



CLARK CLOUSE:

A WORLD'S CHAMPION TRAINER, HUSBAND AND FRIEND

BY ANN BULLARD

Horseman. Husband. Father. Friend. Those are but a few ways to describe Clark Clouse. And he's a world's champion in every category.

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He comes by it naturally. His father, Tommy, showed as a child. When his trainer died, he took over training his own stock. That led to his operating the successful Clouse Stables in Richmond, Ky. Tommy and Connie Clouse's son seemingly had few options in his career choice. His California-based brother is what Tommy calls "a computer genius." Clark began shadowing his Saddlebred-trainer father almost from the time he could walk. He learned his father's way from the ground up.

Rarely did young Clark get to ride what he calls 'a nice horse.' As he told Saddle Horse Report in an earlier interview, "Some [I rode] were broke, some were outlaws."

While Clark loved the horses, playing on All-Star basketball and baseball teams in the summer had him "conflicted about shows until I was about 11 or 12. Then I started really liking it."

Clark refocused his dreams. From starring in the Final Four or the World Series (as many young ball players do) he dreamed of showing at Louisville one day. When he was 16, that dream came true with a five-gaited pony shown as Jolly Boy. It would have been almost impossible to imagine the victory passes to come. Clark went from following his father around the barn to being his right hand. While he had several chances to work with another trainer, Clark elected to remain at home, helping his father with the horses, the family and the farm.

With their Richmond farm being 60 miles east of Lexington, the Clouses may have been in Kentucky but they were off the well-beaten path. However, that didn't hurt their business. Early customers were Lanny and Elmo Greer. Both not only watched Clark mature into an outstanding trainer, each provided the father and son team with nice horses to work.

While Clark was absorbing all the horse knowledge he could in Kentucky, Sheila Sanders was showing ponies from her home barn in Illinois. Casual meetings at horse shows turned into a friendship. In February of 2006, the two married on a pier overlooking the ocean in Grand Cayman.



The Clouse group had a very successful show at Asheville.

As a middle school teacher, Sheila still had a contract to fulfill in Illinois; Clark had to be with customers in Kentucky. The solution: "I continued to teach in Chicago. I'd commute to Kentucky every Friday night and fly back Mondays at 6 a.m., then drive an hour-and-a-half to work," she said.

In July, 2005, Joan Adler purchased the charismatic gelding CH Colonel Hoss and turned him over to Clark for training. CH Colonel Hoss made his debut with Clouse at ASHAV, winning the Novice Five-Gaited class and reserve in the championship. At Alabama, they won both the open and grand championship. All knew they had something special.

CH Colonel Hoss started the next year with Clark in the irons. His reserve in the Five-Gaited championship at River Ridge was his best outing until fall, when Clark won rode him to ASHAV's Five-Gaited Novice title.

Until 2006, Clark's business exclusively focused on investment and problem horses. That year, his first junior exhibitor, Justin Cowley, began riding at the Richmond barn. Clark put him up on Colonel Hoss.

Sheila told the story of ASHAV and The American Royal. "ASHAV was the first time Justin showed Colonel Hoss. He was exciting, but made many mistakes. Clark debated letting Justin show him at Kansas City.

"I told Clark Justin's parents had flow all the way to Kansas City just for the boy to show that horse. We

almost went to war, but Clark finally let Justin show him. It was like magic!"

On November 15, two of the three judges placed Justin and CH Colonel Hoss first in the Junior Exhibitor 14-17 class. Saturday night they earned one first-place and two second-place votes to win the Junior Exhibitor Five-Gaited National Championship.

"He and Justin were a great fit," Sheila said. "Everybody was talking about them. At Louisville, he won his age group qualifier and tied reserve in the championship."

Justin had one more junior exhibitor season year. He and CH Colonel Hoss were champions or reserve champions at every show.

The year 2007 was an exciting one for the Clouses. Sheila was expecting their son. Almost as important, they had the opportunity to purchase Melissa Moore's barn in Versailles. They had hoped to move horses all before Carter was born. However, it was not to be. Melissa was nice enough to get out of the house, but still was in the barn when Carter was born three weeks early.

"It wasn't easy," Sheila said. "My Mom came to help for a couple of weeks. Clark would drive to Richmond to work horses. Looking back, I wonder how we got through it. Life was like a whirlwind, but we kept moving forward. We moved the horses in right after Lexington."



Sheila, Clark and Carter enjoy fishing vacations in Florida whenever possible.

