

S SHOW JUMPING

# Alison Firestone Robitaille:

## AN ENDURING & SUCCESSFUL CAREER

*By Hilary Winocoor*  
*Portraits by Isabel J. Kurek*



Alison and Zodiac at Newstead Farm in Grand Prix Village in Wellington, Florida.

Slow jumper Alison Firestone Robitaille knows a thing or two about fast horses. She's competed for the United States in 25 Nations Cups, rode in the famed American Invitational at only 17 and can race her way through a jump-off with speed and style.

While Alison is a show jumper at heart, her equestrian career started at the racetrack. Her parents, Bertram and Diana Firestone, owned, bred and raised racehorses. Genuine Risk raced under her mother's name and not only won the Kentucky Derby in 1980 but was the first filly to ever finish in the money in all three Triple Crown races. Alison was 3½ years old at the time. "I don't remember much. I've seen pictures of myself in the winner's circle from the Derby," Alison said.

Alison attended the Foxcroft School in Middleburg, Virginia, a college-preparatory school that allows students to study while also pursuing their passions, and by the time she graduated she was already competing internationally. "I went there from 9th to 12th grade and they were really great about allowing me to go to shows during the school year," she said.

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**“ Alison spent her junior years training with Katie Prudent, which provided her with a solid backbone to excel and compete in the American Invitational as a teenager. ”**

Invitational as a teenager. She was named the Leading Rider in the Samsung Nations Cup World and was honored by the U.S. Olympic Committee as their Female Equestrian Athlete of the Year in 1997. In the 1998 World Equestrian Games in Rome, Alison was the top-placed U.S. rider.

She went on to represent the USET in the 1999 Pan American Games in Winnipeg. In the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, Alison

represented the USET as the first alternate. She was on the winning Nations Cup Team and was third in the Grand Prix in Buenos Aires in 2012.

To date, Alison has been to five World Cup Finals, competed on 25 Nations Cup teams, has won 43 Grand Prix, and she's not stopping anytime soon. In August 2015, she won the Kentucky Summer Classic Grand Prix.

*Sidelines* had the opportunity to talk with the enduring and successful show jumper to find out more about her life and her horses.

#### **How did your riding career start?**

I had a pony named Charlie that I rode around the farm for fun. My allergies were really bad when I was younger, and my dad would worry about me being around the horses and the barn. I remember my mom used to sneak me down to see the racehorses and let me go into some of their stalls and pet them. I was fascinated by how soft their coats were and really became obsessed with them and always wanted to go to the barn. I started showing competitively when I was about 10 years old. My first show pony was named Windlea's Firecracker (aka Freddy).

**Cassinja and Alison in the 2015 New Albany Classic**  
*Photo by Meg Banks*



**Where was your first Grand Prix?**

My first Grand Prix was in Cleveland on Roco. My first Grand Prix win was in Gijon, Spain, on Gustl P.

**Tell us a little about your family.**

Ava will be 7 years old next month and Zoe is almost 5. Both of them really enjoy coming to the barn and have a great time riding and grooming their ponies. My husband, Drew, showed as a junior. He still really likes the horses and bringing the girls to the barn, but he doesn't ride anymore himself. He loves being outdoors and spends a lot of time working on projects at our farm in Middleburg. He enjoys golf while we're in Florida.

**Your parents breed horses; do you have any that are currently competing?**

Zodiac, a 12-year-old North American Dutch Warmblood mare. My niece, Christina, was the 2014 USEF National Champion on the Low Amateur Owner Jumpers with her; she's currently leased to a client of mine, Mary Elizabeth Cordia.

**What horses are you showing now?**

Caprice, Cassinja, Konstanze and Sensation. I spent the beginning of WEF working with some of my younger horses in the 1.30m – 1.40m classes, moving some of them up along the way into the 1.45m division. I'll be showing in the spring shows in Lexington, Kentucky; Split Rock; Devon; and our home show in Upperville, which is a CSI\*\*\*\* this year.

**Looking back, do you have a favorite horse?**

I've been so lucky to have worked with so many great horses over the years! It feels impossible for me to really choose a favorite. All of them have been special in their own unique way. That being said, I had a very close bond with Gustl P. His barn name was Gus. He'd follow me without a lead rope at my parents' farm. **IS**

About the writer: Hilary Winocoor is a senior journalism major at the University of Central Florida with a passion for horses and writing. She has been riding since the age of six and is lucky enough to have grown up in riding paradise, Wellington, Florida.



*Alison and Caprice*