



Sloane Coles with her student, Carter Ware; photo © Jump Media



Sloane Coles; photo © Jump Media

THIS ISSUE'S  
QUESTION:

“**How do you approach matching a rider with their perfect horse?**”

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**F**inding the perfect partner in a horse is exciting, but something that needs to be approached with patience. That's often the hardest part. It's inevitable that when any rider is ready to begin a partnership with a new horse they have a tendency to rush the process. It's important to remember that the right horse will come along – sometimes that's right away, and sometimes it takes some searching. Either way, patience is the most important tool for making a good match.

### ALL ABOUT THE FEEL

For me, feel is the easiest way to determine if a horse is right for one of my riders. I can usually tell right away based on how the horse feels when I am riding it. I want a good feeling off the ground with enough scope and carefulness for the intended purpose.

I'll then establish that the horse is honest with a good rhythm that brings the distances up nicely. I don't want any of my riders to have to work really hard to maintain a good rhythm and fight for a distance. For amateur or greener riders, I like to find a horse that has a little blood so they learn to be comfortable going forward.

Generally speaking, the right horse will usually catch my eye. I try to get to know my riders well enough so that when it happens, the horse instantly matches with one of them in my head before we start the trial process. If that doesn't happen right away, I usually have a number of horses that I have seen in the past in mind. I also work with Katherine Walsh in Europe, who is very talented in matching horses and riders.

### LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Sometimes horses and riders just click. When that happens, you usually see the pair get better and more confident very quickly during a trial ride. If there's even a question in the rider's mind about the partnership, it's not the right match.

I'm not sure whether I get attached to horses or I'm just lucky, but I have a number of horses in my program that work for several different riders and are able to stay with me for an extensive amount of time.

I know that sometimes people find a horse and are convinced it's the right pick for them after only viewing a video. That is hard for me because I rely so much on feel. Sometimes they are super flashy on the video and they just aren't a good fit, while other horses are not impressive in a video, but blow you away under saddle. For example, when I found my last grand prix horse, he wasn't spectacular in his videos. I had to have a little faith in Katherine, who was confident he was going to be a fit for me. The first time I jumped him he was super, and I knew it was right.

### — SLOANE COLES

*Sloane Coles grew up in The Plains, Virginia, immersed in all things equestrian. Her father, John, is a former steeplechase jockey and currently Joint Master of Orange County Hounds while her mother, Julie, is an accomplished hunter and jumper competitor. There was little doubt that their third and youngest child, Sloane, would follow in her parents' footsteps. After a successful career as a junior, she formed Spring Ledge, a top-class hunter/jumper facility located in the heart of Virginia's hunt country. In addition to developing horses and riders for the show ring, Sloane and her family operate a retirement program caring for more than 50 horses.*



Sloane Coles with student, Schuyler Hall; photo © Jump Media



Sloane Coles and Coldplay; photo © Jump Media