



Mary & Rochambeau (attempting to braid his forelock for the show!). Photo by Dan Kehoe



Mary Kehoe Dressage client Karen O'Neill and Cadanz's Flemming were big winners in their first Training Level show, at Star Spangled Dressage in June. They were high point winners in the lower level amateur division, thanks to a 71.2 score for their Training Level, test 2, ride.



Mary Kehoe.

## Mary Kehoe Dressage

**Veteran trainer brings her classical emphasis to revamped Orange County facility.**

Mary Kehoe's emphasis on classical dressage training for horse and rider has seen her to many successes over the years. A veteran of the Southern California circuit, she is now happily based at the totally revamped Peacock Hill Equestrian Center in Orange County's Irvine Regional Park. The training and boarding amenities, and the staff supervised by new owner Robin Bisogno, make Peacock Hill the perfect place to help clients progress toward diverse goals, while also continuing to advance her own knowledge and skill, a priority of Mary's throughout her career.

For her students, Mary's classical emphasis begins with developing a good seat, from which the rider can communicate clear and effective aids. Lunge line lessons and sessions focused purely on seat position have always yielded great results, which horses are typically quick to let their rider know about. For horses, Mary aims for responsiveness to subtle aids and relies on the German training scale as her guide at every level.

Ongoing education is a priority for Mary in her own riding and training and she encourages that mindset in her students. Conrad Schumacher and Steffen Peters are experts she has worked with regularly over the years, and CDS and USDF symposiums are among the many educational opportunities in which she participates as often as possible.

Earning her L, "learner judge," certification from the USDF was a rewarding experience. Mary has judged a few schooling shows, but says her

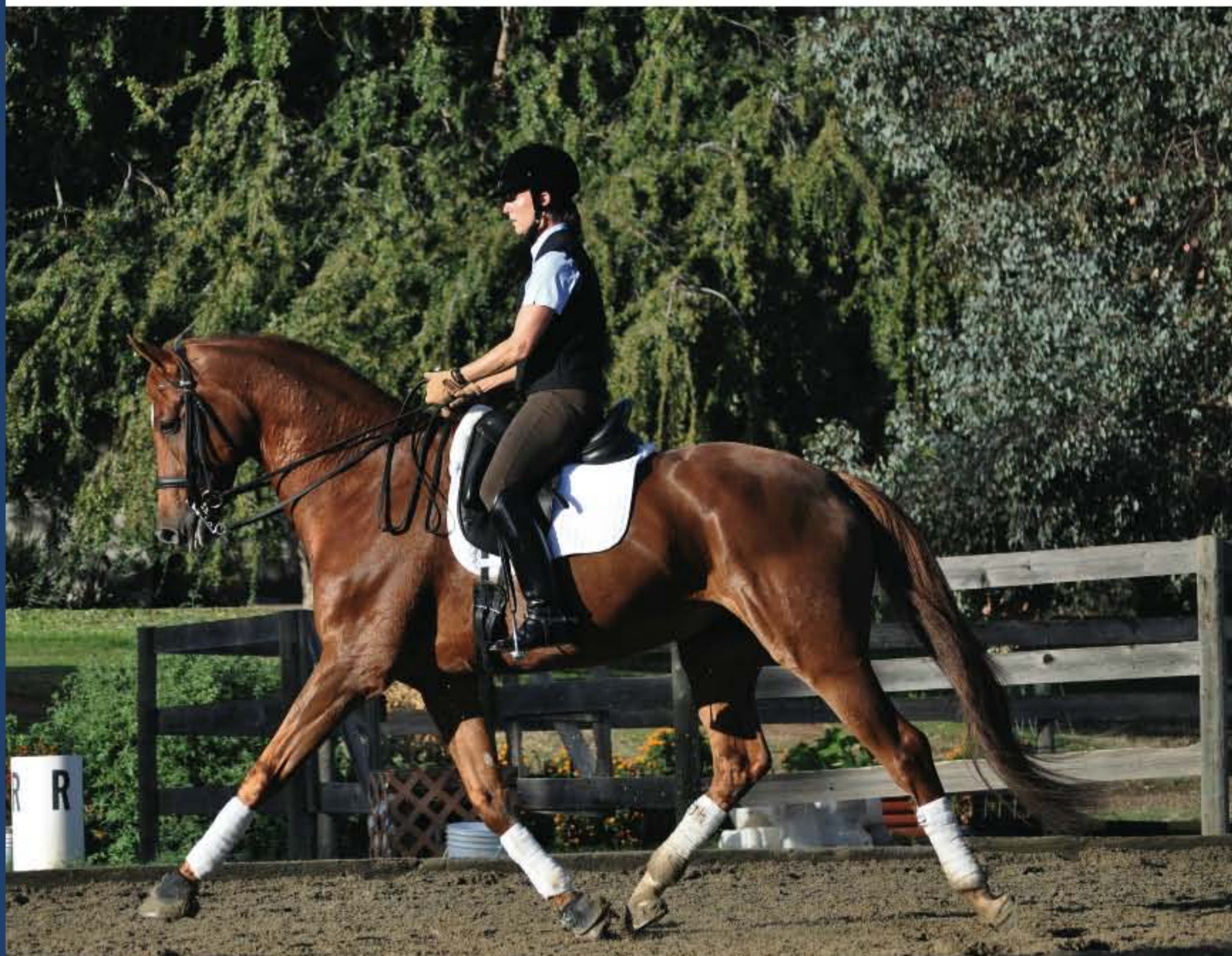
interest in expanding her knowledge about judging is something she did more for her own education as a trainer. Earning the card took a long time and was no easy feat. Scoring tests, then explaining her marks to expert judges was an engaging endeavor and one that has proved beneficial in many ways. "You learn fascinating details about the judging process, it's helped my understanding of each movement from the judge's perspective and it's helped me help my students understand the feedback they get from judges."