It had been a busy spring. In May, Elmo Greer purchased the five-gaited mare, World's Champion CH Radiante. On a hot August Sunday evening, Clark rode her to the Kentucky County Fair Five-Gaited Championship. Later that week, Justin rode Colonel Hoss to the Junior Exhibitor Five-Gaited blue and a Reserve Champion of Championships.

That year, Clark posted winning rides on Radiante, CH Memories Paragon, Last Tango In Paris, Lime Twisted Gin, Battle Rattle and Callaway's Cinnamon Bay. Justin had an unbelievable season; Elmo Greer also picked up blues aboard his world's champion.

The icing on that season: the UPHA named Clark the Young Trainer Of The Year.

Meanwhile, Harold Denton, Jr., had begun riding with Clark. Clark saw the potential for Denton and CH Colonel Hoss, and began teaching Denton to ride the powerful gelding. The two posted winning records for five years before the gelding informally retired in 2009. Today, the gelding enjoys life at Clouse Stables. Sheila says he goes out to play for a short time, but prefers life in his stall.

CH Colonel Hoss was the first – but far from the last horse Denton has had with the Clouses. He currently has eight Saddlebreds in training, some shown by him, some by junior exhibitors and other amateurs and some by Clouse. He also has several broodmares and some youngsters still in the field.



Clark was named the UPHA Young Trainer Of The Year in 2007



Clark wore silks in an early lead-line class.



Dreams Desire had been a five-gaited pleasure horse and broodmare. Clark was just 21 when he rode her to win Lexington's Five-Gaited Mare Stake and a Reserve Grand Championship.



Clark won his first Louisville title aboard World's Champion CH Radiante in two-year-old five-gaited competition in 2003. In 2007 he topped the Kentucky County Fair Three-Gaited Championship.



Ceil and Kenny Wheeler entrusted CH Memories Paragon to Clark. They won a Reserve World's Championship and the UPHA American Royal's Five-Gaited Gelding Stake in 2007.

Jennifer Johnson and her daughter Jozee moved to Clark's five years ago. Jennifer says they knew nothing about horses, although Jozee had taken some lessons at a local barn. Now they spend Saturdays driving two-and-a-half hours from their West Virginia home to the barn.

Why Clark? Jozee responded, "Mom knew, if I wanted to be competitive, we had to move to Kentucky. She was looking through magazines, saw all Clark's horses and achievements and decided to try there. We visited one Saturday and it was a perfect day.

"Clark and Sheila are very calm, relaxed and fun. He and Jozee jelled from the very beginning," Jennifer said. "She had been riding walk and trot equitation; he put her on a gaited horse – at 10 years old."

"The first time he put me on a gaited horse definitely was an experience! It was one of the most fun things I got to do. When we moved barns, he threw me up on different horses. It was a blast," Jozee said.

Jozee has been quite successful showing Varsity Blues. In 2013, she rode Denton's WC Callaway's Eight Below to win the 13 and Under Show Pleasure class at the UPHA/American Royal. But perhaps her biggest accomplishment thus far is winning the 2014 Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 13 and Under World's Championship with Denton's Manipulating The Stars. She will be back with Callaway's Eight Below and Varsity Blues this season as well as catch-riding other horses.

"I get a lot of horses that are projects or that people want to sell," Jozee said. "He throws you a curve sometimes. I love riding with Clark. He is one of the best."

Jozee spends as much as a week at a time with the Clouse family during the summers. She says, "I love being able to help at the barn, to work the horses and eat with the family. I feel like Carter is another little brother; we go fishing, play basketball and Play Station."

Drew Taylor Hewitt is another young lady who has earned her proverbial spurs with Clark and Sheila. She began riding with him at 15 and finished her junior exhibitor career last year.

"We jumped in with him in an effort to sell Kalarama Shiraz; but it's developed into a long-term relationship," Andy Hewitt said. "It's always about Drew Taylor; it was a tough move for her, she was so

close to Mary and Evan for so many years. Sometimes you have to be in a different environment; Clark's is very different than theirs. It's not so junior exhibitor heavy. It's really been a good match for her personally and in developing her horse skills. He's provided great opportunities for her; it's been a win/win situation.

"Clark is aggressive in some areas; he takes chances and always moves in a forward direction. He doesn't become stale," Andy Hewitt said. "She is able to learn from him. Clark is not afraid to take a tough horse that some don't want to mess with and make something of it. They're not necessarily million-dollar horses but they are saleable and useable.

"Moving to Clark put me in a whole different world, especially when comparing North Carolina and Kentucky," Drew Taylor said. "It's a totally different circuit, especially with competitiveness and all that stuff. You're competing against the best all the time in Kentucky; in North Carolina you get a break sometimes."

