

Although Brandy Bannister has only owned her horse Shorty for just over a year, they have formed a great partnership and have had a fantastic show



season, according to her coach Janice Tokar of F.I.T.T. Equine.

"I've been working with Brandy for almost nine years now. In that time, I've seen her healthy and I've seen her go through many surgeries and good days and bad days and she probably falls more often than anyone should," comments Janice. "She's a very resilient girl, she just won't quit and she won't let anyone tell her she can't! And I totally agree. Her riding continues to improve, and she is always ready to work, even on days when she's had ten or more seizures!"

Brandy has been riding for 17 years and had her first horse, an Arabian mare named Sapphire, when she was 11.

Last spring, Brandy was looking for a new show horse because Sapphire was 25 and did not enjoy showing anymore. "I had been riding Shorty at my trainer's place," says Brandy, "Shorty was living at her place and I started riding him as a challenge - he did not have a lot of training but he was quiet, tried hard and was fun to ride. He was also bigger than my mare which was a plus."

Shorty, of course, is not short at all. His registered name is ER Paint It Bask and he is out of an

Arabian dam and by a sire that is a Paint/Saddlebred cross. "The nickname 'Shorty' came because of his size, he is quite tall at 15.3HH and is quite stocky for an Arabian," explains Janice.

Shorty was bred by Janice's mother, Beverly Tokar, of Echo Ridge Ranch, which is located west of Airdrie. Echo Ridge Ranch has had a breeding program for over 30 years. Their breeding program concentrates on producing Arabians and part Arabians for show and pleasure. "I breed full Arabians for shows, mostly halter, but I also breed regular, good quality, all-purpose horses," says Beverly.

And Shorty stood out as one of those great horses right from the beginning. "He gets his good attitude from his dam," says Beverly, "he is always the first to greet you from the field." As a weanling, Shorty would always stand right next to Beverly as she was shooting gophers and it never fazed him.

Shorty was born in 2005 and was sold to a woman from Saskatchewan in 2009. When she was no longer able to keep him, Beverly took him back in the fall of 2010. "As luck would have it Brandy was looking for a new horse at that time, and even though Shorty was just green broke at the time I knew his dam well and I knew him very well. I was sure that they would make a good match. He's just so laid back, nothing ever really seems to bother him," says Janice.

Brandy has limited use of her right side. "She needs a horse that is not overly sensitive in the body," says Janice. "We work with Shorty regularly also so that he has to feel a cue at least twice before he really responds to it (the exception being 'whoa'). This way, when he's given a little nudge by an uncooperative leg or a grab with a weak and bouncy arm he doesn't jump into the lope, or turn hard to the right - he has to wait to see if the cue is given in the same manner again if so then he's supposed to take action. This has really worked well for the both of them."

"Shorty will also stop if he feels Brandy getting off center or losing her balance, some of this is reinforced through training but a lot of it is just his temperament. I think the good horses just know when their riders are in trouble and do what they can to help; also Shorty's favourite gait is 'whoa,'" Janice says laughing.

Brandy shows Shorty in Western Pleasure. This year, she showed in walk trot and equitation.

Over the winter, she plans to develop his lope so she can show all three gaits. "I like showing at the local shows but my longer term goal is to qualify for western pleasure at the Arabian Regional show held every year," says Brandy. "This winter we are going to try side-saddle. If this goes well and I like it we will show side-saddle in Arabian shows."

Janice compliments Shorty as a great all-around horse with his Arabian intelligence and trainability. "A few times Brandy has had a seizure while brushing Shorty and has even fallen in between his legs; he's such a good boy, he just looks down at her as if to say 'what are you doing on the ground?'" Janice says fondly. "He doesn't move and has never stepped on her or caused her any injury. He reminds me of a mare with a foal, he always looks at where each foot is landing when he's around Brandy. She takes him on trail rides around the property and rides him at least twice a week in lessons."

As is true with any great partnership, just as Shorty takes care of Brandy, she takes good care of him too. "Shorty loves attention he'll do anything to get it. He's fun, loving and playful. Although he has this annoying habit of chewing on almost anything, blankets, lead ropes, halters and anything that's chewable. I spend a lot of time with him whenever I'm out at the barn," says Brandy.