

The Garones and Fairfield South Saddlebreds thrive in beautiful New England



Fairfield South is spectacular in the fall.



Devon and Kyle married in a storybook setting.



Marsha and Gary joined the newlyweds for a family photo.

By Ann Bullard

If there's anything more beautiful than New Hampshire in the fall, it's an American Saddlebred trotting in front of a line of red and gold trees. That's the sight Gary and Marsha Garone, their daughter Devon and her husband, Kyle Gagnon, get to enjoy every day. At least before winter sets in. In winter, they have a nice, warm enclosed arena.

Many a world's champion horse, pony and equitation rider have come from this New Hampshire farm. Knowing Marsha and Gary and their determination and dedication to the sport, one shouldn't be surprised.

That determination to be near horses led young Gary Garone to work a paper route so he could afford to ride. Fortunately for the Saddle Horse business, Marsha's parents had a 4-H program at their Vermont farm. That was the beginning of his love affair with horses and Marsha and Gary's friendship that grew into a lifelong commitment.

Yes, there were starts and stops both personally and professionally, but both had their eyes on the eventual prize. After stints in Missouri, where Marsha attended college, the two worked together at her parents' Vermont farm. They realized one of them needed to spend some time in Kentucky; Gary spent a few years working with Charlie Smith and Hoppy Bennett. Meanwhile, Marsha's parents bought a beautiful old home and acreage in Richmond, N.H. for her to begin her business. It wasn't long before Gary came back east and they began to follow their dreams.

The two married and Fairfield South had its official beginning in 1984. Devon was born a year later.

In 1987, they returned to Kentucky for the World's Championship Horse Show. For the ASHA Medal, they teamed Sarah Wright [Lettre] with CH CH-EQBurning Tree's Starcross; she topped a 21-entry ASHA Medal class to bring Fairfield South their first world's championship.

"It was awesome," Lettre said. "After we won, Marsha did an ad that read 'The Right Way' and, at the bottom, 'The Wrightway.' That's where I came up with my stable name."

Today, Lettre shares her knowledge and passion with riders at her Wrightway Stables in Augusta, Maine.

Sarah may have been the first, but she is far from the last world's champion Marsha and Gary have developed. More than 30 world's titleholders in equitation and performance and five national equitation championship teams have come through the lovely New Hampshire barn. Their daughter, Devon, and her husband, Kyle Gagnon, earned many of these.



Devon won the Junior Saddle Seat Equitation World's Championship in 1996, '97 and 98. She and her parents are pictured celebrating that 1998 victory.



Concentration. That word describes Kyle's demeanor as a walk and trot rider at Lexington in 1999.

Not many trainers have the opportunity to grow their own successors. The Garones have done it twice, first with Devon, later with Kyle.

Raised in Livermore Falls, Maine, on the Androscoggin River, Kyle spent much of his childhood on the water. While he enjoyed boating, his grandmother Beverly's Arabian and National Show Horses were of more interest. Fortunately, Wrightway Stables was in nearby Augusta. He began his riding lessons with Sarah.

"His grandmother, Beverly, gave him her horse passion when he was a young, young person," Marsha said, "that's where his fire comes from. She and her trainer wanted Kyle to show Arabians. He put his foot down, telling his grandmother, 'I like Sarah's Saddlebreds a lot better.'"

When Kyle got "real, real serious," he began riding with Mike and Lisa Richardson where he could further his talent and passion.

He still was a pre-teen when he began riding with the family that trained Sarah to a world's championship. With Devon riding in the Senior Equitation division and Kyle in the junior section, the Garones fielded an enviable team.

Devon finished her junior exhibitor career in 2003, winning a reserve in the UPHA Challenge Cup Senior Finals and the USEF Challenge Cup National Championship aboard Duplicate Copy. The following year, Kyle rode the gelding to win the 14-Year-Old World's title and the Kentucky State Fair Senior Equitation World's Championship.

While Devon was studying Marketing at the University of Kentucky, Kyle spent every possible hour at Fairfield South. Not only did he continue an outstanding equitation and junior exhibitor career, he learned.