In these five years, Drew Taylor said "Clark has made the transition from puppy to big dog, from having horses no one else can get along with to having nice horses."

Drew Taylor hopes to follow Clark into the professional ranks. First, however, comes college. Rather than following the 'traditional' path of attending one of the schools with an equestrian studies program, she has chosen to study at High Point University, where she's majoring in health and physical education. She has one horse to work on her own at home. She spends some weekends and the summer with the Clouses, riding the horses her father has in training and honing her horsemanship skills under Clark's watchful eye.

"I've learned a lot from Clark," she said. "He's given me lots of opportunities; it's been a good confidence builder for me. I get to do a lot of different things hands-on, not just by watching.

"Clark is very intense; but at the same time he is funny," she said. "He jokes around; he's hard on you but not constantly. There's a lot of camaraderie and joking. Clark's not serious all the time but when he's working a horse, he is very serious. He works harder than anyone.

"Clark's an all-round good guy who loves spending time with his customers. There's never a day at a show



Clark enjoys judging, whether a lead-line class or the upcoming Lexington Junior League.



Harold Denton, Jr. and CH Colonel Hoss were an outstanding team.



Clark and Drew Taylor celebrated their very successful 2014 World's Championship Horse Show.



Drew Taylor and Fort Chiswell's Prince Charming won Louisville's Adult Three-Gaited Show Pleasure Championship in 2014. They were judged the best of 23 contenders in the Saturday night finale.

when we don't go to lunch. He makes time for his family. It doesn't matter how tired he is, he spends time with Carter."

John Herbst and his daughter, Hannah, commute to Versailles from Richmond, Ky. She had ridden Academy but hadn't been able to ride the horse her family owned. In 2011, they sent the horse to Clark as they wanted a second opinion.

"We thought Clark still was in Richmond, but he had moved to Versailles. When Hannah was able to ride that horse within two weeks of its going there, we moved for good," Herbst said, adding they liked the barn atmosphere.

"Clark didn't have a lot of younger-rider experience when we moved there," Herbst said. "That wasn't an issue. He has taught Hannah more than she had learned in the previous three years. The previous trainers had been teaching her equitation; the first thing Clark told her was to forget equitation, 'we need to learn to ride the horse, not just look pretty.'"

Today, Hannah is showing two horses, My Mockingjay and Thinking Out Loud. She has consistently earned top ribbons with both this season.

When asked what makes Clouse Stables a special place to be, Herbst's first response is "his wife. She is a big part of the business; he is the talent but she is the one that makes the business end work. She does all the paperwork, organizes Clark and is good with the customers. Clark is point-blank, very direct. He's not mean, but rarely sugar-coats anything.

"His strongest traits are his natural ability and the good eye he has for a horse. He has a good reputation. He's had me buy some investment horses and I've made some money. If he calls someone to look at a horse, they take him seriously. He won't show them something that doesn't fit them. He can see a horse and know who it would fit. He can take horses others have thrown away and fix them."

Another big plus to Herbst (and other clients) is the barn's family orientation. "When we went there, they welcomed us into their family, not their business. All the grandparents are involved and Carter is almost always at the barn."

Today, Clark has '30-odd' horses in stalls representing a little bit of everything. Some are young, some are amateur or kids' horses and "a couple of open horses," Sheila said. "Showing gaited always has been Clark's favorite and specialty. He has a good knack with older horses that have problems. He's really good at fixing one.

"Sometimes he wants my advice more than at others. He may have difficulty relaying information to kids and amateurs. Sometimes it's hard for him to understand why he can make a horse do something that they can't. They may be afraid to tell him they don't understand or can't do it that way. I become the middle man, bridging that [communication] gap.

"We now have five kids riding; two are in 14-17, one in 13 and under and two are just coming out of Academy," Sheila said, adding that they no longer do lessons for persons outside the barn.

Andy Hewitt said he thinks a lot of Clark's peers have a lot of confidence in his horsemanship abilities. One of those signs is who entrusts him with their horses. Barbara Goodman Manilow and trainers Kenny and Donna Smith have done just that.

"Clark and I have been friends for 20 years or more," Donna said, explaining that "we hung out together as kids and young adults. Sheila was around, but was more into ponies than horses."

She says "One of Clark's best qualities is that he is always positive. When any horse goes into his barn

he tried to find its good quality. He's not quick to be down on a horse.

"I don't know anyone who wants to go to a show more than Clark. If he were 85 he'd be the same way. He cracks me up. He's like 40 and is always enthusiastic. He's kind of funny; everyone is so PC these days; he just blows past those boundaries. You always know where you stand with him. That's one reason we get along so well."

