

## Cyndi Lorenzen Found A True "Gift" Horse In The Most Unlikely Package

Erin Harty

A good horse is a good horse, the saying goes, no matter what the color or breed.

Cyndi Lorenzen of Phoenix, Ariz., found one of those good horses, quite by accident, at a local dude ranch in 1990. Just 12 and with only a year's riding experience, she was simply looking for a horse on which to learn.

That horse not only helped Lorenzen learn to ride, but also earned her U.S. Dressage Federation silver and bronze medals, launched a successful lesson and training business, and landed her a job at one of the top dressage facilities in the Phoenix area.

And it wasn't thanks to some warmblood wunderkind. The dressage diva in disguise was Maxine, a black Tennessee Walker-Quarter Horse mare. She stands only 15.2 hands, bears an odd-looking brand (from the dude ranch, not a breed registry) on her shoulder, and is instantly recognizable by the fact that she's missing the tip of one ear.

Of course, Lorenzen isn't your typical dressage rider either. When she first started to get serious about riding, she was simultane-

ously balancing school, a job as a waitress on the graveyard shift at Denny's, and a penchant for partying that she admitted was often out of control.

She still has some leftovers from those wilder days, including five earrings, a belly ring and three tattoos—one on her stomach that matches Maxine's brand, a ring of horses around her ankle modeled after a photo of Maxine, and the Chinese symbol for the horse on her back.

Just a few years later, she and Maxine were cantering down centerline in their first Prix St. Georges, a testament to what a rider's determination and a horse's willingness can accomplish.

### ► Not Your Typical Dressage Background

Lorenzen, 23, can't really point to Maxine and claim prowess at finding diamond-in-the-rough dressage prospects—the mare came to be hers mostly by chance, and before she even knew what to look for.

Lorenzen and her mother, Kay, had been riding trail horses at Deer Valley Ranch near Phoenix on weekends for about a year. Their

riding expertise was mostly limited to "hang onto the horn and go," Lorenzen said with a laugh.

Maxine, who'd been born (probably the result of a breeding "accident") and raised on the ranch, was 4 at the time. An exchange student named Monica Deitrich owned Maxine. She'd visited Arizona from Switzerland and had been given the horse by the owner of the ranch. When Deitrich returned to Switzerland, the ranch owner promised to keep the horse forever and just lease her out to people.

Of course, Maxine had already put two cowboys in the hospital, and was such a spook that she couldn't be used as a trail horse. But for some reason, the Lorenzens thought she'd be the perfect mount for a 12-year-old novice rider.

"She was black and she was nice—and she was the only horse [on the farm] for lease!" Lorenzen joked.

For \$100 a month, including vet and farrier bills, Lorenzen got her first horse. When they left the ranch and moved Maxine to a new barn, they stopped paying the lease fee and just kept horse for Deitrich. (She finally gave Maxine to Lorenzen as a Christmas present in 2000.)

She and Maxine started taking lessons, dabbling in everything from hunter/jumpers, dressage and eventing to barrel racing, pole bending, and team penning.

"It was all very, very backyard," she said.

The pair had some success eventing, mostly due to the fact that they always placed well in dressage. By the time Lorenzen was about 16, they had moved from novice up to training level, but Maxine was beginning to feel overfaced and started refusing.

"She fell into a jump in practice.

This was right about the same time that Christopher Reeve had his accident," Lorenzen explained. "So we took a break from jumping. And we're still on that break from jumping!"

Lorenzen had also started training with local dressage instructor Pat Baker, one of the few people who wasn't urging her to sell her rather diminutive mount.

"Pat was the one trainer who said, 'You're not outgrowing her as a rider. Keep this horse—she can really teach you a lot,'" Lorenzen recalled. "[Maxine had] such willingness, and I was such a rough little rider. I was not elegant in any way, and Maxine was just like, 'OK!'"

By the time Lorenzen was about 18, she and Maxine were doing second level. "That's when I decided I wanted a career with horses," she said. "As

**With Maxine, Cyndi Lorenzen has earned USDF silver and bronze medals.**



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soon as I graduated from high school—when everyone goes away and gives up on horses, that's when I got serious."

She also decided she wanted to get her USDF bronze medal, which required six scores of 60 percent or better, two each at first, second and third levels. Baker, who's based in Tucson, had stopped traveling to Phoenix, so Lorenzen was mostly on her own. She earned the first and second level scores, but found herself "stuck" at third level for two years, unable to get the marks she needed.

### ► Breakthroughs

In 1998, Lorenzen started training with Beverly Rogers, an R-rated judge and trainer based in Cave Creek, Ariz. Rogers' effervescence and motivational style were the perfect antidote to Lorenzen's frustration at banging against the third-level glass ceiling.

"Bev was very inspirational to me," said Lorenzen, who finds that her own attitude and enthusiasm for the sport are similar to Rogers'. "She gave me the hope I needed."

Rogers wasn't fazed by working with an unconventional horse like Maxine. Instead, she was impressed by the mare's wonderful, willing attitude.

"She loved Max—she told me she would trade her warmblood any day for Maxine, because she was so good," said Lorenzen. It was the boost of confidence Lorenzen needed



"I know how much I have to learn," said Cyndi Lorenzen about her career as a dressage rider.

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to keep going in the ring against more experienced riders and more expensive horses.

Rogers helped Lorenzen polish up some details and fundamentals, and to perfect Maxine's changes. That extra push proved to be the key—within the span of two weeks in October 1999, the pair earned the high-score at third level at two recognized shows and finally had the scores for their bronze medal. Rogers was already urging Lorenzen to go for her silver.