"Kyle always liked being part of the barn," Devon said. "He was one of the rare kids who wanted to watch it all happen. Being as young as he was, he got a lot of opportunities with Mike and my Dad. Kyle was able to catch ride and show many different horses. He is gifted and shows horses very well."

"Kyle has been part of our family for a long time. He's very talented; he's done a great job with several young horses. I do my best to allow Devon and him to have as much freedom as they need to

make combinations and display their talents. I couldn't have done as much UPHA work and all if it hadn't been for them. They gave me the time to devote to such an all-consuming job," Gary said.

"Kyle has the work ethic of three people," Marsha added. "It's the same thing every day with him. He and Devon are amazing together. She is such a people person; she has warmth and can communicate beautifully."

Not surprisingly, the two young people fell in love. They were married in a fairy-tale setting on September 13. They returned from their Italian honeymoon to get ready for Oktoberfest and the UPHA American Royal.

Fairfield South has a very interesting mixture of clients. They're working 20 training horses and have four or five for lessons. Clients range from the youngest 10-and-under rider to long-time clients such as Rick Daigle, who lives in Ft. Kent, Maine, and Jan Beardsley Blanco, of New London, N.H.

"Gary is as honest and hard-working as the day is long," Rick said, explaining that he's been with the Garones for 14 years. "If you live as far away as I do, you don't have to worry about your horse getting worked. He's really dedicated; we've really become good friends over the years."

Rick says he "hired the Garones to train horses for me and to teach this old dog new tricks. That's not easy to do. They work very hard with me on my riding as well. When I need to be corrected and so forth, they tell me exactly what they think, what I have done and should be doing. There might be a day when I get taken down for a bad job. I might be a little bit fickle about it, but I get over it in a hurry because I know where their heart is.

How much does he trust the Garones?

"I found out I owned most of the show string I have now after Gary called and said where to send the money. I have seven; I was only involved in picking out two of them. I've always given them parameters but that's as much guidance as I've given them. They picked out horses that suit me," he said.

"Before I got to know Gary, I thought he was aloof, a bit shy. After going to horse show parties and having a few beers, he relaxed. From then on, he was different.

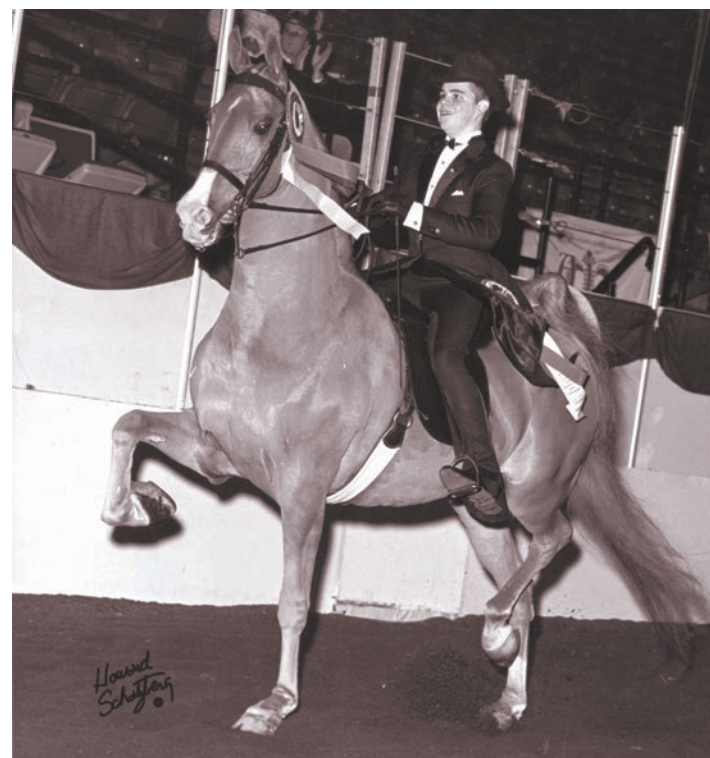
One of Rick's favorite memories was the evening Gary put him on I'm Sky High, a big-time walk-trot



Gary enjoyed all types of riding, including jumping Cock Robin in 1971.



