

CH Courageous Lord Retires

Editor's Note: The following text was narrated by announcer Peter Fenton as part of the video presentation for the ceremony Aug. 26, 2015 at the World's Championship Horse Show.

Have you ever had a dream horse? The horse that thrilled you, left you speechless or maybe even made the hair stand up on your head?

Well, ladies and gentlemen, world's grand champion CH Courageous Lord has been a dream horse and so much more for all the people who have had the good fortune to work with him. Tonight they are all honored to share him with you one more time as they pay tribute to the horse that fulfilled so many dreams for all of them.

Now ladies and gentlemen, I am not going to tell you that the road to glory and history was all paved with flawless performances and picture perfect passes. No, in fact, Courageous Lord, or "Joe" to his friends, made absolutely sure his show ring appearances were never dull or predictable. His presence in a class always kept everyone on their toes and on the edge of their seats.

Mike Barlow, who raised Courageous Lord, said of the world's grand champion, "He was the gamest and most fun horse I ever threw a leg over!" Mike loved working the colt. "He gave 150 percent every single day and Joe would have fallen over dead trying to give that effort"

There are many people in the show world today who remember the first time they saw Courageous Lord. The stories they tell are always the same. He was wild, but he was exciting!

Lisa Rosenberger Jones was one of those people who, when she saw Mike Barlow show Joe for the first time at Dixie Cup, knew the horse would some day be a World's Champion. He was the most exciting horse she had ever seen and soon became the gelding's next trainer. At Cleveland Charity they won the Junior Stake. They went on to Louisville where they became a crowd favorite after a thrilling junior gaited class. While they did not win that year, the crowd got a glimpse of what Courageous Lord would become.

Enter Bill Carrington and Marsha Shepherd. They had decided that the time of their lives had arrived to have a great horse they could enjoy. Courageous Lord was their choice. Back to Mike Barlow he went and Joe and Mike were reserve at the American Royal gaited stake in 2007, and then reserve in the Five Gaited Championship at Lexington the next summer.

When Mike had some health issues, Bill and Marsha decided to send Joe to the great Merrill Murray where the quirky, bold gelding would be "perfected into a well-oiled show horse machine."

Merrill had only seen the gelding once and knew he was a handful. They decided to debut the horse at Indiana Charity. What Merrill didn't know about Joe was how nervous the horse would get before he showed and how very game he could get. At warm up, Courageous Lord seemed to grow taller with every step towards the ring so that by the time he arrived at the ring he was mostly airborne. While it was hard work for Merrill it was definitely entertaining to the spectators.

Merrill and Joe went back to work and by Lexington things were coming together. There they won the gelding stake and came back to win the Five Gaited Championship. They were in line to be contenders at the 2009 World's Championship.

To contain Joe's energy Merrill had to follow a strict routine for warming the horse up at every show. This routine calmed the gelding a little, but every time he showed he would shake all over before the class and break a sweat sometimes before he ever left the stall.

Nonetheless Joe and Merrill overcame nerves and went on to win two gelding qualifiers and two World's Grand Championships in a row. Bill and Marsha were definitely having fun now! Merrill and Courageous Lord had glorious moments together and Joe was thriving on the attention and crowd approval. They were quite a sight to watch and Joe was the personification of the Saturday night ground pounder..... and that's why Owen Weaver decided she had to have the horse.



Merrill Murray had CH Courageous Lord looking as good as he did when he won his first World's Grand Championship Five-Gaited title in 2009. The crowd in Freedom Hall stood to pay tribute virtually every step of the way as they took their final pass on the green shavings. (photos by Howard Schatzberg)

Actually, it wasn't even a conscience idea until Owen saw Joe one day in his stall. She had come to Merrill's to look at another horse and stopped to pay her respects at the great geldings stall front. "It was the very kind look in his eye that hooked me," remembers Owen. I began to scratch him and thought, "Well, this isn't what I thought he was at all!"

After speaking with Merrill and being assured she could learn to team this horse, Owen decided to talk to her trainers and family. Once the surprise and shock wore off, everyone came to the conclusion that they should give this crazy idea a shot.

So, Owen took the second scariest ride of her life when she tried Joe. The first scariest would be their first show ring appearance. Both rides went very well and Owen realized she had found her dream ground-pounding Saturday night horse.

Of course, there was a lot of talk when the Saddlebred world heard the news the Vias had purchased the wild-going gelding for Weaver. So Owen was relieved when Merrill consented to show Joe for the third time to the 2011 World's Grand Championship. It was a record!

Courageous Lord was the first gelding ever to win three world's grand championships in three consecutive years.

Owen had a lot to live up to but she decided just staying on would be a good start. The Wheelers [Steve and Tiffany] worked hard all winter to get the team together and soon summer had arrived. As the season went on, Owen and Joe worked better and better as a team. Soon, Louisville had arrived. "I never expected to make it to Louisville in 2012. It was a minute-to-minute decision and really, it all gelled at 3 am the night before we showed," says Weaver.

Boy, did it come together. After a strong second place showing in a 23 horse qualifier Joe and Owen came back to win the amateur title Saturday night in a memorable two horse workout with Gabe Deknatel and the great CH Daily Lottery.

With 38 wins to his credit Courageous Lord has completed a tremendous career. He fulfilled the dreams of everyone he was ever associated with, was an entertaining asset to the entire Saddlebred industry, and a true friend to the people who love him.