

PERISCOPE ON

# RICHARD SPOONER

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WITH A TALENT FOR DISCOVERING THE TRACK THAT TAKES A FRACTION OFF HIS COMPETITOR'S TIME AND HORSES THAT ARE TRAINED TO STICK TO THE PLAN AND TRUST IN HIS JUDGMENT, RICHARD SPOONER HAS HIT ON A WINNING COMBINATION. AND IT IS THIS COMBINATION THAT HAS KEPT HIM AT THE TOP OF THE SHOW JUMPING WORLD FOR OVER A DECADE. NOT ONLY HAS HE BEEN THE PACIFIC COAST HORSE SHOW ASSOCIATION GRAND PRIX RIDER OF THE YEAR TWELVE TIMES, HE HAS ALSO DOMINATED ON THE PACIFIC COAST DURING THIS TIME AND ACHIEVED GREAT SUCCESS IN CANADA AND EUROPE AS WELL.

The gentleman from California and one which has won over 100 Grand Prix mainly competes with his famous Cristallo, an eight year old Holsteiner gelding bought when five years old and one which has certainly matured into a stylish show jumper. Schooled by Spooner's wife, Kaylen, Cristallo has helped Spooner achieve many wins; recently they won the last round of the 2010 World Cup Final with the only double clear, and were also well placed overall. They then repeated the double clear in the opening Nations Cup of 2010 at La Baule, France, where the USA finished second.

During the Global Champions Tour of Monaco, the man nicknamed "The Master of Faster" for his excellence against the clock sits for an interview with Horse Times magazine. He spoke about his fantastic parents along with his wife and 17 year old daughter Taylor and then moved on to his passion for horses which began when he was ten. He says, "I've been around horses for almost 30 years and was never interested in riding. Actually, it was somewhat an accident that I was introduced to horses. Once that happened, I had no option really but to be more around them. I was not a great rider then, but I took it slowly and by the age of 16 I developed and rode within the equitation division in the USA. I only became a professional show jumping rider and ridden a jumping horse when I was about 20 years old.

From 1986 until present, Spooner's achievements and results undoubtedly say much about the man. He explains, "To have a top-of-the-list equestrian achievement would be to have a horse


like 'Robinson', a winning horse in the history of USA show jumping and one I have had a big relationship with." Robinson won the Queens Cup back to back in Spruce Meadows Derby where Spooner cleared the \$1 million mark, the 10th rider to reach that milestone in the show's history. Spooner continues, "With my other achievement of a horse, I would say Cristallo has helped me win the Global Champions Tour of Monaco in 2006 and 2007, accordingly I would say this was also a good achievement. It was fantastic to win this event once and felt good to win it twice, although winning it the first time felt more special than the second; the crowd was just great, it meant a lot."

Before becoming a professional competitor, Spooner took on training, however stopped ten years ago. He is currently concentrated on competing, and along with his wife Kaylen, they do all the training for their horses, and occasionally trains with his mentor Hugo Simone.

On sponsorship and champion horses, Spooner adds, "Antares Saddlery has been a great sponsor of mine for such a long time: they provide me with saddles and equipment. But currently I do not have any horse sponsors something which I am looking for! In the meantime, all can do is simply sponsor myself. As for the success of my horses, to me personally, it has always been trying to find the right horse. I try to have no system and try to allow my own to adapt to what suits the horse. You see, picking a horse is one of the hardest things to do - obviously there is a financial and emotional commitment, and the largest is time. I like to pick them young and when that happens, when you buy a young horse, you are then committed, potentially for the next decade of your life to be spending

many hours with him. Consequently the responsibility of choosing the right horse is far greater than the financial one. I started with Cristallo when he was five, and for the last seven years of my life, I've been spending a minimum of two hours a day working with that horse; that's a lot of time. The greater expense is not the money, but the investment of your time, passion and energy. One has to be very certain, 100% about the horse's future potentials."

Spooner spends most of the summer season competing in Europe. He comments. "I enjoy Europe, its atmosphere, people and food! It's just wonderful. And most importantly, the show jumping is of the highest levels in the world. I jumped for many years in the USA where the sport is phenomenal, but for me I've reached a point in my life where I want to do something different. Each show in Europe has its own character, given that shows can be generic when one participates continuously."

On aspirations and changes in life, Spooner reflectively and smilingly adds, "As professional riders, we devote our lives to the passion of this sport, therefore there is really nothing better than having quality horses, participating at top events, and enjoying oneself. The art of show jumping is important to me; I want to keep improving my abilities and skills and at the same time, the weight of winning counts. There are many things I'd like to improve and change as a person and as a rider; the desire to do that is actually one of my greatest qualities. I'd like to improve my relationship with the people around me and I'd also love to learn French! If I can get those things done, then I'll be set." 



*Spooener & Cristallo at the GCT of Monaco 2010*