Heartland Sundust won numerous roadster pony titles with Marsha, Devon and Gary. He is pictured winning the Junior Exhibitor Roadster Pony World's Champion of championship with Devon in 2001.



Kyle rode Duplicate Copy to win the 14-Year-Old and World's Champion of Championship in 2004.

horse that was really tough to ride. "I was just getting off an amateur five-gaited mare on Saturday night at Raleigh. Gary came up to me and said 'You want to put this number on, you're going to show Sky High.'

"He knew if he'd talked to me about it beforehand, it would have psyched me out. He literally ran around in the stands coaching me both ways of the ring. We had a successful ride; it was a successful moment for me."

For nine years, Rick stood the stallion Buck's Co-Star, sire of CH Buckles Boots and Spurs and the World's Champion Gelding Roselane's Angelo. If Rick has one regret about that, it was keeping the stallion in Maine rather than sending him to Kentucky where he would be available to more mares.

"A few years ago, Gary got after me saying 'We need to raise more horses; we don't have enough.' I told him to put his money where his mouth is. I'll provide the mares and raise the babies; they're yours to handle for training.

"We have a yearling by Deep Blue out of an Attache's Thunderbolt mare and a weanling by Joe Fabulous out of a Nutcracker/Heir Style daughter," he said, adding that Joan Lurie is managing their mares.

As for Marsha, Rick says she "is a very emotional person and also hard-nosed. A few years ago, Gary and I had gone to Kentucky to look at some two-year-olds. We wanted some ready to start. We didn't see what I wanted but we put a deposit on a yearling and asked them to start working it in lines.

"A month or so later, Marsha and Kyle were going to Kentucky. I asked them to look at this colt and let me know if they like him as much as I did.

"Marsha called to say, 'He's not what you want. I've found what you want.'

"That was a three-year-old with a sore foot. I had to buy a couple of others to get her, but she's in Gary's barn now. If we can ever get her to appreciate how nice she is, she will be a Saturday Night horse. She is by Nutcracker and out of a Globetrotter mare."

Soquili's Morning Star was green-broke when they brought her home. Rick had thought he was buying a walk-trot prospect. However, the mare had other ideas.

"Four months later, Gary was working her for me. I said, 'that's an awful big trot, do you suppose she would rack.' He spent 30 days with her before she took one single racking step. She is seven, but really only five in terms of development."

Rick came to the Garones when Kyle was a 13-and-under equitation rider and "Devon was in her heyday. I've watched them both develop as horsemen. Not only can they equitate, they can really ride. They're dedicated to their horsemanship and are professional in every way they do things so there are no surprises at the end of the equation.

Jan Beardsley-Blanco joined the Garones the same fall as Rick. She talked about her growth in driving divisions.

"I wanted fine harness. Gary told me 'everyone starts at the bottom; you start in Country Pleasure Driving. When I came there, I loved to drive and thought I was fairly good, but I really had no self-confidence. Gary's teaching style is that no matter what happens he finds a way to give it back to you as a positive.

Jan smiled as she talked about Marsha and "the battle of the hats. My first season in Country Pleasure, Marsha and I were having a discussion about appropriate clothes. She said, 'Of course, you will wear a hat.

"I don't do hats," I said. "She replied, 'Read my lips, you will wear a hat.'"

"My husband said for me to look in the horse magazines; all pleasure drivers wear a hat. I didn't subscribe to any, but he told me, 'You'll figure it out. You must wear a hat.'

"I wore hats. Typical of me, one was never enough. After years of pleasure driving, I had three closets full of hats."



Tori Fox watched Devon intently as they awaited the judge's decision at UPHA Chapter 14 Walk and Trot 9-11 Year Old Equitation Championship. She won.



Kyle worked with Elaina Boucher during a lesson.



