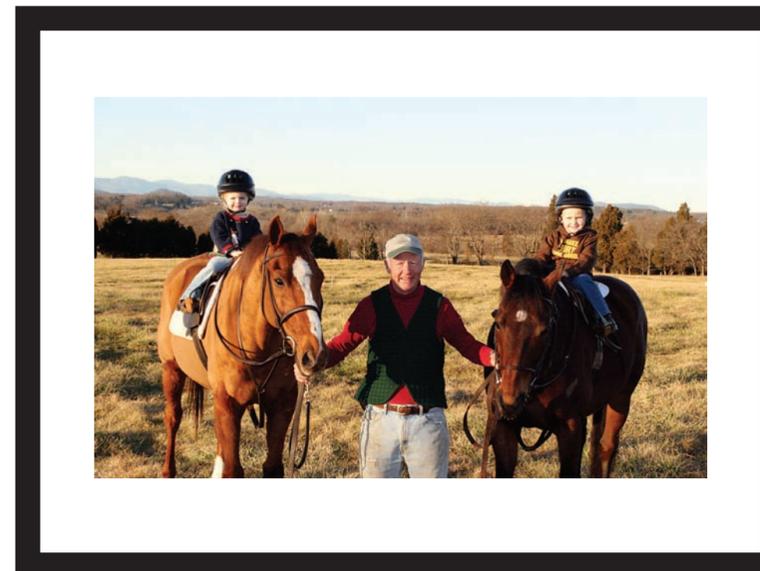


The horseman

Above, relaxed and collected, Noel Twyman might as well be sitting in a rocking chair as he effortlessly takes a rail jump in Orange County.

At right, "Pop" Twyman takes "the future," his grandchildren, on a ride around a field at the family farm in Montford. On the right is 3-1/2-year-old Taylor Jenkins aboard Rap. On the left is three-year-old Riley Marie Twyman on Noel's hunter, Hero.

Photos by Phil Audibert



This past New Year's Day, Noel Twyman had to put down a little brown pony named Charm. "It had just gotten to that point; I didn't want her to suffer any longer," he says of his decision. Charm had led a full life...30-plus years...the last two taking Noel's grandkids for brief rides around the barn at Woodbrook Farm in Montford.

One of those children, Riley Marie Twyman turned three this past Christmas Eve. So, when her Mom explained that Charm "went to heaven," Riley thought about that for a moment, shrugged, and went down the stall row to Noel's favorite hunter's door. "Can I ride Hero then?"

Of course she can.

and the little brown pony

"Pop," as Riley calls her grandfather, tenderly lifts her aboard the chestnut horse and takes her for a little stroll. Will this be her earliest memory...riding a horse? It certainly was for Noel whose earliest memory is of him riding a little brown pony in North Carolina. Will she spend the rest of her life around horses as her grandfather and great grandfather have? Noel looks at his granddaughter aboard Hero and at his grandson, Taylor Jenkins on Rap. "This is the future," he beams.

Perhaps Noel's father, Delmar Twyman, who is in both the National and Virginia Halls of Fame, was thinking the same thing 58 years ago as his son was led around on a little brown pony. Perhaps he too hoped his son would follow in his footsteps and be a horseman like himself.

At the time of Noel's birth in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, Delmar Twyman was riding mounted beach patrol for the Coast Guard at Hilton Head. Soon after, he was working for Quail Roost Farm, riding the professional show circuit. And by 1950, the young Twyman family had moved to Noel's grandmother's house in Montford in Orange County. Delmar Twyman had struck out on his own and established a show stable for himself. Noel was five years old and already had three years experience in the saddle. His career as a horseman was virtually assured.

By age 10, Noel was riding semi-professionally for his father. Back in those days, every town had its own horseshow—Orange, Gordonsville, Culpeper—and Noel showed in them all. Just over Chicken Mountain from Montford a similar scenario was playing out in the Jenkins family. Close friends and competitors, Delmar Twyman and Ennis Jenkins were busy building top-notch show stables as their sons, close friends, Noel and Rodney, were competing against each other in the ring.