By this time, Lorenzen was out of high school and living in an apartment on her own. She was working at her parents' travel agency and also had a growing lesson business. The family had moved to a two-acre parcel of horse property in the Sunburst Farms section of Glendale, just northwest of Phoenix, and they were keeping their two horses at home. People walking through the neighborhood saw Lorenzen riding Maxine and had begun asking about lessons.

Maxine became employed as a school horse a few nights a week, doing her best to stay underneath up-downers during their first long-line lessons, carefully toting unsteady riders around the same arena where she'd done a line of two-tempis with Lorenzen the day before.

"She made [teaching] easier for me because I knew her like the back of my hand. I could explain her because I knew her; I knew her mechanics," Lorenzen said.

Her business soon expanded to include riders with their own horses and then horses in training—Arabians, Western horses, Paso Finos—a typical Arizona assortment. There wasn't an expensive warmblood to be found in the bunch.

Lorenzen still wanted a career in horses, and she was squeezing in community college classes in equine massage between her hours at the travel agency, lessons, riding Maxine, and helping with the barnwork at her parents' place. But doing horses full-time seemed to be a rather distant goal for a 21-year-old sometimes still scrambling to pay her rent.

That is, until Lorenzen found an ad in the *Chronicle* for a barn manager position at an upstart dressage facility in November 1999, offering the sweetest of job perks—the opportunity to ride an experienced FEI horse.

**► The Right Place At The Right Time**

By the time Lorenzen called about the ad, Tracy Roenick had already filled the barn manager position at her new facility, Dynamite Dressage in Scottsdale, Ariz. But the resident trainer, Paula Paglia, needed a groom and someone to take over some clients who weren't moving to the new barn, since she no longer wanted to travel to teach.

Lorenzen sounded like a good fit, so

Roenick and Paglia agreed to "interview" her by watching her ride Maxine.

When Roenick and Paglia arrived at the Lorenzens', they asked which horse was hers, and she pointed out Maxine. Roenick looked at 5'8" Lorenzen and barely-bigger-than-a-pony Maxine, and wasn't sure what she'd gotten herself into. But she and Paglia settled into plastic chairs beside the dressage ring to see what the pair could do.

"Cyndi was very, very nervous—it was really very cute," Roenick recalled. "She was walking [Maxine] around, and I said, 'Let's just see.' She gathered up the reins and picked up a trot, and it was just amazing. That horse can trot!"

Roenick spotted some problems as well, but she thought that Lorenzen could benefit with the training she'd get through the job and the opportunity to ride other horses.

"I thought, 'I'd love to get my hands on her and try to fix her. This girl has potential, and she wants to be better,'" Roenick said of Lorenzen. "The desire was there. So I thought, 'Let's give her a shot.'"

"I was a project for them," Lorenzen admitted. "I was motivated and willing, and obnoxiously eager. I had all the basics, but there was no elegance involved in the whole thing."

Part of the arrangement was that Lorenzen would groom for Roenick in exchange for lessons on Weingraf, her 16-year-

old Hanoverian gelding—a horse who Roenick said Steffen Peters called one of the most difficult he's ever ridden.

It was quite a challenge for Lorenzen at first, Roenick recalled, to go from little Maxine to a big-moving warmblood with a lot of cadence in his trot. "The opportunity was huge for her, and she did a really good job," Roenick said. "They were not the most beautiful combination at first. But she definitely had the determination to want to figure out how to ride that horse."

"She keeps coming back for more. Someone who didn't have the right attitude and desire would have quit a couple weeks in," Roenick added.

A year ago, Roenick said she felt she had to hold Lorenzen's hand through every stride of a lesson. Now, just as she's ready to offer a comment, she sees that Lorenzen has already fixed the problem.

Through riding "Graf," Lorenzen has learned the feel for the upper-level movements. "She tries to listen and tries to understand it," Roenick said. "It's one thing to listen, and one thing to feel what it's supposed to feel like."


Lorenzen's greatest attribute is her strength as a rider—and her sense of when to use that strength, and when to back off, Roenick said. "I'd love to see her on something that's as fancy as Graf, but with a better attitude," she added. "She has to be so strong on him and has to make the horse want to work. I'd love to see her on a horse that says, 'I'll give you this.'"

The ride on Graf was just the beginning of the opportunities. Lorenzen has also traveled with Roenick to several CDIs, from Colorado to California. She's had the opportunity to ride in clinics Roenick has hosted with Debbie McDonald, and she'll spend a month training with McDonald in Idaho this summer. Lorenzen will also accompany Roenick and her horse Kashmir to the State Line Tack/USSET National Intermediaire I Championships at Gladstone, N.J., this month.

"I didn't really have a clue what this whole thing was about. All I've ever done is the Arizona circuit," Lorenzen said. "I've learned a lot about doing this as a business, not as a personal thing. I'm a totally different rider—I know how much I have to learn."

Lorenzen earned the scores for her silver medal last year, and she recently decided to hand Maxine's reins over to her mother, also a dressage rider. The mare is now almost 16 and has essentially reached the limit of her abilities at Prix St. Georges—but she still has plenty more to teach others.

Lorenzen hopes to soak up as much as she can during her time with McDonald over the summer. And soon she hopes to be nationally competitive—not just a big fish in the small Arizona pond.

"It's all going to pay off—good things will happen to her at some point," Roenick said. "For Cyndi, it will only get better." 

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