

BROOKLYN GASKILL

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE *Junior Exhibitor Of The Year*

BY SARA PIZZUTO

Focused. Self-confident. Driven. Helpful. Fun. Those are the adjectives that instructor Brooke Applegate used to describe her student, Brooklyn Gaskill. Her work ethic and confidence have taken her to the top of her sport, and her willing attitude has allowed her to successfully team with a myriad of equine partners throughout her widely successful show season last year. Gaskill's 2022 season highlights included multiple victory passes in Freedom Hall and world's and national titles in both the equitation and performance divisions. It was these tremendous accomplishments that helped this versatile equestrian earn your vote as the People's Choice Junior Exhibitor Of The Year.

Brooklyn Gaskill's first foray in the horse industry came while her family was house hunting for a new home.

"There was a tiny little barn in the backyard with a horse," she said. "I don't know why but I just instantly fell in love. So, I begged my grandma to take me to get a lesson and she did."

A then nine-year-old Gaskill was immediately drawn to the horses and quickly developed a passion for showing. Her grandparents, Richard and Tonya Confer, enabled this newfound love and have been an integral part of Gaskill's journey in the show ring.

Gaskill's abilities were on display beginning in 2019, when the young rider made her first appearances on the breed's biggest stages. Her first world's title came a mere two years later in 2021, where she demonstrated her versatility as the Saddle Seat Equitation 11 and Under World's Champion teamed with Viva La Fantasia and was additionally the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 13 and Under Reserve World's Champion of Champions aboard Seven Oaks Heir Show.

Brooklyn Gaskill has established herself as one of the country's top junior exhibitor riders. She made her equitation debut with CH-EQ Altar Of The Sun in 2022, which resulted in world's and national honors.

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Since then, Gaskill has continued to hone her skills, now under the direction of the team at the Kentucky based Desmar Stables. During the school year, she travels once a week to ride alongside Mark Turner, Caitlin Cooper, and Brooke and Alayna Applegate and spends her summers at the barn as much as possible.

The 2022 season presented new, exciting challenges as Gaskill was paired with the then reigning Triple Crown winning equitation mount, CH-EQ Altar Of The Sun. The chestnut, affectionally nicknamed "Sunny" had just finished a remarkable season with stablemate and now instructor, Alayna Applegate, winning the Good Hands National Finals, the UPHA Senior Challenge Cup National Championship, and the USEF Saddle Seat Medal Finals. Gaskill was fortunate that her family purchased Sunny following Alayna Applegate's successes. The Desmar team along with Brooke Applegate looked forward to the pairing of Sunny and Gaskill in 2022.

"Sunny is a once in a lifetime horse, that for obvious reasons holds an extra special place in my heart," Applegate said. "When the opportunity arose to team Sunny and Brooklyn together, we could hardly contain our excitement. We knew as a team that it would be a challenge, but it would pay off in the end. The two complement each other. Their work ethics are very much the same. We took our time and let them develop a bond, and then watched them grow together each and every ride."

While Sunny and Gaskill established their partnership, Applegate also worked with Gaskill on strengthening her equitation form. Applegate explained that their work together in the bullpen during lunge lessons has been her favorite time with Gaskill, as they work not only on Gaskill's physical abilities but the mental component to riding as well.

"We most definitely put the work in, but at the same time, we spend a lot of time chatting," she said.





Gaskill trains under the expert guidance of the team at Desmar Stables. She celebrated being crowned the 2022 Junior Saddle Seat Equitation World's Champion of Champions with fellow world's champions, Addyson and Harper Hamby, along with Brooke Applegate, Caitlin Cooper, Mark Turner, and Alayna Applegate.

"We chat about anything and everything. It helps set her mind and put her in a great mental place to focus on her goals and what our focus is in both short and long term."

The Desmar team established multiple goals for Gaskill for the 2022 show season. She was most excited to take on the equitation ranks once again, this time with a new partner.

"I love absolutely everything about equitation," she said. "But a few of my favorites are when I connect with my horse and understand what they need from me. I love the adrenaline rush when I enter the ring. And I love it when we nail a pattern."

