

Scott Cole oversees  
the start of a race.





Robin Riesenbeck, Scott Cole, Dale Mallory, and Colby Lavergne head to the track prior to the day's first race.

# FABULOUS FOURSOME



Keeneland outriders  
and their mounts  
ensure safety of  
horses and riders

By Liane Crossley | Photos by Z

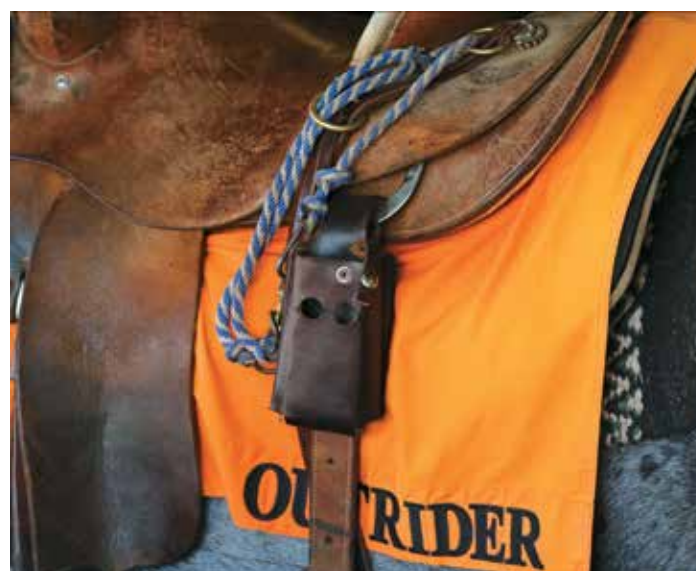




Robin Riesenbeck and her horse Sunny alertly await as runners approach the gate.

**T**he job of a Keeneland outrider is simple until it is not. The easy portion includes riding before Keeneland's stylish racing fans on picture-perfect afternoons and mingling with horsemen during tranquil morning training hours. The not-so-easy segments can be as mundane as stable chores in the frosty off-season dawn or as crucial as preventing a catastrophe.

Keeneland outrider Robin Riesenbeck vividly recalls a particularly dramatic morning that might have ended in disaster without her assistance. An out-of-control rider was careening around the track without reins after his horse's bridle had broken. Riesenbeck and her horse zoomed alongside and grabbed a leather remnant on the Thoroughbred's head and



An outrider's saddle is fitted with extra equipment that comes in handy if a horse gets loose.



Outriders are at the ready to catch loose horses in the mornings and during afternoon racing.

eased the terrified pair to a halt.

“When we stopped, the rider jumped off and kissed the ground,” she said.

The incident illustrates the importance of outriders — track employees loosely defined as mounted safety officers or guardians who oversee racing and training. Unlike the “pony riders,” who are paid by trainers to accompany Thoroughbreds during post parades, outriders draw their pay from Keeneland. They are readily recognizable in their English saddles, high boots, and white breeches in the afternoons and by their bright orange saddle towels in the mornings.

Riesenbeck’s Keeneland teammates are Scott Cole, Colby Lavergne, and Dale Mallory, who all have stories of moments when their roles went from ordinary to extraordinary.

Lavergne’s proficiency was showcased on Keeneland’s training track this past spring. A Thoroughbred became entangled in its bridle and saddle after falling and losing the rider. The



Colby Lavergne and Dale Mallory head back to their post when races conclude.

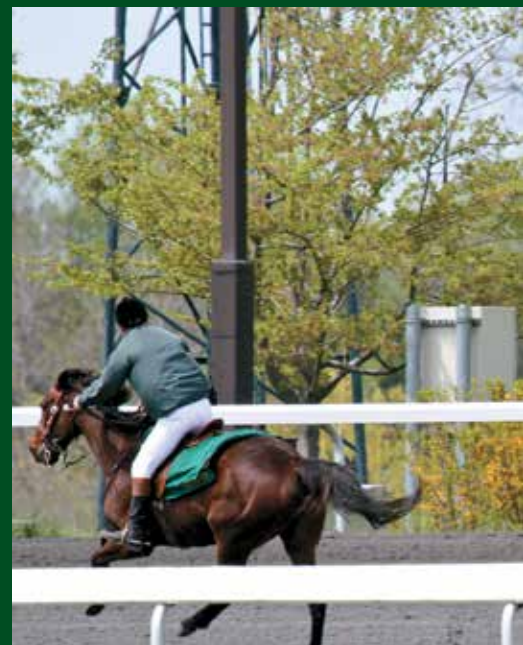


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**Outriders say they remember dramatic incidences. Here, a racehorse speeds down the stretch without its bridle. But quick thinking on the part of outriders ensures the horse is headed, slowed, and ultimately caught.**

panicked animal was running in tight circles, lashing out, when Lavergne and his trusty buckskin Mouse quickly responded.

“Thank God I was using Mouse that day because if I wasn’t, that horse might still be bucking,” Lavergne said.

“When horses are scared, they fight, and that horse was trying to kick and bite us.”

With their total confidence in each other, man and beast were able to pin the frantic Thoroughbred against the rail, and Lavergne placed a strap on its neck so nearby horsemen could detach the tangled equipment.

