



Mesquite Grove Pilot Treatment

MESQUITE GROVE

A satirical animation explores the conflicts and challenges of a forty-something, reluctantly aging, former U.S. Olympic Equestrian Team member as he rules his tiny fiefdom of Mesquite Grove Stables, deep in the heart of Texas.

Earl Norris' past glory as a highly successful international equestrian and Olympian make it all the more difficult for him to survive the oppressive heat and stifling lifestyle of a small Texas community near Dallas. The fact that he continues to age despite his experiments with countless age-retarding products is another source of frustration. Being surrounded by people who, in Earl's opinion, lack the proper appreciation for being in the presence of his greatness further compounds his annoyance.

Kent Mann, sports reporter, is reluctantly on assignment in Paris, Texas, attempting to interview former Olympian, Earl Norris, for the "Where are They Now?" series that will be airing soon on the American Horse Show Network. He exits the air-conditioned comfort of his rental van, inappropriately dressed for the dust and confusion of a horse show, Texas-style. The show grounds are an incongruous maze of western barrel racing, English hunter classes, calf roping and show jumping, including the final round of the Grand Prix Classic. (*Music like Lyle Lovett's, "That's Right, You're Not from Texas"*)

Earl Norris exits the Grand Prix arena, accompanied by raucous cheering and applause, after winning the jump-off round. As he hops off his large, excited horse, he flings the reins to a groom and summons for someone to bring him water. A bored Earl does a clothes check while Guy Patrick, the barn manager, automatically exchanges Earl's saddle from his Grand Prix horse to his show hunter, directs the hired hands, Bolo and Chico, in other last minute details, while simultaneously attending to Earl's comforts. When Guy looks away, Bolo quickly passes Earl a small brick of the Venezuelan chocolate that Earl's body craves but which his riding breeches abhor. Guy gives Earl a leg-up onto his next horse, Miko, owned by Mimi Cartwright, the daughter of the former governor of Texas, Mamie Pritchards, and wife to rich Texas cattle, oil and high-tech entrepreneur, Big Jake Cartwright. Earl barely acknowledges the congratulations he receives from a passing competitor, to which the fellow trainer responds with "jerk" under his breath. As a mounted Earl and his entourage start moving towards the next competition, Earl alternately bellows for Mimi Cartwright while barking for

Guy to look for her among “those cowboys”. He calls out for Chico, squawking, “CHA-CHA”, to wipe the dust from his boots, to which Guy declares, “It’s *Chico*, Earl.” Bolo rolls his eyes toward Chico and exclaims, “La flaca mala.” Earl is oblivious.

Mimi Cartwright dressed in classic English attire and mounted on one of her many horses, chats merrily away with a group of blue-jeaned, Stetson-wearing cowboys and cowgirls. Her large derriere drapes over a tiny English saddle, rendering it nearly invisible. Two cowboys, Roy and Slim, observe her from a distance.

“Isn’t that Mimi Cartwright? I thought she showed Western Pleasure. What’s she doing dressed like that?”, Slim asks.

“She switched to English after her best friend told her the Western saddles made her butt look big. Looks to me like she’s showin’ bareback now!” replies Roy.

Mimi hears the announcement that Earl has just won the hunter class on her horse, Miko. She giggles to her Western friends that, “The Earl is gonna be mad at little Mimi for missing his round,” and starts to ride toward the show ring, right past Guy who has been madly searching for her.

Kent Mann walks up to the cowboys that were admiring Mimi’s large behind and asks them if they can direct him to the Mesquite Grove stabling area. They point him towards a group of identically dressed English riders, suggesting that they might know where to find it. Kent approaches the group, all clad in tan riding pants, tall black boots and white, high-collared long-sleeve shirts and asks if they know where Earl Norris and the Mesquite Grove contingent might be. Tinka Varyeur, a beautiful woman with honey-blond hair, reminiscent of Faith Hill, responds in the voice of a chain-smoking truck stop waitress with an odd German accent, “You mean *The Earl*, don’t you?” The group giggles in unison until Tinka, their trainer and ringleader abruptly motions the laughter to stop. Kent asks why they call him The Earl to which Tinka replies, “Because his mother could not spell *Despot*.” The unit again titters with laughter, although one subunit looks slightly confused. Tinka points her crop towards the immaculately accoutered Mesquite Grove stabling area and asserts, “The *Taj Ma Stalls* are over there.”

