

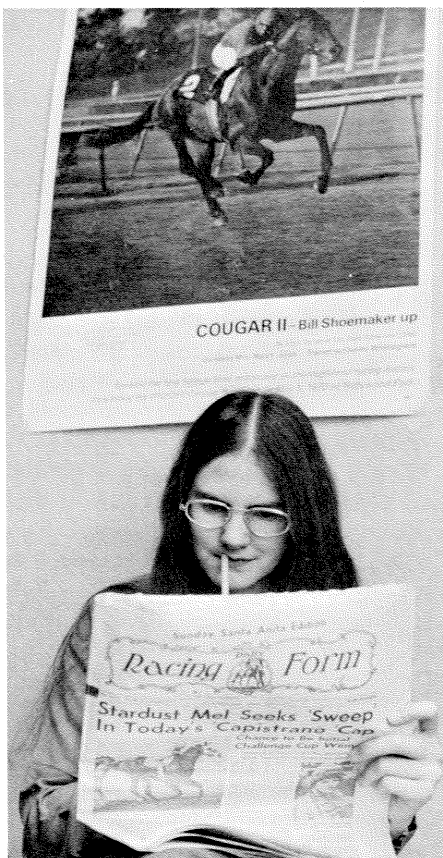
Riding Her Hobbyhorse

Ann Clemmens makes the most of handicapping

If you think the word “handicap” refers only to a disability, you haven’t met Ann Clemmens. Handicap is what she does before she goes out to the race track.

What’s a nice Caltech senior like Ann doing at places like Hollywood Park and Santa Anita? Well, first of all, she’s enjoying herself. Second, she’s extending her already extensive knowledge of the abilities of thoroughbred horses. And third, she’s thinking about going into the racing business.

Ann can’t remember a time when she wasn’t fascinated by horses, though she’s never actually owned one. But she’s ridden them, drawn pictures of them, and read and written about them since she was a child. For five years during her teens she was a camper and counselor-trainee at a summer camp, and each year one particular horse was assigned to her. The assignment included not only the privilege of riding the horse but the duty of taking com-



plete care of it. For Ann, the duty was a pleasure too.

She thinks she’s read every story about horses ever written, and the “Black Stallion” series by Walter Farley inspired her to try her own hand at writing similar novels. Most of them, she says ruefully, never got past chapter one.

This isn’t to say that Ann hasn’t ever finished writing a book. A couple of years ago she took a brief leave from Caltech and wrote a 95-page-long manuscript that recaps the major blood lines of American thoroughbreds. She visualized it as a sort of paperback reference work for horse fanciers, but so far she hasn’t found a publisher with the same vision. She now has another, much longer, book ready for final typing. It groups winners of races between 1925 and 1975 by the female line, and is really an extension of the racing classic *Matriarchy of the American Turf, 1875-1925*. In the summer of 1974 she worked for the magazine *The Thoroughbred of California*.

It’s hard to tell whether the writing, the statistics, or the horses themselves interest Ann most. She enjoys them all. But she didn’t actually see a real horse race until five years ago—on July 4, 1970. Watching the races and reading her first *Racing Form* were about equally exciting that day. The mind-boggling thing about the *Racing Form* was how it opened her eyes to the number of tracks there are in the country and how many races are run in addition to the giants that everybody hears about.

The *Racing Form’s* performance statistics also started Ann doing her own handicapping—adding in her own judgment and intuition. She’s aware that her consuming interest in equine blood lines makes her less than objective when a horse by a good stallion is running. But, she says, “handicapping isn’t just a matter of numbers. You have to look at the horse, the company he’s been keeping, and the class of race he’s been entered in, as well as how he’s been performing.”

How much blood lines have to do with human performance may be debatable, but the fact that Ann’s father and three brothers are engineers may have influenced her choice of colleges. (Proximity to Santa Anita also no doubt enhanced Caltech’s charm.) Her BS will be in math, and she hopes to do graduate work in statistics. She’s applied to several graduate schools, including the universities of Kentucky and Rochester. Kentucky is in horse country, of course, and Rochester isn’t. But the Eastman School of Music is there, and that leads to a consideration of Ann’s heritage in the matriarchal line. Her mother is an accomplished musician, and Ann plays both violin and piano and is a member of Caltech’s Women’s Glee Club. It’s a little harder to account for the two letters she’s won in fencing, but it all adds up to a girl with a lot more interests than horses.

Incidentally, how’s her handicapping performance record? Well, she’s not getting rich on her winnings. She’s used her own money to bet only twice in her life, and she’s down a dime. □