

1999 Rodney Jenkins



Rodney Jenkins dominated the American show ring in the 1960s, '70s and through most of the '80s, and retired as the winningest rider in the history of U.S. show jumping. The Virginian-born son of a famous horseman-huntsman, Jenkins grew up in the saddle and soon earned recognition as a "natural horseman" who could ride just about any horse and get it to perform at its best.

Jenkins accumulated more than 70 grand prix victories in his illustrious career, and his longevity is what separates him from many other great equestrians.

He joked that even though he'd won more grand prix than anyone, that he'd also lost more than anyone (more than 300).

In 1987, after three decades in the ring, Jenkins had his best year ever—he won the American Grandprix Association's Rider of the Year award and won two Silver Medals at the Pan American Games on Czar in Indianapolis. Jenkins also received the 1987 AHSA Horseman of the Year award.

Jenkins said riding for the USET on the Pan Am team was an experience he'd remember always. "Sure there was a lot of pressure, but if you've been showing for 30-odd years like I have, it's good to have that lift again," he said then. "All the money I've won with horses, these two pieces of silver mean as much as all the money."

Jenkins, who won many of the country's most prestigious Grand Prix classes multiple times (including the American Gold Cup five times, Presidents Cup three times and the National Horse Show Grand Prix three times), rode such stars as Idle Dice, Gustavus, Playback, Aerobic, Coastline, Number One Spy, Czar and The Natural. Throughout the years, he never was one to take credit for all he'd done. "The horse makes the rider—I don't care how good you are," he once said. "My philosophy is people don't make the horse. They manage the horse and direct the horse, but the horse makes the people."

Jenkins was also a master in the hunter ring, especially in the 1960s. In the early '70s when Grand Prix show jumping was in its infancy, Jenkins switched focus and concentrated on jumpers. In the late '80s he again changed his focus, this time to race horses, first steeplechasers and then flat horses.

Although Jenkins rode primarily in U.S. events, he did excel internationally as well. In addition to his double Silver performance at the Pan American Games, he also finished 8th in the 1974 World Championships at Hickstead on Idle Dice and 6th in the 1980 World Cup Final at Baltimore on Third Man. In all, he rode on sixteen Nations' Cup teams between 1973-1987, helping his team win ten of them.

