

# America's Next Top Equine

By Kathy Wise

**W**E WERE JUST LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO SHOOT fall fashion. Which meant we needed a location relatively close to our Dallas office that had an interior space where we could lay out dozens of pairs of boots, racks of jackets and jeans, tables full of jewelry, and plenty of handbags and hats. Somewhere with a private place for the models to change and the makeup artist to do her thing. And several back-drop options that would complement the clothes without overwhelming them.

One of our editors, Holly Henderson, had attended a fundraising gala for ManeGait Therapeutic Horsemanship in nearby McKinney last year. It would be perfect, she said. It was a lovely property with trees, fields, a stable, a riding arena where we could shoot, and administrative offices where we could stage.

And, of course, there were horses.

We contacted cofounders Priscilla and Bill Darling (he's the chairman and CEO of Darling Homes), and they graciously invited us out to their 14 beautiful rolling acres north of Dallas, where they operate ManeGait with the assistance of director Lili Kellogg, one of the country's foremost authorities on therapeutic riding.

Fashion is fun and sometimes frivolous, but at ManeGait they are truly transforming lives. Wheelchair-bound children learn balance and develop core strength sitting atop their

patient equine partners. Autistic and anxiety-bound individuals achieve focus and calm interacting with the 1,200-pound animals. Adults with cystic fibrosis and learning disabilities gain independence and socialization skills with the help of each other and their horses. Participants, parents, and volunteers (and the occasional magazine staff) leave this place forever changed.

We owe great gratitude to our hosts at ManeGait both for their daily works and their assistance with our equine models. And thanks to the teens who mucked stalls and groomed horses in between shots. Thanks also to our brave human models, who smiled and posed dressed in shearling and leather as if it were a cool day in October instead of a triple-digit swelter in July. And, of course, thanks especially to the equines—Tony, Stella, and Valour—whose long legs, practiced poise, and fierce-yet-disinterested runway gait would put America's Next Top Models to shame.

The only model moment? When Tony couldn't resist nosing around the horsehair skirt of an exotic Montana Dreamwear design. But then he focused and found his light. And we got our shot.

ManeGait's fourth annual fundraising gala will be held October 1. For more information, visit [www.manegait.org](http://www.manegait.org).



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