Mimi arrives at the hunter ring just as Earl makes his exit with the blue ribbon fastened to the mount’s bridle. Earl peevishly asks Mimi what she thought of his round. Mimi coyly says that Miko is always good for Earl, but maybe he’d be better for her if they tried the pretty bit she just purchased at one of the Western booths. Earl and Miko are fuming at the thought of a Western bit in the mouth of the fancy hunter, and whispers to Guy, “Maybe the horse would go around better if she dropped a hundred pounds instead of a hundred bucks!” Miko nods agreement as Guy shoots Earl a look of caution. As the jumps in the ring are lowered to under two feet, Guy reminds Mimi that her adult hunter class is next. Earl attempts to focus Mimi with last minute instructions before she enters the ring. Mimi interrupts Earl to ask if he thinks her tiny new English saddle makes her butt look

big. Earl is apoplectic, prompting Guy to whisper a reminder that if Earl plans to ask Mimi to buy him a new show horse, that he might not want to make her mad. Earl hisses to Guy, "You're not my mother!" then swallows hard, smiles and says, "No saddle could do justice to that behind, Mimi." Mimi trots happily into the ring. Earl exhales in exasperation, sighing, "I feel so dirty." (*Music like, "Baby Got Back"*)

Earl can hardly contain himself as Mimi gallivants around the ring, missing the appropriate take-off point for each jump, annoying Miko by constantly yanking on the reins and causing him to stop in front of two fences. Mimi completes her round and ensures disqualification by sliding, slow motion down Miko's neck over the final jump and plopping onto the ground. Earl thinks he is out of earshot of anyone besides Guy as he thoroughly trashes Mimi. He suddenly spies the only thing on the planet that can strike fear in his heart. It is Mimi's demonic son, Billy, twin to Mimi's silent-from-birth son, Bobby. Billy, dressed in a cowboy outfit and sporting Colt 45-replica water pistols, approaches Earl and asks if he is "talkin' 'bout my mama." Earl denies it, but an unconvinced Billy kicks dirt onto Earl's immaculate riding boots, then squirts him in the crotch with his water pistol. Earl quickly looks around for Mimi and yells to Billy's retreating back that he is going to rip his arm off and beat him with it. Earl howls for Bolo, his long-time Hispanic stable hand, whom Earl calls for *Boca* in his usual fashion of addressing people by the wrong name. Instead, Chico comes running to help and Earl yells for Guy to translate, "Not that one! I want Boca!" Chico looks confused. Guy shrugs to Chico and tells him in Spanish, "Don't worry, Earl's hemorrhoids are bothering him again, and he wants Bolo." Chico is still confused but very grateful that Bolo will be the one attending to Earl's hemorrhoids.

Kent Mann finally locates the Mesquite Grove stalls, but Earl is not there. He is met by Colonel Tattersal, a white haired, 70ish-looking man dressed in old fashioned military riding clothes. Kent asks the Colonel if he can offer some background information on Earl. Colonel Tattersal indicates that Kent has come to the right man, then launches into a rambling dissertation of how he is in charge at MGS. Yet as Kent is shown around he notices the inhabitants of this small slice of life seem to largely ignore the old man. Refocusing on Kent's original question, Colonel tells Kent about Earl's famous equestrian past including his time with the Olympic team and his other international achievements.

He further explains that he was integral to Earl's success as a rider, at least as he sees it, and in fact, to the efficient functioning of the present day Mesquite Grove Stables. To prove his point, he snaps an order to one of the Hispanic grooms, who smiles indulgently at Colonel and continues on with the task at hand.

Col. Tattersal introduces Kent to the good-natured farrier, Shane, whose black jeans, black shirt and white T-shirt peeking out at the neck seem quizzically reminiscent of a priest, as does the faint sound of a Gregorian chant which Kent is not sure he really heard. As the pair walks on, an attractively dressed woman reengages Shane in a personal crisis, keeping him from shoeing the horse he is holding. They pass a scowling braider, Winona Bray, who glances up from her work with a look that discourages Kent from asking her any questions, and continue on to meet Bebe Norris, Earl's wife.

