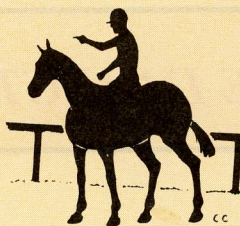


BETWEEN ROUNDS



... WITH DENNY EMERSON

Neil Ayer:

American Eventing's Driving Force

Leadership is a quality that eludes easy or exact definition. Always rare, it can transform the mundane into the exciting and the dissipated into the strong. In the recent past, American equestrian sports have had their share of respected leaders. Names like Whitney Stone, Bertalan de Nemethy and Alexander Mackay-Smith are obvious examples.

But American eventing had struggled along for years until one man came along and through the sheer force of his personality and drive transformed the sport. It is an instructive exercise to examine such a success story in an attempt to grasp the elusive essence that constitutes outstanding leadership.

The Wofford Cup is awarded annually by the U.S. Combined Training Association to the individual who has made the greatest long-term contribution to American eventing. It is symbolically appropriate that the first recipient of the trophy was Neil Ayer.

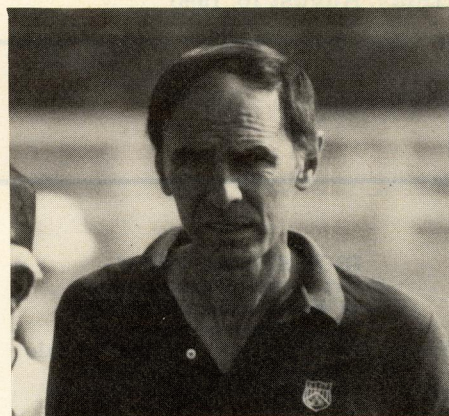
I can barely even imagine in what tenuous state eventing might now exist in the United States had it not been for Neil's vigorous intervention. Because so many of those presently involved with this sport have been attracted by its robust strength, they take for granted

that such vitality is normal. They should understand that much of what is good about today's eventing is the gift of one incredibly talented leader.

Merely to recount a litany of Neil's achievements, while striking and significant, misses the main point about Neil's leadership. He combines two often disparate talents: he is at once an inspired visionary and a determined doer. I have sat through endless boring board meetings, equine related and otherwise, while people nitpicked to death some good idea. Neil's style is quite the opposite. He doesn't think about the 20 little reasons why something should not be done if there is one big reason why it should be done. He sets out to do it, and then the pieces somehow always fall into place along the way.

I have never particularly considered Neil a one-hundred-percent law-abiding citizen. For him the issues usually are, "Is it fair? Is it right? Is it an essentially good thing?" If those answers are "yes" and if some rule happens to stand in the way, then too bad for the rule.

It's fascinating to watch Neil speak at any gathering. In a style reminiscent of John Kennedy, Neil can hold an audience spellbound, whether he is explaining



(John Strassburger Photo)

Denny Emerson

how to construct novice cross-country fences or conducting an official briefing at an international three-day event. His easy good humor and charm hide the steel determination to do things efficiently and well.

Neil tends to cut through the clutter and make it happen. He first brought international three-day eventing to America at his Ledyard Farm (Mass.) event in 1973. He led the United States Combined Training Association for 11 years, from 1971 to 1982, and was personally responsible for many of the changes that increased that association's membership from 500 to 6,000, a growth of 1,200 percent. As America's leading course designer for many years, Neil built the 1984 Olympic cross-country the 1986 World Championship course in Australia.

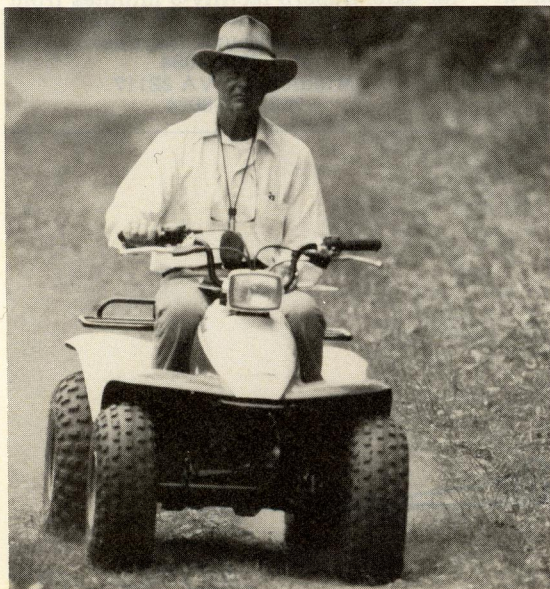
But more important than all his specific accomplishments, Neil's greatest contribution is that to most of the world's event population Neil Ayer is the spokesman for American eventing. For 20 years he has fulfilled that role with grace and charm and efficiency and style. He more than anyone makes our sport what it is today.

This passage by W.H. Murray from the book *Everest - The West Ridge* epitomizes the qualities Neil brings to American eventing: "Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:

Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.

Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Although Neil Ayer is currently undergoing therapy for cancer, he plans to organize the Ledyard Farm Three-Day Event and Horse Trials, Wenham, Mass., Oct. 4-7.)



Neil Ayer in action.

(Mary Phelps Photo)