The episode highlights the skills, instinct, and fearlessness necessary for the Keeneland outriders, who unknowingly honed their techniques as youngsters while having fun aboard small steeds. They expanded that foundation by schooling young Thoroughbreds at farms and piloting experienced racers at the track. Regardless of their specific

backgrounds, their talent is only as good as the horses they sit on, so outriders are selective about the four-legged partners they provide for themselves.

## Right horse for the job

Outriders recruit horses that possess a delicate blend of calmness and quickness. They generally own at least two working mounts at any given time with a prospect or two likely waiting on the sidelines. Any breed is acceptable, and the Keeneland outriders’ team consists of Thoroughbreds and American Quarter Horses.

Race goers are familiar with Cole’s 9-year-old golden gelding, who is American Quarter Horse Association-registered as Sixshootin-gunslinger but is known as Slinger. His gentle nature makes him a favorite of fans, who delight in petting him and taking pictures between races.

“

Some take it all in stride and others don’t because it is hard to simulate beforehand the sights and sounds of all the horses around them.”

—SCOTT COLE ON  
OUTRIDER HORSES



Cole purchased Slinger when he was just a few months old. When he grew up, Cole began preparing him for his future role.

"I seem to get horses that have not been on the track, and they seem easier to keep mellow," Cole said. "But former racehorses already know what is going on, so their transition is usually smoother."

Early lessons mimic situations an upstart will encounter at the track. Cole taught Slinger by leading an experienced horse beside him from both sides and directing him to riderless horses in a small pasture.

Cole then cautiously introduces newbies to the racetrack routine by testing them during sessions without excessive equine traffic. The next phase is walking and trotting alongside

the racehorses.

"Some take it all in stride and others don't because it is hard to simulate beforehand the sights and sounds of all the horses around them," he said.

If the horse eventually passes the morning tests, Cole will loan him to a friend for pre-race activities while he concentrates on leading the post parade. If the rookie does not adapt to the crowds' clamor or the commotion at the starting gate within a few days, Cole will relegate the animal to morning work only.

Mallory's equine colleague is Ricky Bobby, a one-time winner under his official racing name A Mans Man. The dark bay is speedy enough to chase down a runaway Thoroughbred yet docile enough for children to pet while he awaits the next race.



Cleaning their horses' stalls is among the routine chores for Scott Cole and his colleagues.



# FABULOUS FOURSOME

"We have followers who come to see us every year," Mallory said. "It means so much to me to know that meeting Ricky Bobby keeps them interested in Thoroughbred racing."

One of Riesenbeck's steeds is a white-faced Thoroughbred who goes by his actual name of Money. She recognized him as an untapped talent when he was being conditioned for a racing career. When his connections deemed him unable to race because of a minor injury, they channeled him to Riesenbeck.

"I first saw him when he was a 2-year-old," she said. "He was pretty, but more than that, he had a laid-back attitude."

Money's transition began with months of R & R in a field prior to remedial lessons under saddle. Soon, Riesenbeck was hauling him to horse shows and trail outings.



Outrider Colby Lavergne, on his horse Mouse, gives his son Cooper some early exposure to life in the saddle.

When Money returned to the track, he instinctively understood his new role except for one idiosyncrasy that keeps him away from the afternoon shift.

"He is fine with the crowds, but he gets nervous in the confinement of the tunnel that goes to the track," she said.

Riesenbeck's choice for race days is the palomino American Quarter Horse Sunny, who is especially adept at selfie posing with visitors.

## Socializing and problem solving

The Keeneland outriders start their

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Fans of all ages enjoy meeting the outriders' mounts.

“

We react as quickly as we can to get everything under control and back to normal again.”

—SCOTT COLE

days before sunrise by cleaning and saddling their mounts so they can open the track at 5:30 a.m. (about an hour later in winter). When the first fleet of racehorses arrives, the outriders meander around a full circuit to survey the track surface and look for stray objects like lost horseshoes. Then they will park along an outside rail to view the goings-on while chatting with trainers and others overseeing the Thoroughbreds. The social scene on horseback can change in an instant.

Some problems have simple solutions, such as an outrider easing next to a nervous Thoroughbred seeking a temporary four-legged friend. Other situations involving injury to horse or rider require the on-site team of first responders to spring into action.

At the first sign of major trouble, an outrider triggers an alarm and flashing lights to warn other riders to take extra caution. In most cases the situation is a riderless horse that might be zipping at full speed or just strolling aimlessly. In either case the outriders will gain control of the runaway by riding alongside and easing the animal to a halt.

If the rider is injured, the medical team and ambulance are dispatched to the scene from their post only yards from



Outrider Robin Riesenbeck's mount Sunny enjoys the attention.



# FABULOUS FOURSOME



During training hours outrider Robin Riesenbeck is positioned along the rail and ready to gallop into action if necessary.

the track entrance. A sophisticated equine ambulance driven by an expert horseman is at the ready if needed.

Most mornings conclude with no problems when the track closes at 10 a.m., but the work is far from over for the outriders. Daily chores include cleaning stalls and tack and bathing and feeding their mounts.

During the racing season they have minimal time to complete those tasks plus change clothes and grab lunch before they are due in the saddling area 30 minutes before the first race. The long days stretch into evening, especially on major event days when the final race is contested around 7 p.m.

"Some people might think our job is easy because they see us sitting there and talking, but really we are being paid to be there if something goes wrong," Cole said. "That is when we really earn our money. We react as quickly as we can to get everything under control and back to normal again." **KM**



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