Gaskill and CH-EQ Altar Of The Sun amassed a nearly undefeated equitation show record together in 2022. Gaskill made an equitation victory pass at every show she attended and was aboard Sunny to be named the Junior Saddle Seat Equitation Grand Champion at Lexington Junior League. They then traveled to Louisville where Gaskill added to her Freedom Hall winning streak as the 2022 Saddle Seat Equitation 12 & 13-Year-Old World's Champion en route to the roses as the Kentucky State Fair Junior Equitation World's Champion of Champions. Gaskill and Sunny then ended their first season together as the UPHA Junior Challenge Cup Reserve National Champions-making it the second consecutive year for Gaskill to earn this honor, having previously claimed the reserve streamers in 2021 aboard Viva La Fantasia. Her exceptional season thrilled the team at Desmar.

"Brooklyn is blessed with a beautiful, natural seat," Applegate said. "She sits on a horse beautifully and has an instinct in the show ring that is hard to teach. She makes me look good."

Gaskill's success didn't just include the equitation ranks. Rather, she broadened her skills aboard multiple performance mounts. She tackled the ultra-competitive five-gaited ranks aboard Got My Eye On You with junior exhibitor 13 and under wins. She also excelled in Louisville aboard Daily Gratitude, the granddaughter of CH The Daily Lottery, who was named the Three-Gaited Pony Reserve World's Champion of Champions with Gaskill in the saddle. Lastly, Gaskill teamed with Nutcracker's Shooting Star for a reserve ribbon in Freedom Hall as the Junior Exhibitor Country Pleasure 13 and Under Section

Two Reserve World's Champions.

"I was so grateful for every opportunity," Gaskill said. "I had so much fun I loved showing in divisions I have never shown in before. It was an amazing experience. I also loved getting to know what each horse needed from me to make them look and feel their best."

Gaskill was able to apply all that she had learned in her equitation success in order to better her performance rides. Applegate explained that Gaskill is able to successfully team with whatever mount she is aboard because of the horsemanship skills learned in her equitation lessons.

"Brooklyn is great in whatever class she is showing in," she said. "In our program, I very much teach the equitation kids and the performance riders the same. At the end of the day, equitation is horsemanship. Your body and mindset in the saddle is a cause and effect of your horses' performance. Brooklyn does focus more on her form in an equitation class, sure, but as a whole, she is coached to ride the same way no matter if it's an equitation class or a performance class and she does a great job executing any division."

Not only has Gaskill excelled in the show ring, but she has learned valuable lessons through her riding that will aid her in her life outside of the barn. Her work as Desmar Stables and in the Saddlebred industry has set her up for success in her future.

"Showing horses has taught me several life lessons," she said. "The life lessons it has taught me are to be patient, that hard work pays off, and how to balance school, social life, and riding."

Gaskill will have to refer back to those lessons learned as she looks ahead towards another promising show season. Whether showcasing her elegance in the equitation division, or guiding a gaited horse at the rack, Gaskill has her sights set on another successful year, creating memories with fellow horse enthusiasts.

"I'm most excited to have fun with everyone at the barn, making TikToks with everyone, go to new shows, meet new people, and learn new things," she said.

Brooke Applegate is confident that this young rider will continue to excel, regardless of which horse she is paired with in the show ring, as she continues to make her mark in the equine industry.

"She is an absolute joy and pleasure to work with,"



Not only is Brooklyn Gaskill an accomplished equitation exhibitor, but she also excels in the performance division. She piloted Daily Gratitude to the reserve streamers in Louisville as the 2022 Three-Gaited Pony Reserve World's Champion of Champions.

Applegate said. "She comes through the barn door with a smile on her face and a willing attitude and ready to meet any challenge I throw at her every day. She very much enjoys helping the younger kids in the barn. I am extremely proud of the jockey and young lady that Brooklyn has become, and I am beyond excited for her future."



Alayna and Brooke Applegate are part of the professionals at Desmar Stables that have aided in Gaskill's success. They celebrated with Gaskill at the UPHA/American Royal as she was named the UPHA Junior Challenge Cup Reserve National Champion for the second consecutive year.