

Katie Pontone – Leader in the Pony Jumper Standings...

I began riding when I was 6 years old, and I just started riding in the North American League this year at age 17.

My biggest influence is my mother because she has always been supportive and encouraging through all the years and countless hours spent in the barn. She is at the barn with me day in and day out, she has never just dropped me off because she truly loves the horses although she has not ridden herself. She has videoed all of my lessons, horse shows, and just fun days just so I can see my mistakes and be able to improve quickly. If it weren't for my mother I do not believe my horses would perform as well as they do. At horse shows she gives them the pep talk and walks them out as I learn my next course, she gives my horses treats every chance she gets so my horses love her more than they love me, but she brings out the best in all horses. She is the groom, photographer, chauffeur, pony-sitter, cheerleader, and treat-giver so I owe it all to her for making every show day stress free.

My favorite horse show is actually one I have just recently attended in May 2012, I attended the Devon Horse Show for the pony jumpers and had an absolute blast! The top 24 pony jumpers in the country were invited to compete and my pony, Wicked, held her own and impressed me beyond belief, considering it is her first year of real showing, by taking home the blue in the first class of the weekend of 24! I am quite new to showing since when I was young I believed that I would never horse show and just this year have I become competitive. Devon was my first "big deal" horse show so it is easily my favorite horse show, but I am definitely looking forward to NAL finals this year and we will have to see if it tops the Devon experience.

My favorite NAL experience was at a local C show on 12-11-11, I rode the first round beautifully and Wicked was jumping fantastic and I had already won the first two classes so I was one class away from a clean sweep. I remember learning the jumpoff my trainer told me the jumpoff was made for me because it was packed with turns, which was our specialty. Wicked was absolutely perfect, turned tight and balanced; we had a flawless jumpoff and finished the day with a clean sweep to add to our record. My new favorite NAL experience just occurred July 22, 2012. I galloped around with tight turns and had a great balanced and careful round. The following pony jumpers were racing trying to beat our time, but it was unbeatable because the next few pony jumpers all had shoes and could not physically turn any tighter than a naturally trimmed pony jumper. The true proof against shoeing is one of the following pony jumpers had a disastrous fall, they were racing attempting to out-do our time, but the pony had no traction and slipped and fell over. Since I am a supporter of natural trimming, as the pony was walked out of the ring I could not help but check if it had shoes and of course it did. All horses can be returned to barefoot and shoeing is totally detrimental to all horses. Some believe their horses are only sound with shoes, because when their shoes come off their hooves have been absolutely destroyed by the shoes and have become so soft that it takes the horse's body 7 months to a year to repair. I am incredibly thankful and lucky to have found a pony with miles of potential that had been happy, healthy, and barefoot her entire life. Shoeing is never the answer and only ruins a horse's career and minimizes their natural ability and movement.

My trainer is Kali Jerman we train in Colts Neck, NJ. I have been training with her for six months.

I ride 7 days a week in order to keep my pony jumper in shape, happy, and healthy.

My favorite things to do when I ride, is to do crazy stunts and just have fun. For example, jumping in the woods on trails, go swimming in the pond, jumping over road blocks, doing somersaults off the side of my pony as she trots away, and of course bareback and bridless.

I am a student. I trail ride and swim in the pond with my pony in my free time.

My goal as a rider would be to eventually move up to bigger jumpers since I have had a successful first year doing the jumpers, and hope to find a young jumper with potential to train with the help of Kali Jerman and have a repeat show year.

My biggest accomplishment has to be my pony Wicked. I bought her in late June of 2011, the pony jumper season had already begun as of June 1st leaving us at a 200 pt disadvantage. Wicked was easily 100lbs overweight, she had been out of work. We did the itty bitty jumpers and worked hard just to trim the fat off of her. Successful show after successful show in the little jumpers, we then tried to move up to the pony jumpers, but Wicked had little to no confidence at the bigger jumps so we ended up moving back down and had trial and errors until about December. In December we moved up and all the hard work began to pay off! Wicked was braver than ever and jumped around like a star and we accomplished our first

clean sweep. It only got better and better from there and the one-eyed Wicked wonder pony was ready to perform at the top shows. We went on to Devon and took home a 1st, and a 4th of 24 and she was so confident and proved herself. The main accomplishment of Wicked and I's journey was when we had some issues at the bigger jumps many people tried to pressure me into shoeing my pony, saying she must be stinging her hooves on landing, which is so incredibly ridiculous, but to this day I am so happy I did not give in and follow the shoeing trend. My pony jumper is naturally trimmed and has performed consistently all season long and has yet to disappoint me. Since she is naturally trimmed she can turn a million times faster than a pony with shoes and will never have medical issues because nature takes care of everything. And I encourage everyone to look into it because my pony is on the smaller side of a large pony and consistently jumps at her max and has never needed a vet and can feel the ground underneath her unlike every shod horse. Shoeing horses is truly a trend and I cannot wait until the day that people stray from that path and there will be more naturally trimmed horses at shows, which will improve the health of those horses and can even save their lives.

My motto for success is clean, quick, and collected and of course have fun! My pony jumper, Wicked is 13.3hh, blind in her right eye, and naturally trimmed which has led us to our success. I would like to thank my natural trimmer Cindy Ross for all she has done to prepare Wicked for horse shows. If it weren't her attention to detail on perfecting Wicked's mustang rolls I do not believe I would have had such a successful year with Wicked. If I had given in to shoeing her, like some of my fellow competitors did, I truly believe I would have had at least ten more rails, ten less blue ribbons, ten less successful show days, and ten more vet bills.



Katherine Pontone and Wicked at the 2012 Devon Horse Show © Chris Nichols