

▶ Little Tom: An Unexpected Horse Of A Lifetime

Patricia Hennessy didn't go out looking for a winning adult amateur jumper more than 10 years ago when Little Tom came into her life. In fact, she wasn't really looking for a horse at all.

But more than a decade later, Hennessy and Little Tom—now 20—enjoy a partnership that includes blue ribbons from all the best shows—and a win in the \$10,000 Adult Amateur Jumper Classic at the Gold Cup.

“He's been such an amazing and consistent horse. Every day we get to go out, we're lucky. As long as he wants to keep doing it, we will. If he says 'no,' he'll be done showing. But he definitely is still enjoying it!” Hennessy said.

They've won at Devon (Pa.), the Winter Equestrian Festival (Fla.), the Pennsylvania National and other major venues, but their competitors might be surprised at Little Tom's purchase price and Hennessy's budget. Hennessy and her husband, Kevin, run Nobody's Business Horse Transportation out of Kinterville, Pa., and they traded a few free shippings and some cash for Little Tom in 2005.

“He cost less than the commission of most of these other horses,” Hennessy noted. “He's not a six-figure horse, not even close, but he's such a game horse, and he's so much fun. I took him to re-sell him, but nobody was interested. He's very strong and nobody wanted him. He was always a fast horse, but he wasn't very careful when we started showing. He'd go so fast that he couldn't get his legs out of the way.”

But as Hennessy trained Little Tom, a Connemara-Thoroughbred cross by Dynamite, they started winning in the adult division. “He started winning prize money back, so I could go to the next show,” she said. “I've had great help along the way. I've been in the business for over 30 years, and so many people have helped along the way. It's a nice camaraderie in this division.”

Little Tom lives at Chris Kappler's farm in Flemington, N.J., and Hennessy rides with Kappler, though at the shows it's often just her and Kevin back in the barn and at the ring. She's worked out a plan to help make it affordable on her budget. “I get there in the afternoons, and they will have turned him out and done his stall,” she said.

“When I get there, I groom him and ride him and put him away and feed him. Chris has been wonderful, because it's really out of my realm to be doing this, but he allows me to do it because he's so consistent with winning prize money. That lets me go to the next show,” she said.

Hennessy knows Little Tom is in the twilight of his career. “He doesn't show very much, and some shows we go to I'll only do one class. I need more practice than he does! He's my only horse, so I try to save him,” she said.



Patricia Hennessy admits that showing at the top East Coast shows is a bit “beyond her realm” financially, but when Little Tom wins as much as he does, including the \$10,000 Adult Amateur Classic at the American Gold Cup, she's able to make it work.

But she's not actively on the hunt for a replacement.

“It's not in the cards right now,” she said. “Even if I got a young horse, it's a lot of money just to stay in the sport and go to the quality shows. I think that's important for the young horses, too, that you're not introducing them to questionable courses. But then again, never say never! It came out of the blue that I got him.”