

Cosequin Presents OTTB Showcase: Rockin' Off-Trackers

by [Jen Roytz](#)
PaulickReport.com



Jennifer and Birnie schooling at the Kentucky Horse Park

I was out at the Kentucky Horse Park last weekend, helping out with the Mid-South Eventing and Dressage Association (MSEA) Three Day Event and Team Challenge. I was bopping around from ring to ring, snapping photos and collecting stats, when I came across poetry in motion.

A big, strapping chestnut horse was revving his engines in the warm-up ring. He was substantial, but so light on his feet, allowing his energy and eagerness to be contained and accessed upon request by his rider. I inadvertently took a little break and just enjoyed watching them school together.

He and his rider were warming up in an area flanked by brilliant fall foliage, so I took the opportunity to play around with some fun camera angles and then, trying not to be a total creeper, followed them to the ring and snapped a few more photos as they competed.

As the announcer welcomed them to the ring, he announced their team name, “OTTB Rock It.”

This sounded like my kind of team. After the pair finished their round and exited the ring, I went up to congratulate them and find out who this member of team “OTTB Rock It” actually was—and to assure them that the photo-stalker next to the warm-up ring was harmless.

“This is Birnie, and I’m Jennifer, and all three of our ‘Team OTTB Rock It’ horses were off-track Thoroughbreds that Ann Banks helped to transition off the track and into their second careers,” said Jennifer Ramsey, owner and rider of Lil Bernie.

Ann Banks, a longtime owner of flat and steeplechase horses who runs a small rehabilitation arm for race and sport horses in Lexington, was thrilled to have three horses that she’d helped transition off the track competing together in their second careers.

“I helped them out with their entries, got them all OT-Bred saddle pads from Susan Salk’s off-track Thoroughbred line of products, and pulled some silks out of the closet for them to wear in the cross-country phase,” said Ann. “A group of us came out to watch and cheered them home on the cross country course, including Martha Rodgers, who was Birnie’s vet as a racehorse and how I got involved with rehoming him. We had such a great time and are already planning for next year!”

Jennifer told me that she and her teammates, Lori Bond (riding Shawshank) and Lauren Kolegraff (riding Chase Me Forever) trained with Martha Lambert out of Louisville, whose daughter, Lauren (riding Fine With Me), became the National CC1* Champion and Jockey Club High Point Thoroughbred Incentive Program (TIP) winner.



Team OTTB Rock It

“I’ve been riding since I was five or six-years-old,” said Jennifer. “It started as one of my weekly after-school activities, and as I got older I continued to ride and did fewer other activities.”

Growing up in Bowling Green, Ky., Jennifer rode in local hunter/jumper shows, was involved in her local 4-H club, and enjoyed trail riding with friends. Eventually, she discovered the world of three-day eventing and everything else paled in comparison.

Jennifer went off to college to pursue a nursing degree and incorporated horses and riding into her life for fun. Once she graduated and was working as a nurse, she decided to take the plunge back into eventing.

“I purchased Birnie last summer from Martha Lambert, who had gotten him through her friend, Ann Banks,” explained Jennifer. “Lauren Lambert was riding him at the time and I’ve continued his training.”

Before his purchase by Jennifer, Birnie had competed in two recognized events and several local horse trials with Lauren and also spent the winter in Ocala. Since his purchase, Birnie and Jennifer have qualified for the Area 8 championships and the American Eventing Championships, won the Cobblestone Horse Trial in July, were second in the Indiana Horse Trial the month prior, were second in last year’s MSEA Team Challenge, and won the beginner novice division at the 42 Fleur de Lis show.

“I’m a nurse in Louisville and just finished my master’s and nurse practitioner degree at the University of Louisville, and I’m working as a nurse until I find a nurse practitioner position,” said Jennifer. “My goal is to take him to Florida for training this winter depending on my work

schedule, and move him up to novice in the spring. I also hope to start my doctorate sometime next year.ö

Watching them warm up and compete, they seem to have a great sense of what each other needs ö a very copacetic relationship. I asked Jennifer what Birnie is like to ride and show, and if my perception is her reality.



Birnie and Jennifer at the American Eventing Championships

öHeøs athletic, smart, and a great mover that dressage judges just love,ö she said. öEven though Iøm an amateur, I think I have a good feel for horses and can respond to them, and have a good feel for riding the course as I walked it and planned to. Iøve always struggled with using too much hand, but Iøm learningí more leg, less hands!ö

Birnie isnøt Jenniferøs first OTTB. She has had several in the past and has two others now, one that is just getting started in his training and another rehabbing from a back issue. Bernie is her go-to competition mount these days, though.

öI took a small break from riding before I got Birnie, so I am a little more chicken and intimidated now that Iøm older. Dressage is definitely fun with him because heøs a great mover and learns easily. Heøs super athletic when it comes to jumping, but he definitely needs to be ridden seriously and with intent, which is sometimes where I struggle these days. Our bond is getting stronger, and I think if we can spend some time this winter training in Florida that will help a lot.ö

While Jennifer doesnøt typically get too in-depth about researching her horsesøon-track careers, she is a fan of racing and attends the Kentucky Derby and Oaks every year.

öI enjoy seeing ønon-horseyø people getting into the fun of racing, but I am personally horrible at betting,ö she said. öI love that Thoroughbreds are athletic, trainable, brave and can be easily affordable for people to buy fresh off of the track. I love that people are looking for second careers for the horses that arenøt cut out for running.ö

THE DEETS:

Name: Lil Birnie (a.k.a. öBirnieö)

Born: March 1, 2006

Color: Chestnut

Sire: Sky Classic

Dam: Aaron's Time

Sale History: None

Race Record: 12-0-0-1

Race Earnings: \$5,991

If you have or know of a retired Thoroughbred with an interesting story to tell, we'd love to hear about it! Just email Jen Roytz (Jenlroytz@gmail.com) with the horse's Jockey Club name, background story, and a few photos.

Jen Roytz was the marketing and communications director at Three Chimneys Farm in Midway, Kentucky. She is a freelance writer and marketing and public relations consultant for various entities, both equine and non-equine. She can also still be found on the back of an OTTB most days.

*Contact Jen on **Facebook** and **Twitter**.*