

Riding Solo

JESSICA
SPRINGSTEEN
MUSES ON
LIFE AS A
PRO SHOW
JUMPER AND
HER NEW
ROLE AS
A GUCCI
EQUESTRIAN
AMBASSADOR

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAVID

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In most spheres, it's her last name that garners attention. The only daughter of Bruce Springsteen and his wife and band mate, Patti Scialfa, Jessica Springsteen grew up in—where else?—New Jersey, surrounded by rock 'n' roll royalty but very much out of the public eye. It was during this time, ensconced in the lush greenery of Colts Neck, that Jessica fostered her own talents as a world-class show jumper. Now, with a slew of national and international achievements under her belt and a bright Olympic future ahead, Jessica is no longer just The Boss's daughter—she's Jessica, fierce professional equestrian.

"It's funny because I'm not a competitive person," she says. "But once I'm in the ring, it just kind of clicks. There's so much I love about it."

That competitive fire first caught flame at age 4. "My mom had always wanted to ride when she was younger," she says. "When we moved to New Jersey, we moved to a farm and we got some horses and she started taking lessons. So when I saw her doing it, I immediately wanted to do it as well."

From the start, Jessica rode at the Beacon Hill Show Stables and progressed under the guidance of trainer Stacia Madden. "I knew early on that if she wanted to stick with it that she was going to have what it took," says Madden, who worked with Jessica throughout her junior career. "Her style is very natural. Her style is soft and very, very competitive. I think that is the mix [that] makes horses like her. ... The horses become a big believer in her, and when they're a believer in her then she becomes a believer in them and the package just works."

Jessica, who last month turned 23 and graduated from Duke University, grew up competing on the junior equestrian circuit, which included annual visits to Wellington, where her family owns a home. As a junior rider, she participated in hunter seat





Some of Jessica's success can be attributed to her horses. "I really like to have a horse I can trust," she says. "It's nice to go in knowing that your horse is there with you—you can trust him, he's brave and he wants to do it as well."

equitation, a division judged on the ability and style of the rider, in addition to show jumping. Since turning professional, she's decided to focus solely on jumping. "It was tough because showing in Wellington, everything's going on the same day. So it would be running from ring to ring, jumpers to hunters and equitation, kind of having to change mindsets. It's nice now to just focus on jumping."

And that focus has paid off. In 2012 she participated in the Olympic trials and, though she didn't make the team, received valuable experience and plans to try out for the 2016 games in Rio de Janeiro.

"I think it's so hard moving up. When I was a junior, especially my last couple of years, you get to know it so well, it's easy," she says. "It's not easy to win ever, but you get the routine, you're comfortable, it's pretty easy for you. And then when you move up and start competing against, really, the best riders in the world who have been to the Olympics four or five times, it's tough. You're not going to win right away; you're not going to win for a few years. You just have to keep pushing and keep working really hard and have faith in yourself."

Jessica, who describes herself as laid back, plans to pursue riding full time now that she has completed her bachelor's degree. She currently trains with Olympian Laura Kraut and feels as if her skills are finally on par with her aspirations. Just this past year, she saw her efforts pay off with a series of wins and accolades. "Last January is when it all started coming together and I was producing clear rounds and just being much more consistent," she says. "I felt like [2014] was really a breakthrough year for me."

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Out of the ring, Jessica forges personal relationships with her horses. "No matter what, when you get to the barn, they're always excited to see you."

In April, Jessica was awarded the 2014 Maxine Beard Award by the United States Equestrian Team Foundation in recognition of her competitive record and potential. In August, she was named to the U.S. Show Jumping Team for the Dublin Horse Show, where she won the Anglesea Stakes. In September, she captured her first Grand Prix win at the prestigious American Gold Cup. As of late November, she was ranked seventh on the U.S. Equestrian Federation's list of show-jumping riders.

Another title she obtained in 2014: Gucci's new equestrian ambassador. Jessica is in good company—Charlotte Casiraghi, the granddaughter of Grace Kelly and fifth in line to the throne of Monaco, and Australian Olympian Edwina Tops-Alexander are also representatives for the brand.

"It's been amazing," Jessica says of her time with Gucci. "When I first went to Europe, I remember seeing Edwina and Charlotte riding their horses around with all the Gucci saddle pads, and I really admired them so much. So to now be an equestrian ambassador is just so exciting. I couldn't be happier."

"Jessica is a great horsewoman, with a very exciting and positive riding style," Frida Giannini, Gucci's creative director, says in a statement. To celebrate the partnership, Giannini created an equestrian collection specifically for Jessica. "[She] brings the elegant, dynamic spirit of Gucci alive, and I have

ensured that the design of this new wardrobe provides her with pieces that manage to be both technically correct and stylish." In addition to the classic Gucci crest, the shirts featured in the collection are personalized with her initials: JRS.

Growing up in the equestrian world, Jessica's closet wasn't filled with sophisticated designer threads but rather casual riding garb. "When I was younger, we would just wear polo shirts and riding pants every day," she says. After entering college, she began experimenting with fashion and looked to her mother's style for guidance. "My mom has always been really into [fashion] and has really great style, so she's kind of influenced me a lot as well," she says.

For Jessica, her partnership with the brand represents a new phase in her development as a rider and as an independent young woman. "I think [Gucci] represents a really strong and confident woman, and those are two qualities you need as an equestrian as well," she says.

As she continues to gain confidence in her riding and as an individual, one thing's for certain: Her well-known parents will be cheering her on every step of the way.

"Both my parents come to as many shows as they can. They've gotten really into it," she says. "It's important, I think, in any professional sport to have your family behind you and supporting you. They've always been huge supporters." □



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