

Kilby Brunner Deforest

Riding by Heart

Story & Photo credits: B. Ryan

There is an expression that goes like this—when you know something and really understand it, you memorize it and then you know it by heart.

Kilby Brunner Deforest is a 14-year-old pony-jumping, horse-loving Erin teenager who works with horses, competes and rides all year long. In doing so, Kilby has learned to ride by heart.

Kilby is also a champion, claiming a victory in the \$5,000 Royal Pony Jumper Final at the 96th (2018) Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto, Ontario. The top spots were decided in a two-horse jump-off between Kilby and Tatum Horan of Oakville, with Brunner Deforest taking the lead and finishing with a time of 27.88 seconds. More than 1,000 horses and ponies from around the world, compete for nearly one million dollars in prize money during the 10-day show.

“This is my fifth time at The Royal, (in the Pony Jumper Division) and it’s exciting to be here!” she said after accepting the championship title. Kilby was reserve champion in both 2016 and 2017. At the 2018 Royal, she competed on Beaverwoods Halo, a 14-year-old mare, owned by her mother Kirsten Brunner. While Kilby and Halo put all the pieces together for a win at the Royal, their connection took some effort.

“This is a new pony for me, I got her one year ago, and have been competing on her all summer,” she said. “She’s very fast and really good on the turns - Halo is very confident, and handled the noise at the Exhibition Coliseum very well. She is a complicated pony, and in the beginning of the season, we were trying other bits and a lot of different things,” she said. “But then, we realized that I just needed to learn to ride her - we went to a simple snaffle, and I got to know her and other than me telling her to “whoa”, Halo does it all.”

Kilby first visited the Royal when she was six months old, and started competing at age four in the Welsh Pony Walk Trot. She won the class that year. Kilby’s main coach is her mother, Kirsten Brunner, who owns and operates Beaverwood Farm in Hillburgh Ontario. However, during big competitions, Kirsten hand the reins to another professional, Shara Pava of Avhanwith Stable. Kirsten said it was a real gift that her 87-year old mother and the entire Brunner family were able to attend the Royal Show and watch as Kilby won the 2018 championship title. Kilby was also the 2018 circuit champion and won four out of five shows at the Angelstone Tournaments Jumper Classic. During a typical summer, Kilby competes in both Hunter and Pony Jumper divisions, throughout Ontario and in Carriage Driving in both

Canada and the United States. Kilby competes at Caledon Equestrian Park (A circuit), at Wesley Clover Park in Ottawa and at local shows with young ponies in training, including the Erin Fair, Brampton Fair and at Teen Ranch in Caledon.

When asked what she likes best about her horses, Kilby answered, “I just like to see them, and all of them are special for different reasons.” Her favourite horse movie when she was little was Spirit; the beautiful story of a wild, smart, determined and heart-strong young horse. Sounds like a match for Kilby.



Kilby Brunner Deforest with her 2018 Royal Winter Fair Championship ribbon



Kilby Brunner Deforest
with horses/on fence

Photo: Kim Martel



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