

SIDNEY BAUGHMAN GROOMS HER WAY TO HER DREAMS

BY CARLY EASTON, MYTHIC LANDING ENTERPRISES, LLC



Sidney Baughman and Courtney Cooper celebrating after Who's A Star's clean cross-country trip around the Pine Top Advanced course. NEAL CAMENS PHOTO

Grooming for an upper level rider can be easily summed up in two words: hard work. Elite grooms play one of the most integral roles in the horses' and riders' success as they compete week in and week out chasing their dreams. Responsible for everything from mucking stalls, to feeding four times a day, to preparing for the biggest Event of the horse and rider's career, the grooms in this sport are unsung heroes who deserve to be in the spotlight.

One of these heroes is Sidney Baughman, groom and assistant to

Advanced-level competitor and owner of leading sales barn C Square Farm, Courtney Cooper.

Baughman's road to this position has been a long one, and while she has always had a deep love of horses, she didn't even begin Eventing until her senior year of high school, when her family moved from Ohio to Seattle, Washington. Before ending up at Mapleleaf Eventing, home to the late Amy Tryon, she only had experience working with Arabians. Once finding Mapleleaf, Baughman explains, "I worked for Amy everyday after school

and on the weekends along with taking regular lessons. I really just loved being around the horses and genuinely enjoyed caring for them. While at Amy's I was even able to complete my first Event on a horse that I had only ridden a few times when his rider had a college presentation that she couldn't miss. That was my introduction to Eventing!" During her time at Mapleleaf, Baughman made lifelong friends with Amy's husband, Greg Tryon and Allyson Green who she mentions have always pushed her and helped her to reach the next level.

Almost six months into her stay at Mapleleaf, Amy passed away unexpectedly. Many helpful Eventers stepped in to help out and teach lessons, including Kim Severson who regularly flew in to teach clinics at the farm. Severson was looking for a working student at the time and offered the position to Baughman. "I arrived at Kim's farm a week before they were leaving for Aiken, so it was definitely a crazy, but amazing first week to get thrown into the thick of it. "While I was in Aiken I was able to take on a free lease as project and take a lot of lessons," Baughman recalls. "Unfortunately, working students don't make any money so I knew it was going to be hard for me to stay in Virginia after the winter season. I formed an amazing friendship with Kim's groom at the time, Liz Storandt who would go on to play an integral role in my future."

After spending the winter with Kim Severson and her team, Baughman returned to Mapleleaf in Seattle,

which she described as somewhat of a “layover” before she could find her next adventure. She started grooming for Alexis Lind and also worked closely with Ashley Colonel, who transitioned into the barn manager at Mapleleaf after Amy’s passing. Colonel recalls, “The biggest quality that made Sidney stand out is her real drive and determination. There’s never a ‘no’ with Sidney; she wants to learn whatever she can to better her skill set.” In the interim, Baughman was catch riding, taking lessons and helping around the farm, but was continuing to look for a more permanent position.

After several months Baughman received a call from her good friend Liz about an amazing opportunity to work for Courtney Cooper at her C Square Farm in Nottingham, Pennsylvania. After multiple phone interviews and applications Baughman flew herself and her dog across the country once again to be back on the East Coast. She remembers, “Immediately I was immersed in C Square Farm where I was grooming full time for a rider at the upper levels, riding sales horses, and taking care of all the daily barn tasks. As time went on I was trusted to start showing sale horses to clients and competing the sale horses a little bit at a time.”

Cooper and her husband Neal Camens took a chance on hiring Sidney as she had held several different working student positions, but had never been responsible for a full barn. Cooper describes, “You really have to stay on top of a few of my horses. She became very tuned in to what was their normal by grooming them and checking on them several times a day. She’s so tuned into them and has been able to convey any change in their behavior to me. She really speaks up and tells us how she thinks we can handle their routine better so they can perform better.”

As a groom for an upper level rider that has a barn full of both Cooper’s own horses and 5-10 sale horses at a time, Baughman’s days are always packed. She describes, “We start our



Sidney Baughman and Vegas Run complete their first Preliminary/Training horse trials together at the Radnor Hunt Horse Trials in 2015. KELLY BEAVER PHOTO

day around 6:30 a.m. with barn chores, and then try to do all the riding in the morning and some days we’ll go cross-country schooling at Windurra or Fair Hill or have clients in looking at horses. Depending on our stall mucker situation at the time, we may all need to pitch in, even Courtney! Afternoon chores are normally finished up around 6:00 p.m. and then we’ll go in to have dinner and relax before night checks around 9:30 p.m. We also keep a log for every horse about what they did that day, which we’ll update in the evenings.”

