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FASHION TRENDS

When innovation meets quality

Making the leap from performance swimsuits for women to performance equestrian apparel, Kerrits is the name to watch, writes **JESS MORTON**.

In 1986 with just \$50 worth of outlet store material, Kerri Kent began designing swimsuits, eventually opening her own store.

When the New York Times ran a story about her dream to create a line especially for equestrians, the CEO of Eiser's, a large American equestrian

company, approached Kerri about designing a line of riding apparel. Kerrits (Kerri's name with the addition of a 't') is the brand born out of that alliance. The brand's logo features a carrot graphic in place of the 'i', because, well, horses love carrots! Also the reason why every garment comes with a packet of carrot seeds hang tag.

With such great designs plus an interesting backstory, I thought it was time to catch up with Kerrits CEO Melissa Hubbard.

JM: What are Kerrits' core principles and how are they reflected in the current collections?

MH: From the very beginning, Kerrits was built on the need for creating functional and comfortable clothing for women of all sizes. Our product development team searches tirelessly for fabrics that are durable enough to withstand time in the saddle and in the barn, technical enough to perform, and comfortable enough to enhance time in the saddle. We want our customers to feel confident in our clothing no matter the level or discipline. This is reflected in the fact that we offer a wide variety of styles in sizes XS to 2X. We embrace diversity in our sport and one of the ways we support this is by giving back to organisations with those same principles.

JM: Tell us about the design process.

MB: Our team is made up of riders, and we collectively spend a lot of time in the saddle and in the barn, which is where some of our best product ideas

and designs come from. We know what feels comfortable on our bodies when we're in the saddle and what we need from apparel when we're working with our horses. Our 'fit models' are our employees, and I think that provides us with more open and honest feedback on how the garments feel and function. Colour and print wise, we take inspiration from what's happening in mainstream fashion and then 'Kerritise' those trends with equestrian prints. Michele McAlpine, our VP of Merchandising, has been with Kerrits for 30 years, and she is an absolute colour genius. I often say she sees colour like no other human in the world.

JM: What are you most proud of at Kerrits?

MH: This might sound totally hokey, but I am most proud of our team. We support each other in a way that fosters an environment where our employees feel safe to be creative, come up with crazy ideas, and have the courage to do things differently than other brands in the equestrian space. I'm also very proud of the fact that we design apparel for riders of all sizes and all abilities.

JM: What's your best-selling product category?

MH: Our riding tights. We were the first brand to develop athletic tights for riding, and the first to introduce technical fabrics like Ice Fil onto the market. I think their continued popularity is especially impressive given how many brands now offer tights.

JM: Where do you see Kerrits headed?

MH: Is it cliché to say that the sky's the limit? Kerrits is now a well-established brand, but we have so much more to do. We've started to expand our apparel into more conservative disciplines, and we've expanded our show collection to include more coats and shirts for more traditional competitors. Our product development goal remains innovation in a way that honors the tradition of equestrian sport - and we will continue pushing the envelope on technical performance fabrics while focusing on function and fit in the saddle.

JM: Tell us about your new brand EQL by Kerrits?

MH: We launched EQL in October 2020 in the midst of the pandemic, which I

certainly wouldn't recommend for the faint at heart! EQL is lifestyle apparel meant to be worn in your life outside the barn. It has equestrian styling and incorporates equestrian prints so that you can easily incorporate your love of horses in your day-to-day wardrobe.

JM: Lastly, what can we expect from the Winter 2022 collection?

MH: Both Kerrits and EQL have really exciting collections launching this autumn. In Kerrits, you'll see some of our oldies but goodies like Power Stretch Tights and Wind Pro Tights, which have become staples in wardrobes around the world, and some fantastic outerwear with beautiful, feminine styling. As for EQL, Autumn '22 is our best collection yet. While we've intentionally developed EQL to be worn outside the barn, we've incorporated some functional options that are totally appropriate for wearing at the barn or out to dinner. We use responsibly sourced fabrics and donate one per cent of proceeds to equine non-profits like horse rescue and therapeutic riding programs. 🐾



The Affinity Aero Show Coat.
PREVIOUS PAGE: Kerrits Affinity Long Sleeve Show Shirt.



EQL's Horse Spirit Wrap. Kerrits donate 1% of all EQL sales to equine causes.

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