



Rodney and Idle Dice

RODNEY JENKINS

“RED RIDER”

By

Jane Porter Fogleman

In the very wee hours of the morning, a familiar figure is seen leaning against a stall door in the shed row, watching as his horses go by on their way to and from the race track. The figure has a pipe in the corner of his mouth, arms crossed over his chest, and his keen eyes do not miss even the smallest nuance of the horses. The easily identifiable red hair that is now graying, announces the figure of arguably one of the greatest horsemen to live - Rodney Jenkins. The shed rows of Pimlico Race Track in Maryland are now the workplace of Rodney Jenkins.

Rodney, a native of Orange, Virginia, spent his first 50 years there, working with his father and two brothers on a daily basis. They were a formidable team in the world of American show horses, but after dabbling for many years in the racehorse world, two of the sons eventually turned their full attention to the racehorse.

Enis Jenkins was the father of the three boys, and they followed him in his horse and hound world on several fronts.



Rodney, age 10, and Playboy

Rodney was the oldest with Larry and Dale just behind. The boys called Enis *Chief* all of his life, and it was very appropriate as he was a chief influence in their upbringing. Growing up in Orange they fox hunted, rode ponies, and generally had a wonderful country life. They had an old mare named Whirley that taught all of the

boys to ride. The story goes that Rodney dashed their sister's desire to ride by taking her on a harrowing trail ride. Enis worked for Manley Carter, who had a pack of foxhounds, and they would pack the hounds up under the horses and head down the main street of Orange to the other side of town to go for a day of hunting. Not

Rodney and Enis at Warrenton with Gustavas in the upper left corner.



only was Enis a great houndsman; he was a great horseman. Manly Carter would haul wild horses from out West, and they would arrive on the train in Orange where Enis would do the breaking and later the selling of these horses. When the Jenkins family moved to Retreat Farm on the eastern edge of Orange, Rodney was about 10 years old, and he was beginning to show junior horses and ponies for local people and for himself. In the juniors, he showed a horse named Playboy that was Champion 17 times, Reserve once and competed in only 18 shows. If there was a Handy Hunter Class in the show, Rodney won it, and at most of the shows he rode in he was either Champion or Reserve in each division in which he competed. These shows were throughout Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina.

The family next moved to their own farm in Orange called Hill Top, and this became the famous home of the Jenkins' horses. It is a little-known fact

that Enis bought the great Jet Run as a weanling, giving him to his son Dale, who raced him at Charlestown, West Virginia. Rodney then rode him until he was about 6 years of age, before the celebrated horse ended up with Michael Matz.

After Rodney graduated from Orange County High School, the Jenkins family took to the road more often. They had it down to a fine science with Enis and Rodney going on the show circuit, Larry running the farm, and Dale doing a little of both until he went on the circuit full-time.

Rodney began his career in the hunter ring, and he was truly awesome. In the assessment of many learned horsemen, he was a genius in the saddle. He had a balance and rhythm that horses seemed to sense, and they thus loved having Rodney on their back. He never forced a horse; they just responded because he knew instinctively what they were going to do. Rodney never had a riding lesson, yet he

had the instincts that gave him all of those classical techniques. He let the horses teach him. He could take a horse that had disappointed other top riders, work it in the schooling ring for five minutes, go in the ring, and that horse would jump better than it ever had – often winning the class. He could take a 2-year-old and work with it for thirty minutes in the ring, and it would come out looking like a seasoned show hunter. He just seemed to have the knack of making any horse he sat on perform to the maximum of its ability. As lifelong friend Matt Collins says, "It's just freaky what he can do with a horse." His hands on a horse are a miracle to watch from the ground, like no one else's.

According to Larry Jenkins, Rodney's greatest attribute was that he could get along with any horse he ever rode, even if he didn't like the horse. When I asked Rodney what he felt was his greatest attribute in riding, he replied, "I think it was because I always had a sympa-

**Rodney and
San Fillippe at
Keswick Horse Show,
working Hunter Class**



thetic attitude towards the horses.” In the show ring Rodney would come off of the turn, knowing exactly where he was and what he needed in strides or speed to get to the jump perfectly - he never missed a spot. Matt Collins says that Rodney would hum the rhythm of the horse’s gait and would go around the ring humming away to the perfect rhythm of the horse. Now mind you: in a typical large show, Rodney might have ridden over 50 horses in a day. Rodney was Champion and Reserve in any division he rode in at most shows. He rode for such equine notables as Mrs. A.C. Randolph, Harry Gill, and Beverly Steinman. In these shows most of the horses in the classes were Rodney’s or belonged to his clients from Hill Top Farm. And then he would also *catch ride* for others.



