

French equestrienne rides for U. of Delaware

NEWARK, Del. — Americans know Chantilly for its delicate lace and the perfume in the lacy pink box.

But to the French, Chantilly is "Horse City," nestled in the woods 20 minutes north of Paris with its race tracks, race horses, hunting horses, jumping horses...more horses, in fact, than people.

Eighteen-year-old Isabelle Gagnaire, now an animal science major at the University of Delaware, grew up watching the horses of Chantilly each day on her way to school. Like most of the children in town, she started riding at a young age, even though her parents weren't serious riders and owned no horses of their own.

At the age of 12 she started studying dressage ("ballroom dancing on a horse"), cross-country and jumping. She even took a volunteer job exercising race horses every morning before school.

At 15 she developed a taste for the pageantry of riding to the hunt, chasing after deer with swift horses, barking dogs, and blaring bugles. At the same time she joined a jumping team and spent weekends competing in horse shows.

Despite all the local interest in riding, France had no college level equestrian school until the Centre Zootechnique de Rambouillet admitted its first 12 riding students just this year.

Hoping to improve her English while honing her



Isabelle Gagnaire, University of Delaware animal science student from France, shows proper French form in jumping over hurdles.

horsemanship skills, Isabelle came to the University of Delaware to study horsemanship and equine management with Dr. C. Melvin Reitnour.

The college freshman says she has already learned how to tackle most of the little problems that trouble a horse, from parasites to minor injuries that don't require a veterinarian's attention. Perhaps some day she'll be a veterinarian herself, she says.

Isabelle had to adjust to a whole new style of horse show here in the U.S. In French horse shows, riders are paired with their own familiar mounts. They must jump over 10 to 15 hurdles which increase in height

according to the riders' level of proficiency.

In Intercollegiate Horse Show competition in the United States, everyone begins by randomly drawing the name of a horse. There are fewer hurdles, uniformly low, and riders are judged not on height, but on their adherence to perfect form in the execution of each jump.

There are pros and cons to each system, Isabelle concedes. The Intercollegiate shows test how well a rider can work with an unfamiliar horse. The French are more interested in testing the limits of a well-established partnership of horse and rider.

Except in dressage, where

every movement counts, the French pay less attention than the Americans to proper placement of the rider's knees and elbows. The way the French judges see it, if you can clear the hurdles without knocking them down or falling off, you must be doing something right.

Though the unfamiliar riding style took some getting used to, Isabelle took a fast liking to some other aspects of the American way of life—notably, friendly, smiling people, donuts, roller skating, and ice cream that comes in a choice of 36 flavors.

She was pleased to note she could still enjoy some of the familiar pleasures from

home as well, such as skiing, ice skating, and the ocean.

And, of course, there are horses. For the pleasure of riding she is helping out a local women by exercising her hunting horses and teaching the two-year-olds how to jump. There is no

money involved. What, then, is the attraction?

"A horse isn't like a bike or car," Isabelle explains. "It's living. You have to make it understand you. You establish a relationship. My horse is more of a friend than a riding tool."

Chester Co. 4-H Spring Fair slated

WEST CHESTER — The Chester County 4-H Spring Fair will be held April 12-13 at the Exton Mall.

The public is invited to visit the farm animals at the petting zoo on Saturday from 10:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. Club exhibits will show many of the projects and activities in which 4-H members are involved.

Exhibits will be on display all day Saturday and Sunday noon to 5:00 p.m.

Boys and girls ages 8 to 19 may participate in a variety of projects from pets to indoor gardening to crafts. For more information, contact the Chester County 4-H office 215/696-3500.

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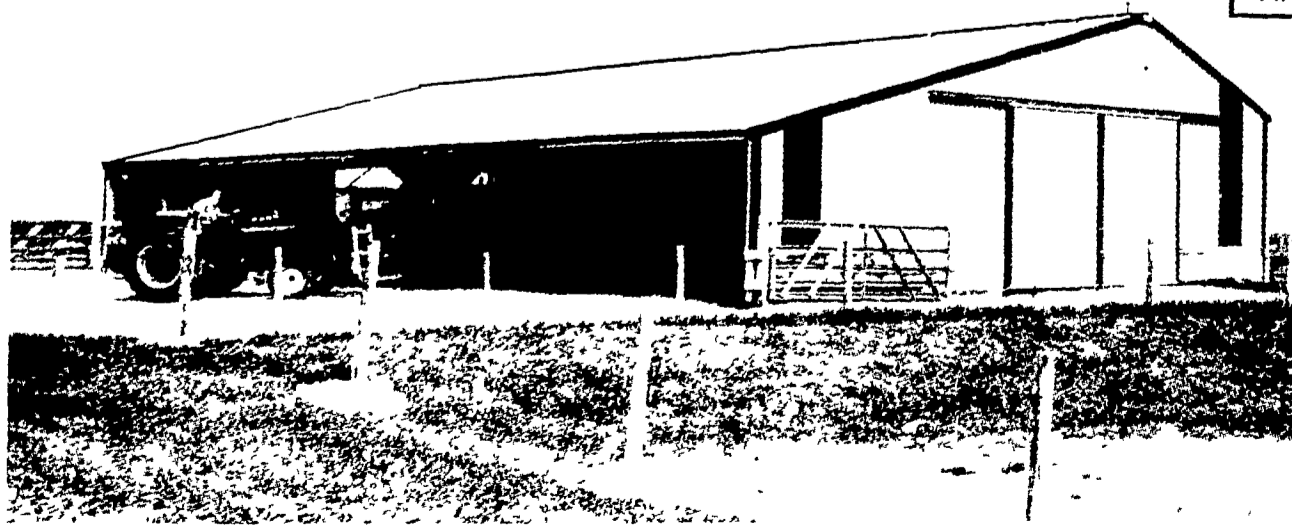


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