

## Ema Klugman Earns Top Young Rider Award at Kentucky 5\*

by Katherine O. Rizzo

Just a few short years ago, Marylander Ema Klugman and her mother were in Lexington, KY, watching what was then called the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event. “It was cross-country day and I looked at my mum and said, ‘I don’t want to compete at this level,’” Klugman remarked. Four years later, the Clarksburg event rider completed her first five-star event... the Land Rover Kentucky Three-Day Event.

### Pony Club From Kenya to Seneca

Klugman was born in the U.S. to Australian parents, but learned to ride as a child in Nairobi, Kenya, where her mother, Jeni, was working with the World Bank. It was in Kenya that the entire Klugman family took part in riding at a local stable as well as becoming involved with pony club.

Klugman stated even though riding was a family affair while she was young, now only she and her mom still ride consistently. “My mum grew up riding in Australia and still does fitness riding for me,” Klugman stated. “She’s a huge help!”

Klugman has called the D.C. area home for all but the two years that she spent with her family in Nairobi. She became a U.S. citizen six months ago but is still close to her Australian roots, competing internationally as an Australian. “I’ve had a lot of support from the Australian Federation and plan to stay in the U.S. but compete as an Australian, at least for now,” she explained, adding, “America is a great country for eventing. There [are] like five events within 30 minutes of my house.”

Here in the U.S., Klugman joined Seneca Valley Pony Club, moving up the ranks to the highest level, the A-rating, and continues to be an active member. “Pony club played a huge role in getting me to this five-star,” Klugman said. “All the foundations learned in pony club... like wrapping and conditioning... I used it all [at Kentucky].”

She said that Pony Club “makes you really learn how to do things properly” and that she “learned to explain why you do things, not just how to do them.” She added that “knowing the why” is a must for anyone aspiring to be a trainer.

### A 5\* Partner

Klugman has had many equine partners over the years but her first dive into the international levels of the sport has come with her current five-star horse Bendigo. Her family purchased Bendigo, a Trakehner/Thoroughbred cross, eight years ago as an 11-year-old. Bendigo had done some show jumping but no eventing. That same year, she entered him in his first event,

the Maryland Horse Trials at Loch Moy Farm where they finished sixth in Junior Novice.

Klugman affectionately remarked that “Ben” is not a natural eventer in terms of his abilities. “He’s not a good mover. Does not have an impressive gallop or jump. But he’s extremely intelligent,” she said, adding that Ben is a quick study and he retains information well, both qualities that make a great event horse. “He has a lot of heart and is brave and really tries,” she said. “We know each other really well so we trust each other.”

And trust is what got this pair around one of the hardest cross-country courses in the world.

### A Kentucky Spring

Klugman had never intended to run Ben in a five-star but this spring things fell into place. “There was some push from the Australian team to compete at that level if I wanted to stay on their radar,” Klugman said. “And [Ben has] just improved every year we’ve had him.” In fact, the horse did his first CCI event in only his second year of eventing.

When they arrived in Kentucky this April, the 23-year-old Klugman and the 19-year-old horse settled into the Kentucky Horse Park on a sunny and warm Tuesday only to wake up on Wednesday morning to several inches of snow. “It was all kind of funny really,” Klugman said with a chuckle.

The comedy seemed to continue on dressage day as Klugman reported, “We were tacking up Ben and my saddle pad fell off and landed in some muddy water... then my spur strap broke.” Klugman’s team quickly got a new pad and some new spur straps but the whole thing did “add a bit of stress to the day.”

“We have a great team of people around us,” Klugman said. “It’s a huge amount of work to get through a weekend like that. Lots of behind the scenes work.” After dressage, Klugman was sitting in 61st place with a score of 41.5%.

Cross-country day was rainy and boggy causing 15 riders, including some seasoned Olympians, to be eliminated on course. Klugman and Ben handled the weather as if the footing were perfect, jumping clean and adding only eight time faults to their dressage score. “He is incredibly honest and incredibly quick away from the jumps, which makes him fast on cross-country,” Klugman explained. The pair moved up to 31st place going into the final phase of competition.

After a brief hold in the final jog Sunday morning, the pair entered the main arena at the Kentucky Horse Park for show jumping that afternoon. “Ben normally excels in cross-country and show jumping but I screwed up [in Kentucky],” she said. “I just let the atmosphere

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Twenty-three-year-old Ema Klugman was named Top Young Rider at this year’s Land Rover Kentucky Three-Day Event in the five-star division.



Ema got her riding start in Kenya through pony club and is currently an “A” member of Seneca Valley Pony Club.



Ema and Bendigo at a UPSC show jump rally in 2013 (above) and jumping clean on cross-country in Kentucky this April (below).



Chelsea Spear

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