



# I'm Lookin' At You

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE HORSE OF THE YEAR  
THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE OVERALL FIVE-GAITED  
THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE OPEN FIVE-GAITED GELDING

# Matt Shiflet

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE TRAINER OF THE YEAR

BY SARA PIZZUTO

Matt Shiflet is a self-proclaimed adrenaline junkie who is fueled by the energy in the show ring at the World's Championship Horse Show.

"I feed off of coming up that chute on Saturday night, hearing the roar of the crowd before you go in there and the playing of My Old Kentucky Home," he said. "Every single part of it is just so electric."

That electric atmosphere was high on stake night as Shiflet achieved his ultimate goal in 2020. He reached the pinnacle of success in the Saddlebred industry, riding off as the Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion on the back of I'm Lookin' At You. Shiflet and I'm Lookin' At You rose to the top of their breed last season and now to the top of your list as the People's Choice Trainer Of The Year and People's Choice Horse Of The Year.

Matt Shiflet was raised as a third generation horseman with his late grandfather Claude and his father Harrison both heavily involved with training American Saddlebreds. Long before his personal barn was established, Matt Shiflet felt the urge to continue his family legacy in the industry and become a horse trainer.

"Ever since I knew what a horse was, there was never any question in my mind what I wanted to do," he said. "My whole life I just eat, sleep, breathe horses and I loved playing with them as a kid. I had Breyer horses and stick horses and it was my life for sure."

Shiflet's training facility, Matt Shiflet Stables, has since become renowned for its champion American Saddlebreds and its stellar breeding program. Many of the breed's finest have been linked to Matt Shiflet Stables



Matt Shiflet reached a highpoint in his career in 2020 when he was crowned the Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion aboard I'm Lookin' At You—a win he celebrated with his wife Whitney and his children.

since its inception in 2007. Last season marked a victorious year for Shiflet, as he piloted a myriad of entries to top ribbons. One of those horses, I'm Lookin' At You, blazed a trail of success with Shiflet in the saddle.

Matt Shiflet found I'm Lookin' At You at Paul Cates Stable in 2018. The son of I'm Lookin' For You and Lady Lyra had only been shown twice in his entire career by Cates before he was purchased by Kelli and Nissa Sultan. Shiflet devised a plan for I'm Lookin' At You to eventually become Nissa Sultan's newest juvenile gaited entry. However, that idea soon changed once Shiflet began working the gelding.

"Once I got him home I realized that he was awfully powerful for that situation and quite a bit green yet as far as he hadn't been shown a lot and wasn't real seasoned in the ring," Shiflet said. "We decided to back off of that thought process and the Sultan's gave me the reins to do whatever I need to do."

With a new plan in place, Shiflet began to slowly develop his newest gaited entry.

"I told the Sultan's to just sit tight and give me plenty of time and I think we might have something special and that's what they did," Shiflet said. "We just brought him around real easy. We only showed that horse very little until we got him going really good there at the end of 2019 and that's when he really started coming for us."

I'm Lookin' At You was crowned the Five-Gaited Gelding Reserve World's Champion in 2019, with his eyes fixed towards the 2020 season. Shiflet was quick to comment on the gelding's power in the show ring.

"He's not a very big horse but he's got an

extreme amount of endurance," he said. "His athletic ability and speed are definitely Saturday night qualities. When he locks in to whatever he is doing, he can get down the rail with the best of them and just really uses his extreme motion up front in both gears, racking and trotting, and I think those things combined are his strongest attributes."

I'm Lookin' At You and Matt Shiflet earned victory passes at both the 2020 Bonnie Blue National and Asheville Summer Fun en route to the hallowed grounds of Freedom Hall. This pair began their week in victorious fashion as the Five-Gaited Gelding World's Champions before arriving for the duel that would ensue in the Five-Gaited World's Grand Championship—the conclusion to Saturday evening's stake night and the finale of the horse show. The energy in Freedom Hall was still abuzz even in a coronavirus plagued world, as Shiflet and I'm Lookin' At You were sent back to the rail

