



SHANNON RITTER

Born: July 2, 1964 in St. Paul, Minn.

Family: Single

Shannon Ritter has, as they say, paid her dues and now she's reaping some of the benefits, thanks to her biggest racing victory – the Grade III, \$800,000 Sunland Derby with the WinStar Farm-owned Endorsement.

The 45-year-old native Minnesotan has been around horses most of her life, beginning with her Palomino for pleasure riding as a youngster. Following graduation from high school in 1982, Ritter went off to Hawkeye Riding School in Indiana where she figured to hone skills that would lead her to race-riding. Instead the school placed her in a job at Windward Farm in Mundelein, Ill.

She worked there for three years, galloping horses and learning all the other things that go with being a good horsewoman. At that time – 1985 – she went to Southern California where she met trainer Kathy Hutchison, who later took back her family name – Walsh – following a divorce. Ritter joined the Hutchison barn at Canterbury Downs, galloping horses for her for three years.

Finally, Ritter reached her original goal of riding races at Canterbury, beginning in 1988. She rode for eight years and particularly successful at Portland Meadows in Oregon, where she finished third among jockeys in her first year there and was leading rider during the 1990-91 season. She quit riding competitively in 1997 and went to work for trainer Elliott Walden.

It was with Walden that Ritter was exposed to such fine runners as Distorted Humor, Menifee, Ecton Park, Pleasant Temper and classic winner Victory Gallop, whom she galloped and tended to through his 3-year-old season, highlighted by a spectacular come-from-behind victory in the 1998 Belmont Stakes, snatching Triple Crown immortality from Kentucky Derby-Preakness winner Real Quiet.

She then became Walden's assistant and took a string of horses to Fair Grounds in New Orleans and to Arlington Park. When Walden gave up his training duties to become WinStar Farm's vice president and racing manager, his horses were parceled out and Ritter was the beneficiary of some, setting her up for a stable of her own.

She's posted good records at Arlington Park, Hawthorne and Louisiana Downs. Naturally she gives Walden much credit for getting her started on her own, with a big assist, also, from WinStar. Ritter also has horses for other owners.

Part of her training regimen requires her to maintain her riding weight of 110 pounds. That allows her to get on her horses during training hours to gallop or breeze them and she believes that gives her an edge on knowing how her horses are doing.