



Kara Hachigian

Reserve Champion Junior Exhibitor of the Year &

CH Hi on Heir

Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 Champion

BY JENNY GREY

Kara Hachigian is the distinguished recipient of two People's Choice awards for the 2014 competition year. She earned your vote as the People's Choice Reserve Champion Junior Exhibitor of the Year and her horse, CH Hi on Heir, was the People's Choice Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 Champion. A skilled and determined competitor, Kara is also a passionate advocate of those less fortunate than herself. Her path has not always been easy but last year's show season brought memories that will last for a lifetime.

Kara, a resident of Houston, TX, was eleven years old when she first started riding quarter horses in a summer program. Recognizing her passion for the sport, her parents, Kirk and Kathy Hachigian, gave her lessons for her birthday at a local Saddlebred barn. She loved the saddle seat discipline and before long was begging her parents for a horse. They eventually gave in, purchasing Party Nut for her 13th birthday. "I had begged my parents for a horse all year so I was elated!" Kara remembered. "I hadn't even learned to canter yet when I began trying to team up with her. She was a three-year old five-gaited Nutcracker mare with little experience. It was a rough beginning! I fell off almost every time I rode her for the first couple of months. We have been through everything together though (including my whole show career), and she has taught me a lot about perseverance." Kara had some catching up to do with those riders who began their careers at age 5 or 6 but she has succeeded with grit and determination. She first entered the show ring in Academy Walk-Trot, graduating to the A circuit in 2011. Now 17, Kara is about to enter her final year as a junior exhibitor.

Kara has worked with several different trainers during the last six years but has forged a special bond with Sandra Currier at Bluebonnet Farm in Bellville, TX. They have been working together for about three years in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation that has brought out the best in Kara's performance. Sandra describes Kara as a 'dream client', who only wants the best for her horses. When Sandra recommends something for their health or well being, there is no question the suggestion will be implemented. "I love that she is involved with her horses' welfare," Sandra told us.

"Kara has been wonderful to work with," Sandra added. "When we first started



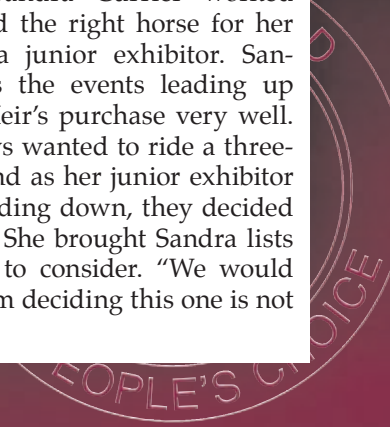
Kara Hachigian and CH Hi on Heir (Hoops) began their career together with an exciting first championship in the Three-Gaited Stake at the Pin Oaks Charity Horse Show last year. It was a huge thrill for Kara and a harbinger of good things to come.

together, she was a reserved and quiet young lady. At that time she had a young horse (I'm Coming Home) that was a bit fractious. As one can imagine, he was not the best confidence builder for a young rider. Fortunately we were able to turn that into a lesson on horsemanship and Kara and I were able to laugh at his antics. So while he was not the best horse with which to hit the show ring, he did teach her how to read a horse's thoughts and moods. I think at this point Kara learned to trust me. Several times I asked her to try something new and she would say, 'I can't do that.' Of course, my reply was, 'Yes you can - you know how to do that!' Over and over she would accomplish what we were working on. It really boosted her self-confidence and gave her the ability to believe in herself."

When the Saddlebred community votes for an outstanding junior exhibitor, it typically looks at not just show ring success, but also someone who is an excellent representative of the breed. Kara Hachigian exemplifies this description. Kara's family, long-term supporters of the Texas Children's Hospital, spurred her interest in St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, for which she

has raised over \$80,000 in the last three years through the Ribbons of Service program. At the recent UPHA convention, Kara was honored as having raised more money for charity through Ribbons of Service than anyone else in the USA. Helen Robertson, the Ribbons of Service chair, was quoted as saying, "Kara is an outstanding young lady. She is an inspiration to younger riders and participants, not only for her success in the program, but for her dedication to perfecting her skills as an equestrian." In October of last year, Kara was featured in the Houston Chronicle for her service to both St. Jude's and the local community where she has logged over 100 hours walking dogs and cleaning cages at Citizens for Animal Protection.