In addition to working, Baughman is currently riding and competing one of Cooper and Camens’ personal horses, Vegas Run, at Training level with plans to move up to Preliminary. Baughman’s goal is to compete at the upper levels, a goal that Cooper has always supported and helped her to achieve. Baughman continues, “When I arrived at Courtney’s I had only competed through Novice, so seeing my dreams start to become a reality is huge. It really just goes to show how hard work can go such a long way. I’m chasing my dream of becoming an upper level rider because Courtney trusts me with her horse and ultimately wants to see me succeed.”

Grooming is a 24/7/365 job that requires persistence, responsibility and honesty. “When you want something, you’ll work hard to get there. I don’t

get much social time; the horses have become my family, and Courtney and Neal have been amazingly supportive. It really makes a difference when you feel that your employer is pulling for you too.”

Between Baughman and Cooper, their favorite memory together is from this past year at Fair Hill, where Cooper had recently overcome a broken leg in order to compete. Baughman explains, “You don’t realize what your team is really made of until everything goes really wrong. We had lost a stall mucker, didn’t have a working student at the time, Courtney’s leg was broken, Neal had a family visit previously planned and our barn manager, Jodi also took a family vacation with Fair Hill looming on the calendar. To pull through all of that at one time was so rewarding. When Courtney pulled up after cross-country on both horses with a huge smile it felt so rewarding. We had done it.”

Cooper goes on to describe how that moment would have never happened without Baughman by her side. “Sidney kept the horses in work, along with Jennie Brannigan, and when I started back to riding I couldn’t lead the horses to the mounting block, get on or barely post the trot. For someone to continually have the patience to make sure I was safe getting on and safe getting off was so important. Sidney was very encouraging of me in terms of →

what needed to be done.”

As Baughman continues her career at C Square, she has become more actively involved in C Square Farm’s sales program and she has begun showing horses to clients and solely assumes that role when Cooper is away at competitions or overseas looking at horses. “This year has definitely been a defining one in my career. Courtney has sold more horses than she ever has and I’ve sold a horse on my own while she was gone. It’s really rewarding because it’s validation that I can do this and this

truly can be my career.”

It takes a specific person to be able to handle the massive amount of daily responsibilities of a groom and Baughman is continually described as just that by not only her current employers, but her past ones as well. Neal, Courtney’s husband is actively involved in everything that goes on at C Square Farm and has witnessed Baughman’s growth first hand. “Sidney is the type of person who is willing to learn things that require more work and more effort and willingly goes

through that process. She seeks those things out and challenges herself. She solves problems. She does things without direction, she’s become more responsible with dealing with clients, suppliers, sponsors and showing horses.” As Baughman expresses repeatedly, “If something is hard or challenging for you, don’t stop working at it until it becomes easier.”

What makes Baughman stand out to Cooper more than anything, is her generous spirit. Cooper continues, “She’ll go the extra mile for the animals and she’ll go the extra mile for you. She wants to do things right and she genuinely cares.” As a groom for such elite athletes you must be forward thinking, pay attention to detail and be able to observe the slightest change in any of the horses, according to Baughman’s former employer, Colonel. Colonel describes, “Sidney encompasses all of those qualities and she’s always three steps ahead. She has a sincere passion for the horses, and it shows.”

To all those aspiring grooms out there, Baughman offers a few valuable pieces of advice that should stick with you. “Never give up. If you go to work for someone and the first two weeks feel like the hardest weeks for your life, than that’s a good thing. It will only get easier. It comes down to how much work you’re willing to put in. Be okay with hard work because you’ll begin to look back and appreciate how far you’ve come.”

Eventing at the top levels of the sport on not only one, but multiple horses truly takes a village with the groom sitting at the top of that totem pole. Grooms allow the riders to focus solely on their riding as they are continually checking the horses for the slightest change that may upset their performance. Without these special individuals, the sport could not exist in the way it does. The dedication and passion that encompasses their being is extraordinary and inspiring to everyone involved in the sport at any level. They are the unsung heroes in Eventing. 🐾

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