Mary's current clientele consists mainly of adult amateur riders with horses that range from 3-year-olds to a 17-year-old who's returning to Prix St. Georges after a hiatus. Breeds include a recently-imported Andalusian Mary hopes to campaign at Third or Fourth Level this year, Warmbloods of almost every nationality, a Friesian and an Irish Thoroughbred. She's also a go-to girl for fellow professionals in various disciplines who want a slow, patient start for their young horses.

Whatever their background or level, Mary's goal is to keep all horse and rider pairs progressing in their partnerships. Competition schedules for Mary Kehoe Dressage are dictated by the needs and desires of her clients.

She settled in fully at Peacock Hill this past January. The property has all the top amenities, but its greatest asset is owner/manager Robin Bisogno, Mary reports. "She and her staff are incredible to work with. Their priority is always the horses'

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Mary and Rochambeau, clinic with Conrad Schumacher



# Mary Kehoe Dressage

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welfare and they are very responsive to our needs as trainers."

In addition to the thriving business run by show jumper Edgar Pagan, Peacock Hill has a riding school for beginners and all boarders enjoy easy access to wonderful trails throughout the Irvine Regional Park.

### Horses First

In the show ring, Mary is well known for her successes with Ascension, who she trained to Grand Prix and competed to the top 25 of the national small tour rankings. Her more recent star was Rochambeau, who finished 13th in the country at Third Level in 2010. But when the normally gregarious horse began to struggle with higher-level movements, Mary backed down immediately and began a two-year search for physical causes behind his apparent discomfort. It was a big disappointment for a horse who showed "fantastic promise," but, for Mary, pushing forward was not an option.

"I'm very sensitive to the horses," she notes. "When they start feeling not themselves or not happy in their work, I take note of that and start looking for other explanations." Two years of tests and other efforts did not produce any definitive explanations, "but it was clear he was not comfortable in his body." Mary retired "Beau" to a 350-acre property in Oregon. There was never any question about doing right by her horse, but it did mean no funds for a new horse of her own.

She's confident new opportunities will emerge in that department and is open-minded to creative partnerships with owners and sponsors. Part of her confidence comes from a good feeling about the current state of dressage.

"There are a lot of good things happening and I'm impressed with how the quality keeps getting higher and higher," she observes. "In international competition, it's really nice to see that some of the nicest riders and training methods are being rewarded more consistently."

She knows from experience that having top horses and owners to support them is the biggest hole in the American dressage system. The fact that three-time Olympian Guenter Seidel is currently without an international mount (his WEG prospect Coral Reef Wylea is sidelined) exemplifies this reality, she notes.

Simultaneously, Mary is encouraged by Laura Graves' story. The Florida-based equestrian has been working outside the spotlight for many years and finished second in the USEF National Grand Prix Championships in June, earning her a berth for the World Equestrian Games later this month. "I was really excited to read about that and I'm rooting for her because I can identify with her," says Mary. "She's a good rider who is breaking through after many years."

Returning to the international stage is a priority for Mary, and in the meantime she values the daily rewards of working with horses and riders and seeing how the tried and true classical methods advance their partnerships and enhance their joy in the sport.

For more information, call Mary Kehoe at 714-272-6182 or visit [www.marykehoedressage.com](http://www.marykehoedressage.com).

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