

It's something that every horse owner loves – a perfect stranger complimenting their horse. But imagine if that perfect stranger



was Ian Miller riding Big Ben? It happened to Holly Howard and it is her favorite memory of competing with her horse.

Holly was at Spruce Meadows for the first time as a part of Battle of the Breeds with Performance Standardbreds. She was riding her horse, a Standardbred from the track who had never raced because he was too slow, Bare Essentials.

“My first time in the warm up ring Ian Millar rode beside me on Big Ben,” remembers Holly. “It was his farewell tour and as I am completely speechless he nodded at me and said ‘nice horse.’ I will never forget that moment.”

But that is just one moment in many. “Every day I see him is a new memory,” Holly says, “21 years is a long time, trying everything and everything you can and shouldn't do with horses, he was always up for it as long as I was.”

Holly's parents purchased Bare Essentials or “Bart” as he is affectionately known as a 4 year

old in 1992. Bart was born in Leduc in 1989. He was sired by Ruble and out of Beulah Witch. "My parents picked him up right at Stampede Park," remembers Holly.

Throughout the years, Holly and Bart were inseparable as young girls and horses typically are. From Pony Club to parades, and



competing in jumping to barrel racing, Bart would do it all. He even travelled to Olds College with Holly for a brief stint. "But he always excelled at jumping," says Holly. "I have never sat on a horse who tried so hard every time out in the ring, he just knew." He competed to success in the 3'3" and 3'6" jumper classes.

"I have two Rubbermaid tubs of ribbons that we have won together. We learnt to jump together, drive together, he has all my firsts and there are so many people who have helped us out along the way."

When he was 17, Bart was forced into retirement because of an injured check ligament. "Unfortunately he still doesn't think he should have been retired but loves the attention he gets and sure does love his kids," says Holly. "Bart is now a very happily retired 24yr old. He'll still give you a good ride if you're up to it, but he is more than happy to let my eight year old son bring him in and hop on."

Eight year old Braden now owns Bart. And, although officially retired, he still has two jobs:

looking after Braden and teaching a new



yearling colt to behave.

“I really owe a lot to Bart he was always there when I needed a friend and don’t ever forget to hug his head before you get on or you will not get on. I love him and I love to talk about him he has given me the passion and means to do what I love, I am forever grateful that my parents picked up this Standardbred from the track.”