Taylor Pszeniczny and Devon had a great time at UPHA Chapter 14 this year. Taylor came back from a third-place tie in the qualifier to win the Equitation Championship.



Gavin Gagnon finished an outstanding equitation career in 2014. He showed Peter Abdow's Callaway's Cohort to a reserve championship in Lexington's Adult Three-Gaited Show Pleasure 35 and Under Championship.

Devon had more than a bit to do with Jan's purchase of Unclaimed. She worked for the late Sam Brannon while at the University of Kentucky. The horse was in Sam's barn; Devon showed him in show pleasure driving.

"When Devon came home for Christmas, she said, 'Mom, Dad, we really need to have this horse. At Devon the following June, the Brannons asked Devon if she would be willing to show Unclaimed in Show Pleasure Driving. When they came in the ring, Gary and Marsha said, 'Yeah, we need to have that horse. Twelve hours later, I owned him,'" Jan recalled.

In 2010, Jan and Gary took Unclaimed back to fine harness. The hats got put away; she sent two-thirds of them to her step-granddaughter at the University of California. She still has a good supply 'just in case.'

Shortly after Louisville, 2013, Jan and Gary added Undulata's Crystal Crown AMF to her Saddlebred collection. Gary showed the Nutcracker x World's Champion CH Crystal Illusion to top honors in Lexington's Junior Fine Harness Stake.

Jan talked about having Gary and Kyle's training together. "Kyle's manner of training is so Gary, all to the positive. With Gary at one end and Kyle at the other, you get the same feedback. If you cluck or whatever, you get the same response from both. How can you go wrong when you're reinforced like that!"

When Kyle came to Fairfield South, his younger brother, Gavin, joined him. Gavin's career began in lead-line. He soon started bringing home blues in Walk and Trot Equitation. In 2006, he won his first world's championship in Nine-Year-Old Walk and Trot Equitation. Now in Vet Tech school near Boston, Gavin has continued to show performance.

In the past few years, Marsha has spent much of her time caring for her and Gary's aging parents. Most of the lesson duties became Devon's responsibility. She has brought some innovative ideas to in-barn competitions.

Today, Gary says the barn has a higher concentration of adult riders than in many years.

"Last winter, Devon brought in a guest judge for an adult in-barn equitation challenge. All rode routinely once or twice a week, in groups on weekends and monthly for three or four shows," Gary said. "They all competed on the rail in groups of four or five and did a workout."

Fairfield South fields a group of competitive equitation riders. Taylor Pszeniczny is one who is having an outstanding season. The young lady started out in 4-H.

"I did a 4-H clinic; Taylor was eating it all up. She had been to smaller shows and knew something of equitation. Taylor had befriended one of the kids and wanted to be part of them. Finally her mom called and asked if they could bring Taylor over.

"I can't say enough good things about Taylor's parents [Andrea and her stepdad Peter Galant.] When we were looking for a horse for Taylor, Jessie [Moctezuma] was raving about a horse and sent a picture. About 8 p.m., I contacted Taylor's mom asking if Taylor and I could fly to Chicago. Twelve hours later we had the plane ticket bought. They are the most go-forward, not drag your feet parents I know."

They purchased Won For The Gipper in March 2014. Kyle worked the gelding and taught him his figure work. Devon 'finished' Taylor and Gary says he "always adds my two cents to all of that."

Devon spoke of growing up at Fairfield South. "I loved it. Honestly I never wanted to be at a different barn; I just wanted to hang up a blue ribbon for the barn.

"I overheard a lot of lessons," she said quietly, acknowledging this as a big part of her basic training to teach. "Mom primarily taught me in eight and under; as I got older, Dad did more. Kyle and I have talked a lot about this. When a rider comes to us, we have to figure out their motives, their psychological part."

Devon says things aren't much different than when she was growing up. She and Kyle live on property adjacent to the farm.

"I teach beginners and get them through Academy," she said. "For the most part, Kyle is there for every single lesson, from lead-line up. It's very advantageous to have an 'all hands on deck' kind of thing.