Like his father, Clark is known for finding those forgotten horses, the hidden gem. He, too, has a great eye for a horse.

Donna says Clark likes to talk. She told one story that illustrates that point.

"He was driving to a horse show and talking to me about a horse. He stopped for gas got back in the truck and kept talking for another hour. All of a sudden he said, 'You're not going to believe this.'

"I told him, 'I bet I will.' He said, 'My caretaker was riding with me. His phone kept ringing; I turned around to tell him to answer it ... and thought, where did he go. He must have gotten out at the gas station and left his phone in the truck. I have to go back and retrace my steps!'

"I was dying laughing and told him, 'Only you would not realize that for one hour.' His caretaker was sitting at the station.

"He always is very easy to do business with," Donna said, adding they have bought Effie Trinket,



Sarah Bratton and Monnington's Sir Charles are successful in five-gaited show pleasure.



Jozee Johnson rode Manipulating The Stars to win one section of the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 13 and Under World's Championship in 2014.



Harold Denton, Jr. and Mark of Perfection are what Sheila calls 'a perfect team.'



Hannah Herbst has stepped up to show My Mockingjay in junior exhibitor park competition this year.



Carter joined Sheila in the road bike to celebrate her Shetland Road Pony Championship at the Illinois State Fair.



Carter shows off a big bass he caught on one of their Florida fishing vacations.



Clark will campaign Harold Denton, Jr.'s, Bodidly this season. They have won Five-Gaited championships at River Ridge and Rock Creek so far.

Skyfall, Rockband and Maya's five-gaited pleasure horse, Just Heavenly from Clark. "Every one we've bought has been exactly what he said it was. He's as quick to tell you a horse's fault and what you have to work on as its cool part. If you have the imagination to see it, you can follow where he's going with those horses. He and Kenny collaborate well."

She also spoke of Clark's abilities with young riders. "He's a good instructor and able to communicate with his riders. The kids all respect him. Sheila's teaching background is huge as she can explain his thinking. It works."

As for Carter and Sheila the parents, Donna and his clients agree they both adore Carter. They do a lot together.

"Carter's involved in basketball, baseball – and fishing. Every day in the winter, we go to the gym and play basketball. He can shoot, it's natural to him," Clark said. "He likes Kentucky and the Bulls. We usually go to those games together. Right now, it's baseball time. And it's always time for him to fish with Dad or Sheila and me. Every year, Sheila, Carter and I take a vacation to Lake Okeechobee; Carter caught a seven-pound Largemouth there."

Sheila says Carter may not ride "as he has a fear of it. We have an old Quarter Horse for him. He loves to 'drive' our tractor, and helps clean stalls. He will work the hardest of all the grooms, helping load and do other things around the barn. And he loves to drive ponies with me. We enjoy seeing that develop and knowing he always will be involved in the barn side of the business."

So just who is Clark Clouse? Sheila says he "definitely is an overgrown kid. He has a lot of energy, a lot of passion for the things he does. His still being a 'grown child' is one of the things that drew me to him."

Drew Taylor says "he's the same at or away from the barn. There are no ups and downs when working with him."

He's a man who is excited about the new season. They purchased an open five-gaited horse for Harold Denton, Jr.; Bodidly won the gaited stake at River Ridge. Harold also has a new junior five-gaited contender, Adam Levine; he will continue to show Mark Of Perfection in amateur competition. Drew Taylor is back with Lady Renaissance while Havana Wester is showing Lighter Than Heir in Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited. Sarah Bratton and Monnington's Sir Charles are strong five-gaited show pleasure contenders.

Clark will be showing seasoned horses, prospects and youngsters. When they're ready, he will introduce Barbara Goodman Manilow's Shelley's Time, by Arrowhead's Once In A Lifetime and out of Margaret Rose, and Berry Chill, by their stallion and out of CH Callaway's Sugarplum, who Sheila says "looks just like her dam."

Sheila says Clark really is "a different person than everyone sees. On outside projects, he is confident, maybe to the point of cockiness. At heart, he's kind of a boy, with a crazy and loud image."

"To be honest, he is someone who lives and dies for these horses; he obsesses and worries about them. He's way more of a perfectionist and cares way more than many see. He eats, lives and breathes these horses. Yet, when the day or the week are over, the first thing he asks is 'what can we do as a family this weekend.'"

A consummate professional with his horses. A great teacher and better friend. Outstanding husband and father. Clark Clouse has worked hard to reach this level.

To say he has succeeded would be an understatement.