Virtually the same age, both attended Orange County High School and hung out together...even got into some trouble together...something to do with fast cars or fast horses. Noel clams up. "Uh, we better not talk about those things," he says with a sly grin, adding sagely, "It was fun days and educational." Noel guffaws.

Speaking of education, Noel earned a two-year degree in Livestock Management and Technology from N.C. State while competing in shows for his father at the stable's winter quarters in Southern Pines. And he earned another degree: "a degree from the school of hard knocks." He shakes his head in mild disgust. "I tell ya, so many kids need to be brought up that way now. When they get out of school they don't know how to work and never been made to work."

Noel digs through some old photos and comes up with one of him taking a jump in the Virginia Jumper Classic in Richmond. "That's the day I beat Idle Dice and Rodney," he says with a twinkle in his eye. Rodney and Idle Dice, of course, went on to cover themselves in glory at Madison Square Garden.

Noel had also shown in Madison Square Garden and every other major show ring, for that matter, but he felt a tug in a different direction. Slight of build, and quite fearless, he was a perfect candidate to



Above, it was around 1970 that Noel Jenkins rode this horse to victory over his competitor and close friend Rodney Jenkins at the Virginia Jumper Classic in Richmond. Below, Twyman competes in the Culpeper Horse Show at age 10. At right, it was either 1968 or 1969, and a mud-spattered Twyman had just won on the flat track at Montpelier. This was a particularly memorable day for Noel because he had just launched his steeplechase career and had won on his home track.



become what's known as a "jump jock," riding steeplechases. Marion Dupont Scott of Montpelier, offered him a job.

"That was one of the hardest decisions I had to make because I had been with Dad all those years, and he was still in the business, and with me saying 'Dad, uh, I'm going to New Yawk to ride races.' That left him high and dry," he remembers. "So it was a very hard decision and he told me to think about it and since I had the opportunity to ride for Miz Scott, he said, 'You won't get a better chance with a better outfit. So if you feel that's what you want to do, do it, and I'll see you when you get back.'"

And so off to New Yawk, as he pronounces it, went this 128-pound bundle of wire: Belmont, Aqueduct, Saratoga, riding turf races over hurdles. In the jockey's room at the tracks, the northerners had trouble deciphering this sandy-haired Virginian's southern drawl. "What did he say?" he remembers them asking each other whenever he opened his mouth.

Jump jocks start off as apprentices, called "bugs." Because of their inexperience they are spotted 10 pounds of weight until they win their first race. Most steeplechase horses carry between 140 and 145 pounds. That's the weight of the jockey, his clothes and his tack. But if you're a "bug," your horse carries 130 pounds; you need to lose weight.

"You'd sweat it off," says Noel nonchalantly, conjuring visions of Sea Biscuit. "You'd get in a hot car and drive around, go to the hot box. At the major tracks we'd go to the steam room in the jock's room and set in there and sweat off three, four pounds." His clothes and tack weighed four pounds, "So if I weighed 126 stripped, when I stepped on the scales to go out and ride, I'd be 130."

Once a "bug" starts to win races, the weight he is spotted goes down, until he wins 10 races and becomes a journeyman jockey, and you "ride at an equal weight with everybody." It also means you can take another trip to the salad bar because your weight can go up to 140.

Noel, who to this day, is still within 10 pounds of that 140-pound mark, remembers occasional altercations among jockeys. "You know, like any sport, you've got guys that will try to intimidate you," he says, "but if you've got patience enough, you just sit instead of fightin' him or gettin' a fine or gettin' your

tail whipped." He compares steeplechase riding to NASCAR racing. "You know how they get right on the bumper, they might have a little touch or something and next thing you know he's spun out," says Noel. "Well, at a fence you ain't gonna touch him, but if he's tryin' to come up on your inside and you're anglin' a fence, you can shut the door and he doesn't even see the fence, and he can turn ass-over-teacup."