Rodney and Number One Spy

In the 1970’s Rodney decided to turn his attention entirely to the show jumpers, a discipline that had become increasingly popular. Once again his great attributes of balance, rhythm and compati-

bility made him an immediate success. Some of his greatest combinations were with Idle Dice, Number One Spy, Gustavas, Playback and The Natural. When asked, Rodney says that Number

One Spy was his favorite horse, because of his personality and the fact that he was sensitive and easy. Most people however remember Idle Dice and Rodney in the show ring as a fabulous and exciting combination. Rodney is one of the winningest riders in the history of show jumping and grand prix events. His accomplishments in that arena include two Pan Am Silver Medals, American Grand Prix Association Rider of the Year, and 1987 AHSA Horseman of the Year. He was a member of 16 Nations’ Cup Teams, winning 10 world championships, and in 1999 he was inducted into the Show Jumping Hall of Fame. Rodney’s career in the show ring spanned three decades, earning an international riding reputation and a list of accomplishments that no other individual can boast. One would think that would be enough but not so - now on to the next equine venture.

Rodney, Dale and Chief



Rodney and Dale had always kept a few flat and steeplechase horses at Montpelier where the Jenkins had expanded their operations. When Rodney and



Rodney and Unjin

Rodney's three boys,
Matthew, Patrick and Robert



Dale came home from the circuit, they would immediately go up to Charlestown to watch the races. The story is told that they would leave enough money in the car for a bowl of bean soup and a cup of coffee. If they lost all their money, they could still get something to eat. So Rodney had always had a love for the racehorse, and in the late 80's he decided to hang up the stirrups and go into training full-time.

He began this venture at their barn at Montpelier with steeplechase horses and some flat horses; eventually he concentrated on just flat horses and moved his operation to the race track at Laurel, Maryland, and later Pimlico, where he can be found in the shed rows today.

Accustomed to being in control astride the horse, Rodney now watches the races from the rail. Today the nervous gestures and constant motion tell the story of his frustrating lack of control - someone else is in the irons. But Rodney's eye for the horse has stood him in good stead in his racehorse career as well. This is evidenced by one of his first *pin hooking* endeavors when he bought a weanling out of a field in Kentucky. Mane Minister became the only horse in history to run third in the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont Stakes. His career in this horse endeavor has proven equally successful as the others. He has campaigned numerous stakes winners, captured the training title at Laurel in 2002, and was named Leading Trainer of the Year in Maryland in 2004. His owners include such racing luminaries as David Reynolds, his daughter Dottie Brotherton, and David Wright.

Rodney's strong family ties, derived from his mother and father and his closeness with his brothers, has given him the base upon which he has built his life. When I asked Rodney who had the greatest influence on him, he immediately said, "my dad." He reveres, admires, and respects his father above all else. Rodney feels he was the ultimate horseman: honest, never lied to them, appreciated and was proud of his sons and their accomplishments, and was the basis from which Rodney's abilities grew. Rodney says his father Enis, who died in 1983, gave him his work ethic and was a man many people looked up to and respected. Rodney has passed his talents and his passionate love of all horses on to his two adult sons, Robert and Patrick, who work in the racehorse world. Rodney, his wife Unjin and their 3-year-old son Matthew now live near Laurel, and doubtlessly Rodney and Matthew will be seen heads together sharing the day's racing or training stories. I asked Rodney which accomplishments was he most proud of, and his immediate

response was, "having Matthew." Then, realizing I was referring to the horse world, he answered, "being the first professional to ride on a team representing the United States."

With the help of his father and brothers, Rodney has truly become a self-made man, having maximized his gifts and strengths to make himself a success. One could say that Rodney is the epitome of his extraordinary upbringing. If you ever have the opportunity to question Rodney about his career, don't bother. It's like pulling hen's teeth to get him to brag about himself. Thank goodness for his family and friends, who are still in awe of his abilities - as are those fortunate enough to have observed Rodney in the show ring. He was and is a truly AWESOME rider.

Jane Porter Fogleman was born and raised in Albemarle County and is an avid life-long fox hunter. She hunts with Farmington Hunt Club, Keswick Hunt Club and travels to other Virginia Hunts whenever possible.