Bebe is surrounded by a herd of miniature dachshunds, from which she occasionally scoops one up to kiss directly on the mouth. She is sitting comfortably in her personal golf cart, sharing a Coke with Maximus IX, the regal patriarch of the dachshund clan, as she reads a copy of *Architectural Digest*. Before they can speak to Bebe, the attractively dressed woman, Ivy Gabbinger, known as Poison Ivy behind her back, rushes up to ask Kent if he would like to interview her on Earl's history, as she knows him better than anyone. At that moment, one of Kent's crew informs him that Earl is near the hunter ring, and Kent excuses himself. He asks the Colonel if he is coming to watch, to which Colonel replies that he and Earl sort of have an understanding that things function more smoothly if the Colonel stays away from the show ring when Earl is competing.

After Billy squirts Earl, and Bolo refuses to dab Earl's crotch with a rag, Earl jumps on his golf cart and blasts back to the MGS stabling area for a dry pair of riding breeches. Ivy sees Earl approaching and rushes over to compliment him on how nice he looks. When Earl scowls at her remark, she quickly adds, "Well, except for that little urine stain on your pants." This elicits an even bigger scowl from Earl and leaves Ivy searching for the right obsequious comment.

Earl starts snarling orders, asking for a clean pair of riding pants and excoriating anyone who happens to fall into his line of sight. Guy, who Earl left to walk back from ringside, comes trotting up and takes control of the situation. As he enters the tack room to deliver the clean breeches to Earl, he pretends not to notice Bolo handing Earl more chocolate while Earl quickly puffs on a cigarette. Noticing Guy's disapproval, Earl proclaims, "I only do it at horse shows!" (*Music like Steppenwolf's, "Pusher Man"*) Guy frowns at Earl and tells Bolo and Chico (in Spanish) to saddle Earl's horse for his final appearance of the day—the puissance wall. This will be a demonstration event as no one else in the vicinity has the ability to compete at this level of danger and difficulty.

There is an electrical buzz in the air as the audience anticipates Earl's ride. Tinka grudgingly admits to her unit that this event is actually a bit dangerous and requires, "at the very least, *some* skill." Mimi talks to her mother, Big Jake and Bobby about the cutest saddle pad she just bought. She asks if anyone has seen Billy. Shane listens to Ivy complain about how rude The Earl is to her and how some day she's going to tell him off. Winnie looks intently, almost dreamily, at the jumps in the ring. Roy and Slim wonder "what kind of *idgit*" would want to jump a six-foot wall? Kent Mann expresses frustration that he missed Earl again and will have to wait until after this ride for the interview. He tells his crew to make sure they get a good film of Earl. Outside the arena, cowboys on horseback ride back and forth, swinging their lariats in anticipation of the calf-roping contest which will follow Earl's ride. A pen of mooing calves stands adjacent to the arena, ready for use in the next competition. Billy lurks unnoticed at the gate to the calf pen.

Earl rides into the ring on a huge dark Thoroughbred. They gracefully canter a large circle and ride to the first of several smaller, warm-up fences. A hush falls, broken only by the sound of the horse's hooves, as the pair thunders toward the enormous puissance wall. (*Music like Pink Floyd's, "The Wall"*) The wall looms like a mountain from the perspective of the horse and rider. Suddenly, the

quiet is broken by the bawling of frightened calves as they race across the arena, right into the path of Earl and his horse. The horse squeals and rears in fright, bucks and sends Earl crashing, first into the wall and then to the ground, seemingly unconscious. The audience gasps as Guy rushes to Earl. Kent yells to his crew to ask if they got that on tape. Roy tells Slim that Earl “just needs to cowboy-up”. The jumper continues galloping frantically around the ring with Bolo, Chico and lariat-tossing cowboys in hot pursuit. Mimi, who has not missed a conversational beat, asks what happened. Ivy cries that her best friend may be dead. Winnie continues to stare into the ring as a single tear runs down her cheek. Bebe, Rafe and the dachshunds race into the ring while Billy laughs and closes the gate to the calf pen.

A dazed Earl lies frighteningly still. Guy notices with relief the reflexive movement of Earl’s hand. As he peers more closely, he realizes Earl is actually attempting to grasp something lying slightly out of reach. Bebe arrives at Earl’s side, stepping on the tiny, foil-covered object, one of several scattered nearby. Guy hears Earl’s faint attempt to communicate. Unable to understand what Earl is saying, Guy places his ear near Earl’s mouth to better hear the raspy response of . . . “Choc-o-late . . .” (*Music like Joe Ely’s, “Me & Billy the Kid Never Got Along”*)