



## **RIDER SPOTLIGHT: MELISSA AND DARRELL VAUGHEN**



**Melissa Vaughn**

**Photo by Meghan Benge Photography**

**Melissa and Darrell Vaughn are familiar names and faces in Aiken. Both of them were born into horse families and grew up very immersed in both the business and horse management sides of the industry.**

**Melissa's grandmother started a girl's riding camp in the 1960s called Kingsbury Hill. Her parents eventually took over the riding programs and farm management in the 90s. Her parents had met at Huntington Farm in Vermont where her mom was the breeding manager and was riding with Denny Emerson at the upper levels of eventing. Melissa shared, "My mom took over as director of the camp and I followed in her footsteps. I grew up eventing and helping run a large facility that hosted camps and USEA events. Growing up in Area 1 eventing was most of my childhood riding, but I always loved the dressage. I made the switch to dressage because I enjoyed the focus on making the horses better in their body. Truthfully I was not brave enough for the upper levels of eventing but also enjoyed being competitive and developing horses. After a bad injury, the switch came easy and I love the dressage focus and don't miss the jumping or course walking LOL."**

**Meanwhile, Darrell grew up with a family that rode primarily in the Hunters and Equitation. His mother was a Hunter and Equitation Trainer and his sister was also successful in the hunters/EQ as a teenager under his mother's tutelage. His father was also a horseman and rode western. He worked with horses on the weekends desensitizing them and doing lots of ground work. Darrell didn't start riding until he was fourteen and instead focused on lots of other sports growing up. These included wrestling and football. He especially loved learning martial arts. Darrell shared, "I believe these sports gave me good timing, balance and fitness to quickly step into riding. Of course, I was working with horses in the barn since I was very young, which gave me a great deal of understanding of how kind they are. My mother gave me a green six-year-old thoroughbred and said here's your equitation horse, let's see what you can do with it. Well, this was the beginning of my long journey to**



**learning to hear what Horses had to say, and then finding ways to explain to them that I wanted to be their partner and not their boss. I have enjoyed doing many different disciplines ranging from Jumpers to Cutting and Sorting. They all require respect and understanding of the horses and that is the part that I enjoy teaching and the foundation to my decades with horses."**



**Darrell Vaughn**

**The Vaughns own and operate Vaughn Equestrian as well as manage The Stable On The Woods for owner Mike Rubin. They bought their farm in June of 2014 and have worked at TSOTW since 2004. Vaughn Equestrian is more of a training and dressage focus. The couple shared, "After years of running TSOTW and watching Aiken's continued growth, it was evident we needed to invest in our long-**

term future. We always had high demand for board and training so we made the leap in 2014 to buy our own farm. We had a lot of work to do to fix it up to our vision. In 2023 we had the opportunity to expand and purchase the farm next door. We have slowly expanded and tried to improve the facilities each year. We believe in cross training, that horses need variety. Our dressage horses go to the track at Jumping Branch to do fitness work, we do cavelettis and rails and go hacking. It's important to keep them happy in their body and brain." In addition, Darrell also has a bodywork business. He has lots of local clients and he also travels regularly for his clients in New England. Melissa said, "Darrell's work is very critical to our program, keeping the horses happy and healthy in their body allows them to be happy in their jobs. We enjoy teaching and training and have a large Adult clientele at both farms as well as a great team of support staff and assistant trainers."

The couple was then asked about their personal horses. Melissa shared, "We have had some great horses over the years, and our fair share of the good and the bad that comes with horses and this business. My current horse we purchased last February as a four-year-old (pictured above). I am excited to have him as he is the first horse I have had that really gives you his complete attention and focuses on the job and really tries hard for you. It is amazing to have that in a partner and I am looking forward to developing him. Our other two personal hoses are both turning twenty this spring and are enjoying the slower lifestyle now and of course still getting spoiled daily."

Melissa and Darrell's lives tend to revolve around the horses and their many businesses. This doesn't leave much time for activities outside of horses, but Melissa tries to go to Pilates a few times a

**week.**

**When asked what their parts about Aiken and Stable View are Melissa shared, "Stable View has so much to offer for every level of equestrian which is why it makes it so unique. They provide great schooling opportunities through top international level competitions and we are lucky to be able to have that right in our backyard. I do love the covered to warm up in for the shows for the summer dressage series! And Darrell loves having the TIP championships at such a great facility. We are grateful to be in Aiken and enjoy all that it has to offer. It's great that Aiken's Dressage community is growing and that we have lots of sanctioned shows and schooling opportunities to get our young horses and clients out in a stress-free environment."**

**Stable View looks forward to welcoming Melissa, Darrell, and their students back to many more shows.**