

## RIDING

Continued from Page A6

"It's all about who has the fewest penalties," Burke said. "You're just trying not to goof up."

Burke said she'd like to move with Esprit de Corps into more advanced eventing. They qualified for one-star this year, and she hopes to try for two-star next year. Ultimately, she may try for the Olympics (four-star), but only if she can find the money — Burke said it costs more than \$120,000 to travel internationally to campaign for Olympic qualifying.

But Burke would like to at least move in that direction. She's looking into breeding and selling horses, which would earn her much more money for competition. She may never make a living off horses alone, but she's willing to see how far Esprit de Corps' talent will take them.

"I will continue striving towards what my horse excels at," Burke said. "I'll move up another level next year, and if (Esprit de Corps) continues to perform as well as he has, we'll see how far we can go."

# FROM RAGS TO RICHES

## Burke raises unbroken horse to win nationals

By IAN ABBOTT  
sports editor

**E**sprit de Corps seemed like a lost cause. The thoroughbred was bred in Ellensburg to be a racehorse, but after his breeder died of cancer when the horse was 3 1/2 years old, his fate on the track was uncertain. At age 6, he was still unbroken — a vagabond with a penchant for bucking riders that no one wanted to take a chance on.

Until Mary Burke took that chance. And Burke didn't just break Esprit de Corps; she turned him into a champion.

Six years later, Burke and the 12-year-old Esprit de Corps have taken first place nationally in the preliminary horse division at the American Eventing Championships in Wayne, Ill., in September.

"I was really surprised (that I won), especially when I realized the caliber of competition," said Burke, 47, of Ellensburg. "It was incredibly hard because the weather was so cold and rainy. But I was very excited to win. (Esprit de Corps is) very talented and extremely consistent."

Esprit de Corps — which goes by the barn name "Tucker" — may not have been raised to be a show horse, but Burke says he has the genes and instincts that allow him to excel in any competition.

"He was bred to be an athlete," Burke said. "He has the right mental process. He's

very smart and very bold."

When she was invited to the AEC nationals — the biggest eventing championship in the U.S. — Burke knew she'd have to face some of the toughest competition in the world. The men and women competing ranged from amateur to pro, from hobbyists to Olympians.

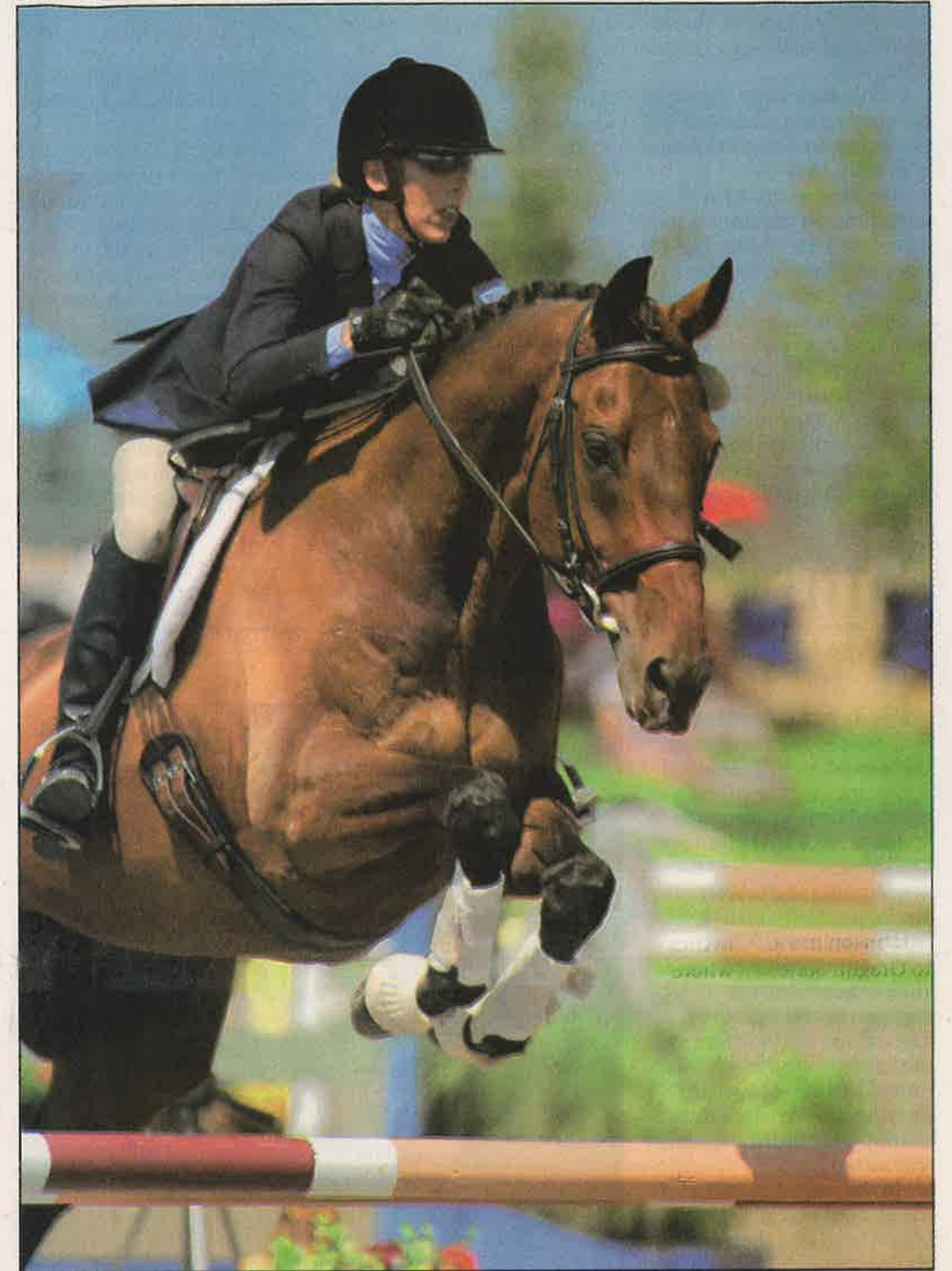
But Burke, who often spends more than she makes on the horses and works as a physical therapist full-time, beat out all of them — including Olympic rider Leslie Law.

Burke gets a little money for her work with horses, but it's hardly enough. For her finish at AEC, she won about \$3,000 in cash and prizes, but it cost her \$4,500 to make the trip.

"I lost money going to nationals," Burke said. "Even though it gives you recognition and national exposure, you hope to catch the eye of Olympic committees. From an athlete's point of view, you want the recruiters to see you, but it's not where you make your money, unfortunately."

Still, Burke said winning the championship was a big step in her career. AEC puts the rider and horse through dressage, cross country riding and show jumping. Burke held second place through the first two events but jumped into first when the first-place rider and horse took two time penalties in show jumping.

See *Riding*, Page A7



Contributed by Mary Burke

Mary Burke competes with Esprit de Corps in the Rebecca Farms competition in August. Burke and Esprit de Corps took first place in the preliminary horse division at the AEC nationals in Illinois in September.