

## LOOKING BETWEEN THE EARS

Feb. 10, 2011

### Wasabi

My heartfelt thanks to all of you who sent notes, e-mails, and Facebook messages expressing your sympathy over the loss of my horse Wasabi.

If you've ever wondered whether a few words matter, I'm here to say that they do. In our lives with horses, I suppose sooner or later most of us will have to live through a loss like the one I have suffered. It means a lot that you can share my grief, and that you "get it," that she was important in a way that non-horse people cannot fully understand.

Wasabi died of acute liver failure from unknown causes. The truth is I may never know what killed my horse.

Six years ago I purchased Wasabi as a four-year-old in Canada. She was the third horse I vetted. The first two were bay geldings.

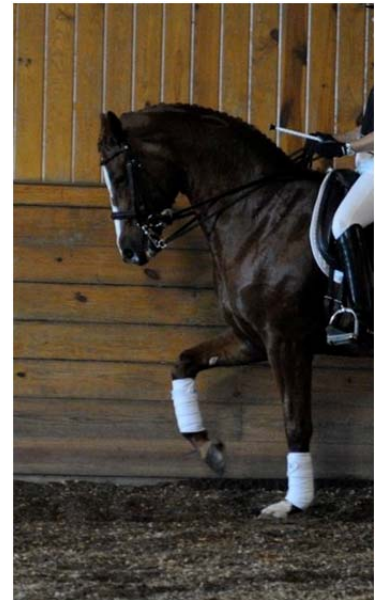
I did not want a mare, and I really did not want another red-head. Plus, I had heard some rumors about Weltmeyers being difficult, and Wasabi's grandsire was Weltmeyer.

I almost did not sit on her. But I was there and she was there, and the gelding I had come to try at that barn just did not suit me.

In our one and only try-out ride, there were a few things that really impressed me. One was her balance. Even as a green-four-year old, she cantered around the small indoor arena in a very good balance.

I was also impressed with her walk which was free in the shoulder, ground-covering, and always marching.

Though it was July, Canada was cold and really windy. I had them open the arena door, and I braved a hack around the farm. She eagerly walked into the wind, calling once to the broodmares on the hill but not in a way that made me doubt her courage. I could tell she was a horse that was secure in herself, and although very green, she made me feel safe.



Like any dressage training project, we had our ups and downs. There may have been something to those rumors about Weltmeyers. But through perseverance and great help from my trainer Roel Theunissen, we were schooling a bit of everything including piaffe and passage and one-tempis. Those rides when she and I were “on” were simply a blast.

She was a character in the stable, with some eccentricities that I accommodated. But she loved people and would flirt by putting her chin on your shoulder and begging for scratchies. She never cared so much for other horses, except for Cavalier who seemed to love her, but whom she mostly just seemed to tolerate. Woe to any horse that looked at her the wrong way. She could bellow like a trumpeting elephant.

I love bringing a horse along. It takes a huge commitment, and it forms your days and weeks and years. I think when you keep your horse at home, the way I have, the commitment is exponentially increased. The opening of my back door was always noted, and often greeted by a whinny. The awareness of horses is ever present.

Looking back, I see each horse I’ve owned as a marker for an era in my life. Usually a horse’s tenure in my care was at least a decade long and finished with a sale. The Wasabi era did not end so happily. That’s a sadness that will stay with me.

But I can’t imagine my life without horses. And I am still riding every day. Although I am taking a break from horse ownership, I look forward to the next era, the next project, my next horse.