

20 Questions with Sara Mittleider

With Jo Whitehouse

1. How did you get your start with horses?

I was born into it actually. My Mom has ridden all her life and my father starting breaking race horses and then got into eventing. That's all I've ever known.

2. What level has your father competed up to?

My father has competed up to advanced. We get horses at our farm, get them going and then we sell them. We have convinced him that he needs to keep one to ride at advanced again.

3. You've trained with your father most of your life. What's it like working and training with your dad?

Well I don't even think about it really, it's so normal for me. I've never known anything else.

4. What has been the best moment of your riding career so far?

It would be pretty hard to pinpoint one moment. I have had so many exciting moments at every level, starting from the fact that Tony was willing to do it and when I found out that Tony could do a four-star. I've been really thrilled at how he's gone all the way through.

5. What is the most embarrassing moment you've had in your riding career?

I don't get embarrassed when I fall off. It's just something that happens and you go on. Once, I got talked into doing a costume class and my friends dressed me and my pony up as a mermaid. That was so embarrassing. We had snorkels and goggles and everything.

6. If you had to change riding disciplines, which would you pick and why?

Combined driving! I saw that when I went to Fair Hill five years ago and it looked like



Above: Sara's father began coaching her when she was in grade school. Below: Sara and her pony working with mom Brenda.

Above Right: Sara with her current partner, El Primero, competing at the 2004 AEC.



Shannon Brinkman Photo.

a lot of fun. It's very similar to eventing really. I sat myself at the water obstacle and just watched them fly through. That was pretty cool.

7. You and El Primero, aka "Tony" have been together for seven years now, from when your father found him at the race track and bought him for \$300. Can you tell us more about him, his personality, training, why you feel your partnership works so well?

We got him when he was three years old. He's very smart and very strong willed—that was the biggest issue to get around. He is only 15.2 but he thinks he's 17 hands. His attitude is that he is pretty sure there is nothing he can't do.

8. When did you realize that he would make an event horse? What made him stand out?

When he was four. He is incredibly brave. He pretty much went to anything I pointed him at. That was big. That was our turning point right there.

9. How quickly did he move up the levels?

He started at novice. He did two novice and two training and two years of prelim. As soon as I was 16 we went intermediate. Same for advanced. I just had to wait to turn 18.



Courtesy of the Mittleider Family.



Courtesy of the Mittleider family.

10. Does he have any little quirks, anything that makes him very special? I understand that he is not very cuddly.

No he is not. You cannot touch his left ear. You can get his bridle on now. It actually took a couple years for him to get used to getting the bridle on. We don't trim him up. Other than that we leave that thing alone.

11. What do you think are some important qualities in an event horse?

One of the things that makes Tony a good event horse is that he can flat out jump. Jumping ability is very important. They have to be intelligent, they have to be smart, and they have to be able to think on their feet. They have to be brave, they have to want it and they have to try for you.

12. Last year you made the 3,000-mile trip back East to ride in the inaugural American Eventing Championships. What did you think of that experience, and are you planning on coming back?



Shannon Blinn Photo.

My Dad and I made the trip together. It took us five days to drive across the country. We were able to find places to stop and stable the horses.

I'm working on coming back next year.

13. What words of advice would you give to young riders out there who hope to have four-star success in their future?

You can do it. You can really do it, no matter where you are. If you really want to get there, you have to make a plan and set goals and persevere. No matter what happens, you have to keep going.



Courtesy of the Mittleider family.

Above left: Sara and her father Gary have walked many show jumping courses together.

Center: Sara and an early mount bound up a bank complex.

Below: Sara and "Tony" placed ninth in the Advanced Championship division at the 2004 AEC with a score of 76.17.

14. If you had to choose a non-riding career, what would it be?

Emergency medical services. I'd become a paramedic.

15. What do you do with your free time, when you have some?

I became an EMT (emergency medical technician) and during the winter months I plan on volunteering my time to that. I just volunteer. I don't hire on. The rest of my free time is here at the farm with the horses.

16. What kind of things do you do as a hobby or for fun?

I like to read a lot. I like puzzles and we like to talk about horses—that really makes my brother roll his eyes! He's funny. He likes horses but he's not a fanatic like me.

17. Your brother, Jason Mittleider, is serving in Iraq. How did he feel about his little sister competing at Rolex, the biggest event in the United States?

He thought it was pretty cool. The first thing he told me before I went to Rolex was to be safe and have fun. He knows what this trip meant to me. I wish he could have been there.

18. Is there anything you would like to say to him? Hopefully he will be able to log on to the website and hear your interview.

Don't get into too much trouble over there.

19. What are your future plans with Tony this fall?

He is aimed at The Fair Hill CCI*** again.

20. Tell us about your eventing aspirations?

After Fair Hill I would like to go abroad. I'd like to go overseas and compete. After that I would like to get on a team. 