

BEHIND THE SEAMS

by Tanya Zilinskas Naouri



Tredstep|ireland™

Pairing innovation with timeless equestrian style, Tredstep Ireland is quickly becoming a preeminent name for riding gear. At the heart of Tredstep's products is a constant push towards increased performance paired with an abiding respect for the traditional look of the sport. Producing some of the most comfortable and attractive riding boots and accessories on the market today, the philosophy of form following function has defined Tredstep Ireland ever since its launch nearly 20 years ago.

A Customized Fit

Tredstep was founded from necessity when founder and three-day event rider Aiden Keogh went shopping for a pair of half chaps. He was unimpressed with what he found: bulky rectangular pieces of leather outfitted with a few straps for attachment. Keogh found them so unsatisfactory for his purposes that he set about making his own pair of half chaps. The result was markedly different from what was being predominantly sold in tack stores at the time. Instead of relying on the omnipresent awkwardly fitting straps, Keogh's half chaps utilized elasticized leather panels for a more customized fit. The design was so appealing that upon seeing them, other equestrians wanted their own pair as well.

Keogh began supplying riders with his newly designed half chaps, and he knew that there was serious business potential in his creations. His official product launch was to be at the 1993 Dublin Horse Show, but there was only one problem: he had not yet come up with a company name.

In addition to riding, Keogh had been working for his family business, a supplier of arena surfaces that utilized chopped rubber from tires. An informal competition at a bar the night before the show determined that Keogh's new business would maintain the same name as the arena surfacing business: Tredstep. The newly minted Tredstep half chaps flew off the proverbial shelves the next day at the show.

The Reluctant Bootmaker

While half chaps were Tredstep's initial offering, the company has more recently been defined by its similarly revolutionary boot collection. Despite his considerable experience over the past couple of decades with fitting the legs of riders, Keogh's desire to create a Tredstep boot was tinged with some reluctance - it would be an enormous undertaking, to say the least.

Working with some of his larger key retail customers in the United States and Europe, Keogh focused on the concept

of flexion for Tredstep's boot line. Noting that tall boots are designed to "stand upright" rather than break down, Keogh set out to create a boot that would build flexion into the design, bypassing both the lack of longevity found in ultra-soft hides as well as the potential painful breaking in period that riders often have to endure with tougher leathers.

"It's a boot and a boot has a job to do," Keogh observes. "If you make it ultra soft it will disintegrate. Instead of making the leather ultra soft, we made flexion part of the design."

Named the Renaissance collection because of the innovation-infused classic design, Tredstep boots launched in March of 2011 with the da Vinci and Donatello styles. Unlike competing brands, Tredstep boots avoid wrinkling at the ankle as the built-in flexion doesn't force the leather to break down. Once again, the new Tredstep products were an unmitigated success upon their release, even becoming the #1 and #2 best-selling boots for some retailers.

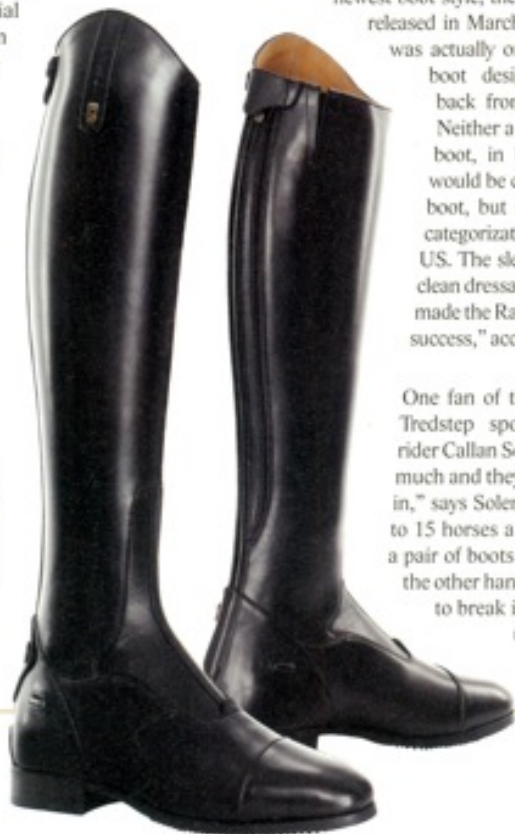
Both styles have been equally popular, albeit for different reasons: the da Vinci offers Tredstep's pro-flex design and is made of superior quality Italian calfskin leather that rivals much more expensive custom boots, while the Donatello is an ultra-affordable option that still offers the European styling, quality and flexibility of Tredstep.

Defying Categorization

Despite Keogh's intense focus on functionality, the incredible performance of Tredstep's products is still undeniably bolstered by their stylishness and visual appeal. Nowhere is this more evident than Tredstep's

newest boot style, the Raphael, which was released in March 2012. The Raphael was actually one of Tredstep's first boot designs, but was held back from the initial launch. Neither a field boot nor a dress boot, in Europe the Raphael would be considered to be a tall boot, but to a degree it defies categorization, particularly in the US. The sleek, tailored look and clean dressage leg of this boot has made the Raphael a "phenomenal success," according to Keogh.

One fan of the Raphael boots is Tredstep sponsored grand prix rider Callan Solem. "I love them so much and they are so easy to break in," says Solem. "I ride between 8 to 15 horses a day and breaking in a pair of boots can be so awful. On the other hand, boots that are easy to break in don't always stand up to that sort of schedule. All of



Tredstep's products are very comfortable but you can also use them – they're not fragile." She adds, "They really know the audience that they are producing equipment for. I think that Tredstep is a unique company in that they have such a basis in horsemanship that all of their products have a unique combination of durability and comfort."

Indeed, Keogh's own pedigree as a rider has undoubtedly been a major driving force in making Tredstep as rider-friendly as it is. Born into an equestrian family in Dublin, Keogh started his riding career competing in a local pony club. He was introduced to legendary trainer William Micklem, and under his tutelage began competing at the junior level.

Keogh later worked for Rodney Jenkins in the US, joining him at the Seoul Olympics in 1988. After that, Keogh rode for the Junior European Championships. His current mounts include Tredstep Bold Flyer, Master Tredstep and King Tredstep, the latter two with whom he placed 1st and 5th with respectively at the recent Burgham Horse Trials in the U.K. in March.

As Micklem recalls from their first encounter, "Aidan was riding this pony when I first met him and I remember telling his parents how talented he was. Telling parents they have a talented child is a multi-edged sword. It must always be included with a little 'balancing sermon' about all the talent in the world is useless without hard work and good coaching and that aiming at elite performance requires huge sacrifices."

Micklem's words regarding hard work and sacrifice certainly hold resonance with Keogh's enduring dedication to the quality of Tredstep products. In addition to riding boots and gloves, Tredstep continues to produce the original half chaps in their signature colors of black, brown and tan. Of course, in true Tredstep style, these classic items will be joined by even more newly advanced products over the next few years.

"At the end of the day, the most important thing is being known for pushing boundaries, bringing innovation and respecting the sport," notes Keogh. "We can bring interesting features and improved products, but still keep them beautiful and classic."



Opposite page: Tredstep's newly released Raphael boots.
Above: Aidan with his canine companion Toby.



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