

Vintage Vinnie Has It His Way At The Maryland Hunt Cup

Teddy Davies trusts his horse and relaxes to add the latest family win over big timber.

By **Kelsey Baker**
Photos By **Douglas Lees**

When Vintage Vinnie's regular jockey Dan Nevin was injured in a fall, trainer Joe Davies had a tough decision to make with his talented but challenging horse.

"Vintage Vinnie is a really, really difficult horse," Davies said. "He runs off literally every day. He's a frightening, frightening ride. Jog him up and down the driveway, and then the minute he gets near the gallop, he bolts and goes as hard and fast as he can. He's truly a very unusual horse, really difficult."

Could—or should—his 18-year-old son Teddy Davies handle him over big timber in lieu of Nevin?

"I rode him a little bit last summer, just galloping him at home," Teddy said. "And he's always kind of been like the crazy horse in the barn. And we just never knew the side of him that we know now. It's his nerves. He just gets so nervous. And he runs off, and people are afraid of him, and that makes him even more nervous."

Joe said he would have preferred that Teddy's inaugural Maryland Hunt Cup ride had come with a little less pressure.

"I would have rather had his first ride around this huge course on a steadier horse that was more manageable, more rideable," he said. "[But] he really wanted the chance to ride Vinnie. He knew it was going to be somewhat of a kamikaze ride, but he also knew that if he was able to get the horse settled enough to jump well, then he had a very good chance of winning."

Then there was the added pressure of competing in one of the world's most prestigious races that both his parents won as riders and as trainers. Teddy's mother, Blythe Miller Davies, won it in 2011, and Joe won as a

rider in 1998, 2000 and 2005. The Davieses, of Monkton, Maryland, have also won the Hunt Cup six times as trainers.

"There's a lot of pressure," Joe said. "That was the biggest disadvantage, and Teddy just handled it. That was a lot of pressure, but he handled it just with great aplomb."

Those extra pressures didn't seem to affect Teddy's nerves.

"Whether I was competing in front of one person or 100,000 people, what was important is that I do it right, that I do it the best I can and give Vinnie the best ride I could," he said. "And I really just focus on that. Once we're out there, it's just me and Vinnie, and all I can do is focus on that meet."

The result was Vintage Vinnie's second \$100,000 Maryland Hunt Cup timber stakes title in Glyndon, Maryland, on April 30. The 13-year-old owned by Armata Stables (Vinnie Roe—Bobby's Jet, Bob's Return) set a speed record last year with Nevin riding, and this year he beat his own record by 7 seconds, finishing the 4-mile race more than 62 lengths ahead of the nearest challenger.

Teddy and Vintage Vinnie also won the apprentice rider timber at My Lady's Manor in Monkton, Maryland, two weeks before their Hunt Cup win.

Teddy's best advice for other riders is to avoid overthinking things.

"There's no point in worrying about anything else because that's not going to help us in the end," he said.

The natural unflappability that helps Teddy thrive under pressure also puts Vinnie at ease.



"I was pretty much born into it, and I've fallen in love with it," said Teddy Davies of his racing career.

"I think Vinnie and I have a bond he didn't really have with any other jockey before, just because everyone who got on him was so terrified of him running off," Teddy said.

Instead of fighting with Vinnie for control, Teddy lets Vinnie do what Vinnie wants, even if that means managing some unpredictability.

"If I'm calm, and if I'm relaxed, he's relaxed," said Teddy. "He can sense if anyone else is scared or if a jockey's on who is afraid of him. There's a lot of jockeys who've ridden him who are afraid of him, just because he's such a different horse. But I go down to the start, and if I notice him start to jig or get a little nervous, I'll take a deep breath and just make sure I'm as relaxed as possible. And he can feel that, and he really relaxes for me once I'm relaxed, and that's really all there is to it."

On the day of the Hunt Cup, staying calm set the tone for Vinnie's strong run.

