

Chantal Sutherland: on Circuits & Jockeys

By Kimberly A. Rinker



Undisputedly one of the top jockeys riding in North America today, and a source of inspiration to women in all equine disciplines, Chantal Sutherland also became familiar to thousands of non-racing fans when she was featured in the *Animal Planet* cable series "Jockeys" for the past two years.

Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, the 33-year-old began her riding career in 2000, and has since scored over 500-plus victories at a host of tracks throughout North America. Named one of *People* magazine's 100 most beautiful people in 2006, Chantal has her own line of perfume and beauty products, and has been featured in *Vogue* magazine, profiled by renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz.

At five feet, two inches and 105 pounds, Chantal is poised and professional when perched atop a 1,200 thoroughbred. In person, she's just as poised and professional, and yet also as affable and easy to talk to as the girl next door.

The Circuits

In 2009, Chantal rode the winners of over \$7.5 million and sat second in the Woodbine jockey standings. Just as in

2008, she spent most of her time on the Ontario and southern California circuits, but did don silks at other venues as well.

"Each track has its own unique kind of thing going on," she offered. "Los Angeles has a really laid back kind of atmosphere, but all the jockeys are very intensive in their work ethic and in being health conscious. They're always working out and training hard, and all have a very positive attitude, and the atmosphere there in general is extremely positive. It's very casual and relaxed, and you can come to the track in your jogging outfit if you want."

In New York, Chantal said the atmosphere is quite different.

"New York is way more traditional, it's a little cliquy, and you have to dress well," she advised. "Everyone there is wearing suits and people pay attention to how you're dressed. It's a bit more pretentious, and it's important who you're seen talking to and who you're

seen with."

Although she's ridden sparingly in the Midwest, Chantal says she definitely enjoys the atmosphere, especially in Kentucky.

"I didn't really spend a lot of time in the Midwest, but at Keeneland, the attitude of the people is traditional and infectious, and very different from either of the coasts. It has its own unique click, but it's really cool there because everyone is into horses.

"I mean, everywhere you go in Kentucky, people are into horses and they're very knowledgeable," she added. "They eat and drink horses, which is very cool. Whereas if you go into downtown Toronto, a lot of people don't even know that Woodbine exists."



Chantal says that one of the major differences between riding in Ontario and elsewhere in North America is the length of the race meetings.

"Woodbine is a meet that stays together for a long time, so as a jockey colony we don't get to hang out as much or spend a lot of time together away from the track," she admitted. "We don't get to have that real family atmosphere here. Some of the old veterans have



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that, because they've been together for such a long time.

"I think the difference is that most of us have homes here, and live here for a good part of the year because Woodbine is a long meet," Chantal added. "We don't have that tight family atmosphere because the jockeys go home after the races and don't spend as much time together as we might if we were all on the road together somewhere else."

Chantal said racing at other venues outside her home base allows her to forge close friendships with her fellow riders.

"When the jockeys are on the move and traveling from meet to meet, there's a bigger camaraderie that exists because everybody stays at each other's houses, or a lot of the guys get places together," she explained. "Being on the road actually makes the jockey colony a lot tighter, a lot more close."

The Show

"I think the show is great," Chantal said. "It's attracted new owners for me and helped to establish me a little more in the United States, which is great because they're able to see how hard I work and how dedicated everyone in this business is to the horses. They see our work ethics—that we don't just work in the morning—that we're here all day.

"People could also see the grooms and the life on the backside and what jockeys face on a daily basis," she continued. "The show proved how much everyone loves the horses, how much we care and a nice side racing.

"Hopefully, this program has targeted a whole new generation of people who otherwise wouldn't know much about horse racing," Chantal stressed. "I think it's important that we—the racing community—target a whole new group of people outside the track."

Chantal said that being followed daily by a camera crew, while initially intrusive, eventually became routine.

"It's really weird to have people filming you every day," she acknowledged. "And what's even weirder is when you start to forget people are there filming you. That's a little scary!" she laughed.

"So much of what is filmed doesn't get on the show and after a while you start to think, 'well, that's not going to get on the show, we'll shoot something else.' You get so used to it, though, when you film so much. I remember at one point, nothing we were filming was getting on. Then later, when you see the show, you think 'I wonder why this didn't get on and the other stuff did?'"

"For instance, one segment I look like a cry baby a little bit, and I was

wondering 'do I really cry that much?' It was weird to see, but that was pretty accurate."

Chantal said she could only recall one instance where she was less than pleased with a segment within "Jockeys."

"It's becomes a strange thing when they can't hear us talking and then they put in sub-titles," she said. "For one segment I was in the gate and they put in sub-titles that read 'God help me please.'"

"I don't say that," Chantal stressed. "I would never say that and I thought it made me look silly. I don't know what they heard but I don't talk to myself in the gate."

"Otherwise, the show is pretty accurate," she acknowledged. "Some of the guys have moments now and then, but we all do. Corey (Nakatani) got a little carried away at one point, but actually he's a really nice guy. There isn't much staging to the show, there's no faking fights or anything else, pretty much everything is real."

"Jockeys" also chronicled the relationship between Chantal and fellow jockey and former boyfriend Mike Smith.

"Everything between Mike and I was real," Chantal noted. "The show was very taxing and stressful on us and our relationship, and it resulted in us in not seeing one another anymore. We were asking questions that might have been a little premature and it was a bummer that things didn't work out."

Chantal recently returned to southern California, competing at Santa Anita for the 2009-2010 winter meet.