"One thing I do love is that this is a group effort. It's nice to work as a team. From the time I was a little kid, I've only wanted the best for the family business. Our barn roles are slightly flexible, so we're not so overwhelmed. When Dad is away [judging or on UPHA business,] Kyle and I keep the barn running. When Kyle and I were on our honeymoon, a client asked if they still



Undulata's Crystal Crown AMF has had an outstanding season. Gary drove her to a unanimous Junior Five Harness Championship at Lexington Junior League.



Gary finished his term as UPHA President at the 2015 convention. One of his many 'duties' was presenting Melissa Hughes with a plaque recognizing her as UPHA Chapter Five Horseperson of the Year.

could ride on the weekend. Dad told them, 'I've been giving lessons since you were in diapers; it will be just fine.'

And so will Fairfield South. Marsha told the family she hopes to come back and do some teaching, her first love. She hopes to go back to helping drive the big rig to shows, something she did for years. Devon teaches and handles all the administrative work. By all accounts, Kyle is more than living up to expectations for a talented young trainer. As for Gary, he will continue to work horses, share his expertise with the younger generation and help direct the UPHA to ensure the future of the sport.

"It has its challenges and moments," he said. "I think we all feel very fortunate we have this opportunity. I do my best to understand that challenge from all perspectives. Marsha has had to focus on our parents' healthcare the past five or six years. She's very involved in running back and forth to Vermont so she's had a little less involvement. Thank God we're in a position to give time to my dad, her dad and now her mom."

The Garones do have a life away from horses. Their avocation: what Marsha calls 'junking.' Finding such bargains, repairing and repainting them has become Gary's hobby, his second passion. Traveling as they do, they have plenty of opportunities to find 'bargains' on the road as well as near home.

"No area of New England even comes close to having the 'antiquing opportunities' that Keene and other nearby towns have," Marsha said, explaining that 20 consignment or used furniture shops are in Keene, a few miles from the farm.

"When we drove Devon to school, we'd drive by and see a line of cars at some little shacks in our town. The owner was buying furniture closeouts; we've bought \$5 chairs there. They're open on Thursday and Saturday; if you can't find Gary on Thursday, that's probably where he is."

Gary says this is his stress reliever "it's something I did with my mom when I was a kid. She was into antiques and could pile though an old barn, cleaning it out for someone. I think she was the first American Picker.

"It's a standing joke with our family. We'll be traveling, and I'll yell stop! Devon just freaks out. It's fun to find something you like and only pay what you want for it."

"We've turned all of our younger family members, particularly Gary's sister, onto this. It's become a competition to see who can find the cheapest stuff that's pretty and most functional," Marsha said, adding "Devon and Kyle just roll their eyes."

Gary's other stress reliever is art. His brief college career was aimed at being an art major.

"A few years ago, I did a painting class with other middle-age people at a local high school. We sat there, painted and talked," he said, acknowledging that it's hard to set aside time or space to follow this interest.

Rather, spare time entails working for the UPHA, judging and giving clinics. He spoke about challenges the professional organization faces.

"In many ways, the horse business is at a crossroads. We need to be proactive as horsemen and owners. We need to take a stand, find a direction and be involved in ensuring that the business is sustained.

"UPHA members have been leaders of our industry. It's vital to see that continue because, as horsemen, we need to guarantee our livelihood not just for the sake of providing for ourselves but for future generations making it a healthy, fun, safe experience for clients as well. We need to stay ahead of where we're going. That's one reason the Super Convention will be so valuable to the Saddlebred and Morgan Associations, AHHS and the UPHA. With the numbers we expect there, we'll have the opportunity to create positive change, to plan and take steps we all can be behind.

"If this is something Kyle and Devon want to have ... we haven't hassled them about it. But Marsha and I can't do anything else. We'll continue to train horses and expose the American Saddlebred to everyone we can. We can't sit here and expect someone else can do it. There's only so much a person can do alone, but there's nothing we can't accomplish together."

That's true for the business and the Fairfield South family as well.