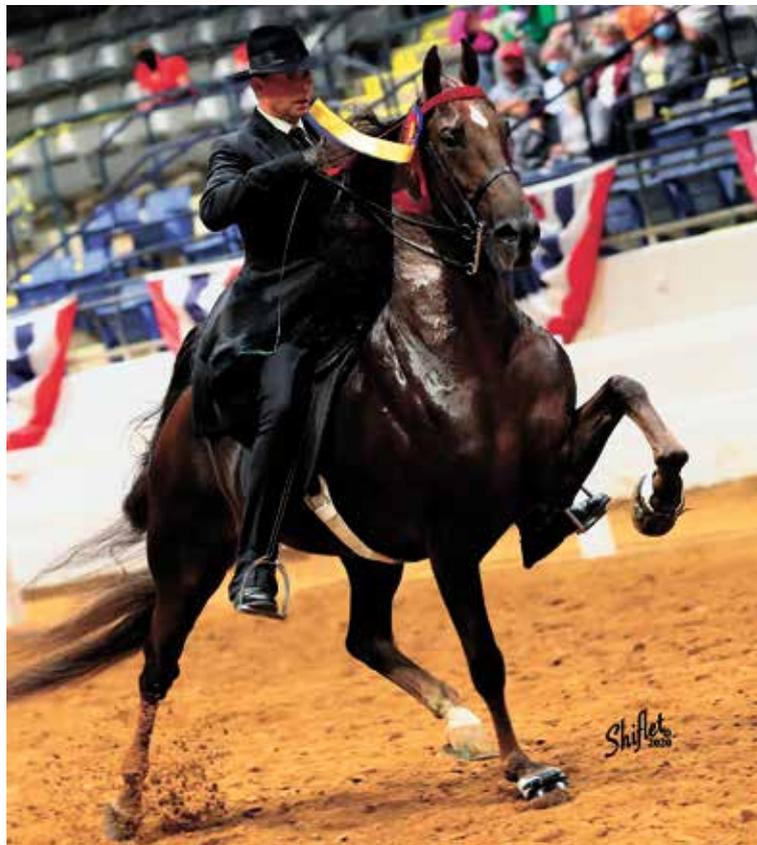
for the highly anticipated workout. Ultimately, they were crowned the world's grand champions—a dream come true for Shiflet.

"I get a little choked up just thinking about it to be honest with you," he said. "My dad and my granddad were both horse trainers, very successful horse trainers and I have watched them work a lifetime and they never had the opportunity to do that. So, that for me really showed me how special that moment would be if you ever got there because they were more than capable horse trainers. But it just takes so many things involved. You've got to have a great horse, a great owner, the blacksmiths, the vets. Your team has to be incredible and then you have to go and get that done and you've got to be all you could ever be for that particular moment."

I'm Lookin' At You wasn't the only entry trained by Shiflet to achieve success in Louisville last season. He celebrated many world's



The spotlight shined brightly on I'm Lookin' At You and Matt Shiflet during the conclusion of the 2020 World's Championship Horse Show as they left the ring as the world's grand champions.



Kelli and Nissa Sultan purchased the then lightly shown I'm Lookin' At You in 2018 and placed him in training with Shiflet. The entry was initially set to become Nissa Sultan's next juvenile gaited mount but took on the open ranks with Shiflet instead.

and national champions in a variety of divisions including additional world's champion gaited entries. Shiflet himself was in the saddle aboard I'm Lookin' Expensive to be crowned the Five-Gaited Mare World's Champion as well as Tua, who was the Junior Five-Gaited World's Champion of Champions. In addition to owning the newly crowned world's grand champion, Nissa Sultan earned her share of Louisville victory passes as the Junior Exhibitor Five-Gaited 14-17 World's Champion of Champions aboard the legendary CH Honey Badger and the Five-Gaited Pony World's Champion teamed with Macho Camacho. Shiflet explained that while he loves a good horse of any kind, he was particularly fortunate to have a sensational group of gaited entries under his direction last year.

"I love the thrill of trying to master a horse and harness all that energy especially on a gaited horse," he said. "There is just so much involved in getting one peaked and perfected and usually those open gaited classes on the right night have a crowd that is super electric. I love

one that racks true and I like a gaited open horse that is powerful."

After a remarkable 2020 season, Matt Shiflet has become an inspiration for those looking for similar success in the show ring. He urges other professionals to remember that despite its challenges, horse showing is supposed to be enjoyable.

"This game is supposed to be fun for the clients," he said. "That is something that is very important. It's a very serious job. I take my job very seriously and that's a hard thing to balance sometimes but this sport is supposed to be fun for the competitors and the audience and the crowd and everyone involved. It's our job as horse trainers to try to make sure they do enjoy their time and that they stay doing this. You have to work crazy hard, have an unbelievable passion for this business, you've got to have huge dreams, and for me at least make sure your people enjoy it."

In its simplest form, Shiflet reiterated the key to his immense success and the fulfillment of a lifelong goal.

"Work hard and dream big," he said.