

CH Sweet Virginia

“SHE
NEVER
LET ME
DOWN”

Barbara Woods and CH Sweet Virginia were a formidable combination in the show pleasure division for many seasons.



Howard Schaffers
Photo by Shane

by Bob Funkhouser

Some horses are made for certain people and when Barbara Woods and CH Sweet Virginia found each other it was indeed one of those special bonds. Foaled in April of 1996, the daughter of world's champion Supreme Heir and D.S. Sweet Summer Sunshine (by Destiny's Santana) passed away this summer leaving behind lots of great memories for the lady that won world's and national championships with her.

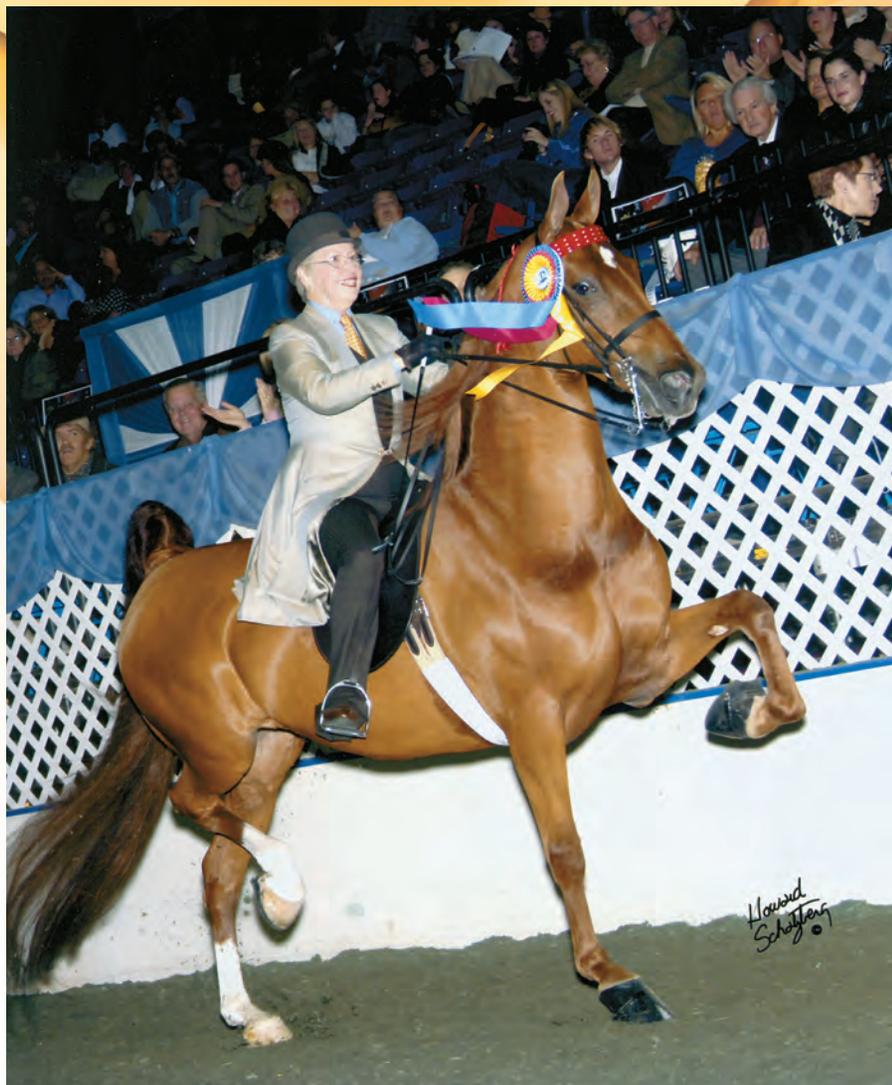
Bred by DeNeveu Farms, CH Sweet Virginia was sold as a three-year-old to Tony Ricker and her training was turned over to Patty Milligan and Lonnie Quarles. Liz Kinney had shown her once under saddle.

The next year as a four-year-old she was partnered with Kelley Ricker in junior exhibitor show pleasure, winning at Pin Oak, Oklahoma Centennial and Big D before taking reserve at Midwest Charity and winning at Blue Ridge Classic. In August this special mare won her first world's championship, the 11 & Under Show Pleasure class. What an amazing feat this was with a four-year-old mare and an 11 & under rider.

In 2001 there would be another world's champion 11 & under qualifier and then the 13 & under reserve world's champion of champions honors. Ricker and Sweet Virginia closed out a great year with the 14 & Under Show Pleasure National Championship. A world's champion of champions performance in the 13 & under division and a division one 12-13 world's title made it three consecutive years for the Milligan Stables team to make a victory pass on the green shavings and the second consecutive year to finish the season as National Champions.

Ricker and Sweet Virginia would win one more world's title in 2003 before Don Judd and Maria Gilman purchased her for Barbara Woods. Their career began with two victory passes at the 2004 Tampa Charity and they never looked back during a 9-season career together. They won near and far, and their bond grew closer.

When those nine seasons came to an end they had won two world's championships, a reserve world's title and a National Championship as well as victory passes from shows like Blue Ridge, Pro-Am, Asheville Lions Club, Gasparilla Charity, Southeastern Charity, J.D. Massey, and Alabama Charity, among others.



The pair also garnered a National Championship at the UPHA/American Royal.

"The mare was about as perfect a horse as I've trained," said Don Judd. "She was so kind and good with Barbara, they just hit it off. That mare was there for you every day and she really got Barbara interested in showing horses again."

"She was a once-in-a-lifetime horse," added Maria Gilman. "She made you look good because she always delivered. Barbara Woods is one of the kindest and most lady-like women you'll ever meet and the mare was the same way. Their personalities matched. They never needed the spotlight but were always there for you." A fitting ending to her wonderful career with Woods, CH Sweet Virginia was shown for the final time by her granddaughter, Emily Candelaria, winning the Novice Rider Three-Gaited Show Pleasure class at the 2012 Harvest Days Horse Show.

The mare enjoyed her retirement years in her very own paddock at Judd Stables, named the CH Sweet Virginia Paddock. She had one foal, Nuttin' Sweeter (by Undulata's Nutcracker) and she has been a winner in the park pleasure division.

Barbara Woods looks back fondly on the time she had with the champion mare. "We had seen her show with Patty Milligan and thought she would

be perfect for me," said Woods. "She was the epitome of what a three-gaited show pleasure horse should be. She was perfect as far as I was concerned. The whole time I showed her she never let me down. She was always the same.

"We won world's and national championships and many others along the way. Her last show my granddaughter showed her and that was the first time she had cantered in the show ring so that was very special for me.

"She was just so enjoyable to ride and show. You could count on her. You had to ride her, but she was always a pleasure. When you brought her out you knew what you were going to have. My confidence was very, very high when I showed her. She took such good care of me.

"In the barn when I would walk down the aisle she would hear me coming and start whinnying for her peppermints. She knew my voice. My greatest memory was winning Louisville the first time. I had wanted that for a long time and it was such a thrill to make that victory pass all by yourself."

It's hard to lose once-in-a-lifetime horses but the memories, her baby and the Sweet Virginia Paddock will keep the great mare close to the Woods family for a long time to come.



A son of CH Sweet Virginia, Nuttin' Sweeter has been shown by Emily Candelaria (pictured) and Maria Gilman.



Winning a world's championship aboard the mare was the thrill of a lifetime for Woods.