Kara and Sandra Currier worked together to find the right horse for her last years as a junior exhibitor. Sandra remembers the events leading up to CH Hi on Heir's purchase very well. Kara had always wanted to ride a three-gaited horse, and as her junior exhibitor career was winding down, they decided to give it a try. She brought Sandra lists of possibilities to consider. "We would go through them deciding this one is not



suitable, this one is not in our budget, this one is too old, this one is not enough horse, this one is too much horse, etc." Finally a friend of Sandra's told her Hoops was for sale. She talked to Kathy and Kara about going to see him but they had obligations that would keep them busy for the next several weeks. "What to do?" asked Sandra. "We decided I would try him out." She took a trip to Matt Shiflet Stables in Asheboro, NC. Telling her everything he knew about Hoops, Matt was extremely helpful to Sandra in making the purchase decision. Sandra remembers it was 'nerve-racking,' knowing that Kara had not ridden him but she was confident enough to buy him then and there. "He had just enough enthusiasm to help Kara be a bit bolder in the ring and I thought the two of them would be a fun team to work with."

Kara's first ride on Hoops, when he came home to Bluebonnet Farm in late November, 2013, was one of her happiest memories of their time together. "When I got on him and took a first pass, he bounce-trotted along the rail. It was unreal. We clicked right away!" Kara knew they had found something unique. "He moves like a true walk-trot horse – slow and precise. He's very focused. He also has a special personality in the ring. He trembles with excitement before every class. There have been so many great moments with Hoops!"

The Pin Oak Charity show in her home state of Texas was a breakthrough show for this new team. Successful in their first time out, they were called to the presentation area as the Three-Gaited Stake Champions. It was a huge thrill for Kara and a harbinger of good things to come. They followed up this auspicious start with first place in Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 and the Three-Gaited Junior Exhibitor Reserve Championship at the J.D. Massey Classic. Another first place at Midwest Charity set them up nicely for Louisville, where she would have her first world's championship experience.

Another highlight of Kara's year occurred during the week before Louisville in a practice ride well beyond her expectations. It gave her the confidence of believing her first world championship show with Hoops would be a wonderful experience. She was nervous, yet excited at the same time. After her first pass in the qualifying class, she knew she was having a great ride. The judges agreed, awarding CH Hi on Heir the Reserve World's Championship in Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 Division 2. This was an outstanding accomplishment for Kara, as it was her first time winning a ribbon at Louisville, an incredibly competitive environment. Not surprisingly, Kara was apprehensive about the final and had to find a way to



Kara Hachigian and Sandy Currier, her trainer, have formed a special bond during the last three years. It was a triumph for both of them when Hoops and Kara won the Reserve World's Championship in Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 Division 2 last year at their first Louisville show.

stay calm and focused, knowing there was a real possibility of placing at the top of the judges' cards. Her dreams were realized with another beautiful ride, scoring a great victory pass with Hoops as the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 Reserve World's Champion of Champions.

When preparing for a class, Kara likes to listen to music, spend time with her horse and focus on staying calm. She appreciates that Sandra Currier trusts her enough to ride her own ride while saying just enough on the rail to give her confidence. Kara learned a lot about herself and Hoops at Louisville and worked on applying what she had learned at the American Royal in Kansas City. "I knew I needed to be more aggressive and get off the rail in the championship," she observed. "I do get very nervous, but I know I can trust Hoops. He was amazing at the Royal – very focused." They finished a great show season in fine style with top ribbons in the junior exhibitor three-gaited division.

Kara and CH Hi on Heir are poised and ready for the 2015 show season in her final year as a junior exhibitor. She is also determined to find success with her horse, Party Nut in a new division and He's Momma's Boy in country pleasure. Reflecting back on her show career, she is very proud of how much trust she has established between herself and her horses, especially Hoops. "In the beginning I had a rough, few years," she confessed, "but I never gave up. I feel very blessed." She is also grateful to have such supportive parents in Kirk and Kathy Hachigian. When she first heard about her People's Choice awards she started jumping up

and down, immediately calling her mom, who travels with her to all of the shows. She acknowledges that they took a huge leap of faith and a big risk regarding the purchase of Hoops but it has paid off in a spectacular fashion.

"It has been fun watching Kara go from a very quiet youngster to an outgoing young lady," observed Sandra Currier. "It seems as if each horse she has teaches her not only about horsemanship, but also about life. She has learned to take on tasks she thinks are impossible and with an inner determination, she prevails. She is also very good at realizing a mistake, analyzing it and very rarely making it again. These skills have helped her make a huge amount of progress in a very short time."

Kara's story is not just about winning, it is about hard work, determination and taking personal responsibility. In just a single show season, she and Hoops have been recognized by the Saddlebred community for their outstanding performance in the three-gaited division. Equally important to Kara, her riding has been able to help children in need. She is a person with a broader view of the world and is willing to go the extra mile to make a difference.

As for 2015, Kara plans to enjoy it to the utmost, making her last year as a junior exhibitor special. "I plan to give it my all at every show," she declared. "Hoops deserves it!" We could not agree more. Kara and CH Hi on Heir are well-deserving of your votes as Reserve Champion Junior Exhibitor of the Year and the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 Champion.