

# RIDING STARTS

## Young Para-Dressage Athlete, Sydney Collier, Takes the "Dis" Out of Disabled

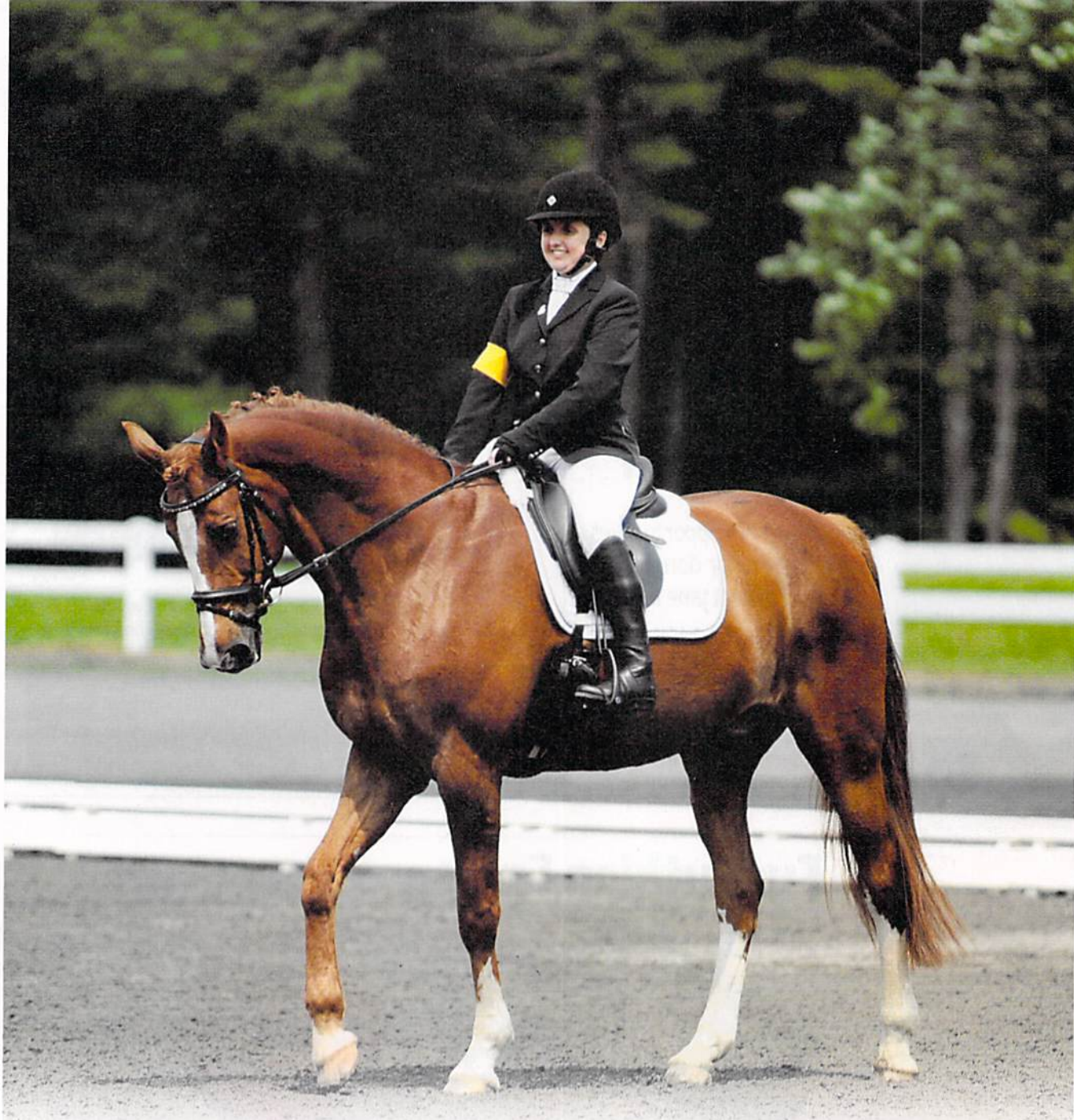
**E**n route to the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) para-equestrian dressage jog at the 2013 Adequan® Global Dressage Festival in Wellington, FL, a familiar entourage was following its high-performance rider and horse. Young United States para-equestrian, Sydney Collier, from Ann Arbor, MI, rolled up to the jog with her family by her side. Shadowed from the bright Florida sunshine by her new black Hanoverian, Wentworth, led by Wes Dunham, the moment could not have felt more complete.

After a successful 2011 international show season, and the honor of the youngest competitor to ever qualify for a United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) Para-Equestrian Dressage National Championship, the 15-year-old, Grade 1b rider was ready to take the 2013-2014 show season to a new level.

In 2012, Sydney was too young to qualify for the Paralympic Team, making the upcoming 2014 Alltech® FEI World Equestrian Games™ in Normandy, France, her first U.S. team opportunity.

Sydney has lived her entire life overcoming obstacles, setting goals, and working hard to get there. At age seven, she was diagnosed with the rare congenital disorder, Wyburn-Mason Syndrome. The untreatable disorder can cause brain hemorrhaging, stroke, paralysis, and even death. With a rare disorder at a young age, Sydney has been in and out of the hospital often. She noted, "I have had to take on a lot more than the average person has by my age. That is what makes me, me, and makes me a strong and persevering person." While Sydney was in the hospital, her mother, Anna Collier, always remembers Sydney focusing on





her riding. She was talking about seeing her horse, studying riding, and setting goals for her next step as an equestrian. One of those plans was to watch the World Equestrian Games in 2010.

After meeting the late Paralympian, Jonathan Wentz, at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, Sydney was influenced and then mentored by him. His determination and love for para-equestrian dressage gave Sydney the desire to achieve those same goals. The 2011 calendar year was a fast track through the discipline of dressage, and the young equestrian learned quickly. She was naturally talented as an athlete and excelled on her own horse and borrowed mounts. A year of catch-riding at international shows around the country, clinics, and changes to her para-dressage aids prepared Sydney for working with accomplished trainer, Wes Dunham, out of Woodstock Stables in Millbrook, NY.

A new trainer, a new program, and an FEI horse to

match the talented equestrian, completed the dream team for Sydney's journey to the 2014 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. For Sydney though, the adventure is also about enjoying the sport she loves, providing good sportsmanship, leading by example, and promoting the sport to a younger generation and to physically-disabled peers.

Sydney's motto is, "Take the 'Dis' Out of Disabled," and she lives by the hope that she can influence others with her actions. Sydney commented, "I really want to make it so having a disability isn't seen as so different. I want society to see other people with disabilities and see that these people have great personalities and should be approached."

In 2014, Sydney Collier will be an athlete to watch on the international equestrian scene. An announcer once noted that the term "entourage" is used for the support team behind riders of the highest caliber. Look out for Sydney and her entourage in the upcoming months. 