"He was calm, and he was great at the start," said Teddy. "He walked like a lamb, and once we were off, he just kind of set off on his own cruising speed. He trained so hard at home that I think that's why he's able to go that speed that he goes around that course. He just loves the four miles; he loves the big fences, and he's just an amazing horse."

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—Teddy Davies

Joe and Blythe may train Teddy, but they don't try to micromanage him.

"At the end of the day, they kind of leave it up to me because they know that it's up to me and Vinnie to get around," Teddy said. "They believe in me enough to know that. I just got to focus on jumping well, and that's really all there is to it. I've had a good amount of experience, and I've learned a lot from them."

At home, the majority of focus is on Vinnie's mental health and happiness.

"When we train at home, it's whatever he wants to do. If he wants to work every day, that's what he does," says Teddy. "I just try to let him do whatever he wants to do. If he wants to work up the hill, I'll let him know I'm there. I'll take a hold, but I'm not going to fight with him. And he does whatever he wants to do; if he wants to go up the hill as best he can go, that's what he's gonna do. We've developed a better relationship with him. He's definitely improved since a couple years ago."

Teddy said the key is not being afraid of him. "I think that goes for a lot of the horses," he said. "He's a special type of horse. I'm super grateful to be able to have the opportunity to ride him. My parents have done such great work with him like getting him to where he is today. And I'm so grateful to Armata Stables for giving me the opportunity to ride him."

BORN INTO IT

Teddy began his riding career racing Shetland ponies, including races at the Washington International Horse Show (District of Columbia) in 2014 and the Central Park Horse Show (New York) in 2014. He later trained in England and competed abroad—once in the Middle East and once in France.

“He was a leading pony rider,” noted Joe. “He won a trip to Abu Dhabi and rode pony races there, and he went to British jockey school in Newmarket when he was 13.”

Teddy decided he wanted to race when he was 8. “I watched some little pony races with my mom, and she asked me if I wanted to do that,” he said. “And I said, ‘Yeah, it is actually.’ But I was pretty much born into it, and I’ve fallen in love with it.”

Along with racing, Teddy, a high school senior, has excelled in high school wrestling, attending this year’s state championships. He’s wrestled since seventh grade and notes that exploring a second sport has helped him grow as a racing athlete.

“It’s a tough sport,” he says. “Especially at the high school level. But it’s really helped me I think, especially staying fit. It’s also helped me to kind of learn more about fitness and working out because I’ve gotten into weightlifting and general fitness a lot more, because of wrestling. And it’s really just helped me in more than one way I’d say with racing.”

Teddy will graduate high school in June and head to the

University of Delaware. He’s leaning towards a degree in business.

“I definitely want to have a degree,” he said. “My parents have definitely stressed that. If I want to be a jockey, that’s all right, but having a degree is definitely going to help me no matter what I decide to do. You never know what can happen with racing. So it’s definitely good to have a backup plan.”

As for racing, he has no plans to stop. “I don’t know if I want to become a professional or not yet, but I’d say I definitely want to try to get through college and see where I go from there,” he said. 🐾

Maryland Hunt Cup Glyndon, Md.—April 30

The Maryland Hunt Cup Timber Stakes. 4 miles. 165 lbs. Purse: \$100,000. Time: 8:15. Winning margin: 62½ lengths. Winner: B. g., 2009, Vinnie Roe—Bobby’s Jet, Bob’s Return. Breeder: Miss Carmel Hennessy (Ire.). Trainer: J. Davies. 1. Vintage Vinnie (Armata Stables) T. Davies; 2. Rocket Star Red (L. Goelet) B. Owings; 3. Goodoldtimes (Armata Stables) C. Smith. Also ran: Le Chevalier (M. Smith) M. Hendriks; Blackhall (Kinross Farm) E. Poretz; Pocket Talk (Kinross Farm) W. Easterby (lost rider); Preseli Rock (Bruton Street-US) C. Hankin (fell); Sideling Hill (Kiplin Hall) G. Daly (fell).



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