Which brings us to the inevitable question about injuries. "Oh yeah, oh yeah," confirms Noel softly, "a lot of fingers and collar bones... a horse goes down and you'll jam your fingers." He shows a crooked and swollen pinky from a recent foxhunting incident. "Basically, I was very lucky. I didn't have too many bad falls. No head injuries...that's a major one." He pauses and adds, "Besides, you're riding nice horses, usually good jumpers, horses that are well-schooled. You've got a better chance of completing a course than if you're riding a real green horse that is a bad jumper."

And so from early March through November, Noel Twyman kept busy riding steeplechases from Saratoga, New York to Camden, South Carolina. And in between he'd ride the hunt meets, such as Montpelier. During the height of the season he might ride as many as a dozen races a week, which at \$100 per ride, plus 10 percent of the purse if he won, was "a decent living."

It was 1968 when Noel made that decision to become a jump jock. A lot of other things happened that year too. The house

he lives in today was built on the exact site of his grandmother's old farm house. And he married his girlfriend since high school, Pat Blantz. "She's been a big part of my success because everything I did with the horses she never complained. And she doesn't like horses. She doesn't ever go to the barn, (but) she was very supportive." In those days Pat worked for Eastern Airlines (remember them?) as a stewardess, which is what they called flight attendants back in the days when flying was fun and working for the airline was glamorous.

Anyway, something happened to the steeplechase scene. The number of meets dwindled, and although he liked the people involved, Noel was ready for another career change. "I felt like I'd fulfilled my goal of being an established jump jock, and I always wanted to go into training and I was



"It gave me a good feeling"

Douglas Corbin owes his life to Noel Twyman.

It was 15 years ago. Doug suffered a heart attack and had "coded." Noel, a certified cardiac tech with the Orange County Rescue Squad Advanced Life Support Unit had to perform what's called a cardio conversion on Corbin...the paddles. "I had to shock him about four different times," Noel recalls. But Doug revived and lives to tell about it to this day.

Noel Twyman had several saves during his 22 years with the rescue squad. Living and working only five minutes from town, many is the time his pager went off in the middle of the day or night, in the barn or at home in bed, and he'd be dashing out the door to respond to someone's call for help. He served six years as First Lieutenant, one year as Captain, and was a certified EMT, Shock/Trauma and Cardiac Tech. It meant that Noel could administer life-saving drugs, start IVs, and yes, at last resort, use the paddles. He's seen it all from the blood and gore of car wrecks to the wonder of birthing babies.

One night he was summoned by the Sheriff's Department to meet the Advanced Life Support Unit. They weren't sure if the young lady inside was really about to have a baby or not. Noel looks in. "And she went into one (a contraction) and I told the driver, 'Get on up the road!' And before we got to Orange, the baby was there," he says astonished. "And I didn't have time to even think or get worried about it, I just went on," he says recalling his classroom training.

"In those situations the good Lord helps you a lot. You just go and do what you've been taught. But when you're settin' and thinkin' about it, you wonder. Can I handle this? Can I remember what drugs I'm supposed to give, or can I remember what an EKG looks like? But when you get in that situation and somebody's in need of help, it gets like, whew...everything boom boom boom boom boom. Everything just gets right in line."

He thinks about that for a moment. "It's like in competition, racing or showing. Before you go into that class you're settin' there thinkin' ...'hmmm, time to plan out your route a little bit, your strategy, and I wonder if this son-of-a-gun is going to bust my butt today,' and you do have a little bit of butterflies and the person who says he doesn't have them has got to be lyin'. But as soon as the trainer gives you a leg up on that horse, and you're up in that saddle, it's all gone because you're so focused on what's ahead of you."

Like a baby drawing its first breath in front of you, or a man's eyes fluttering back to life because of something you did... "It was the feeling that you got from it that is very satisfying because, if somebody was in trouble, they needed help and God gave me the ability to try to help them," says the horseman. "It gave me a good feeling."

