



People's Choice Junior Exhibitor of the Year Megan Buckley



By Jenny Grey

This year we have a unique set of circumstances where grandparents Russell and Jeanette Quilhot and their granddaughter, Megan Buckley earned two of the six major People's Choice awards in the same year. The Quilhots earned the People's Choice Breeder of the Year award and Megan has been voted the People's Choice Junior Exhibitor of the Year following an incredible show season culminating in a triumphant conclusion to her junior exhibitor career.

Megan's interest in horses began at three years old when she visited her grandparents at Indian Creek Farm, riding with her cousins from Virginia. Living two hours away from the farm, she began taking lessons with Kathy Conflenti in Indianapolis when she was seven. It was not until she was in fifth grade that Megan began to show under the Indian Creek banner directed by Kurt Hufferd and Shanna Gish, traveling to Columbia City every weekend to practice. When it became apparent that Megan needed practice time during the week, Shanna Gish arranged for her to ride close to her home in Zionsville, Indiana, with Kellie and Dalton Budd at Select Show Horses Arabian Farm. Megan now owns her own Arabian who she has shown in equitation for the last two years.

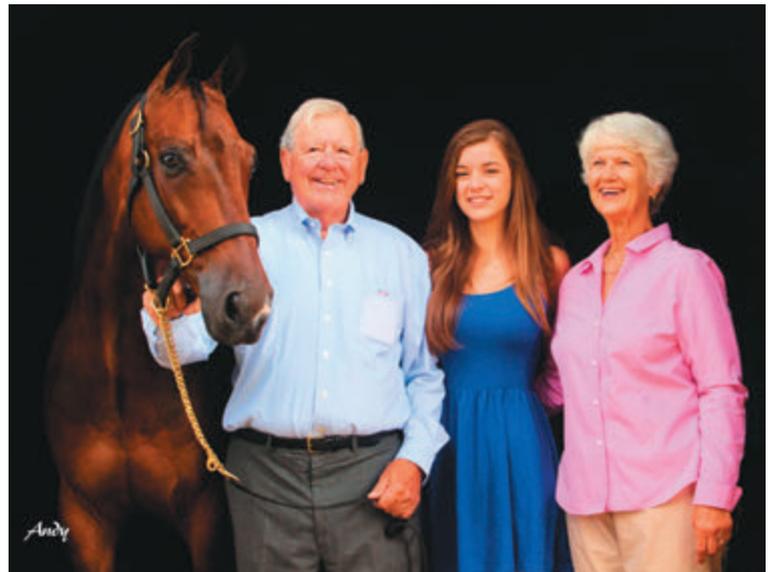
Progressing very quickly from the Morgan walk-trot division to the junior exhibitor ranks, Megan and Indian Creek High Stakes were the 2011 New England Regional English Pleasure Junior Exhibitor Champions, then followed up with a first victory pass in Oklahoma as the English Pleasure 13 and Under Reserve World Champions. Riding many different horses on her trips to Indian Creek, she became a versatile and adaptable horsewoman who, by 2014, was becoming hard to beat. Her grandma, Jeanette, has fond memories of Megan as a shy, young child. "She was a darling little girl who wore the funniest outfits", Jeanette remembered. "She was horrified when she had to wear make-up."

Through the horses, Megan has blossomed, making firm friends in the equestrian community and gaining the confidence to step up to new challenges. "She doesn't seem to have any nerves", said Jeanette of Megan today, who focuses on the job at hand and who will catch ride in any division at a moment's notice. "I'm most proud of her self-confidence and her ability to focus and see a job through", her mom, Anne, told us. "She's a fun, caring person who doesn't let things get her down; there's no drama." Shanna, who has known Megan from the time she was a baby, is thrilled with how far she has progressed, saying "She has grown so much through the horses; she's always thinking, she has opinions and she will try anything. She's always 'right there'; very genuine."

Ending 2014 as the Park Harness Junior Exhibitor World Champion with JW Phantom and the Classic Pleasure Driving Junior Exhibitor World Champion with Indian Creek Nathan Hale, Megan was ready to go into her last year as a junior exhibitor with a special, new horse. Kurt and Shanna had been looking for some time when they saw Jenny Taylor riding Alexander McQueen at Oklahoma in 2014. Immediately thinking "That's the one!" they arranged for Megan to try him out. "She loved him from the moment she sat on him", Shanna remembered. Having won three world championships as a two and three-year old, 'Zander' was well-qualified to be a top contender in the junior exhibitor English pleasure division.



Megan began showing under the Indian Creek banner when she was in fifth grade, riding everything from 'barely broke' youngsters to seasoned world champions. She is pictured with SpringMill November Rain (left) and Indian Creek High Stakes, a 'forever' family horse.



In a year of great achievement, Megan Buckley was named the People's Choice Junior Exhibitor of the Year at the same time as her grandparents, Russell and Jeanette Quilhot of Indian Creek Farm, were voted the People's Choice Breeders of the Year.



At the triumphant conclusion of her junior exhibitor career, Megan Buckley won the Junior Exhibitor 14-17 English Pleasure World Championship with Alexander McQueen. The excitement was shared with her mom, Anne Buckley, and her trainers, Shanna Gish and Kurt Hufferd.



A versatile rider who is always ready for a new experience, Megan Buckley excels in multiple disciplines including western pleasure, English pleasure, classic pleasure, the park and pleasure driving divisions and saddle seat equitation. She is pictured with Indian Creek Broadway Joe with whom Shanna Gish won the Futurity Western Pleasure Three-Year-Old World Championship in 2010.

Megan hoped Zander would also be a good candidate for equitation but only five years old last year, he was not quite ready. Megan took this in stride and moved on to focus on performance, but she still wanted to show her last year in equitation. Just two weeks before Oklahoma, Cate Blevins generously offered to loan Megan her outstanding equitation mount, The Wizard, who she rode only twice before leaving for the Morgan Grand National. It was a perfect solution. Megan qualified for all of her equitation finals, placing in the top 10 in senior saddle seat equitation and the UPHA Senior Challenge Cup. These were great achievements to round out an unprecedented year of success.

Megan's 2015 Grand National schedule was so tight that she literally had to leave the ring after judging for the Classic Pleasure Saddle Youth Finals was complete in order to ride in the UPHA qualifier. When High Stakes (aka Ace) was announced as the Reserve Champion, Shanna Gish had to lead him out of the ring for his victory pass. "It was a nail biter!" observed Shanna, in a great moment of understatement. High Stakes has been a very special horse for Megan. "He was born and raised at Indian Creek and I was able to show him, making him a true family horse. We have done really well together and he is so sweet...Ace is a horse that will stay at the barn forever because of his amazing temperament and how wonderful he is with everyone."

Undeclared in pleasure driving, Nathan Hale won the Grand National Pleasure Driving Junior Exhibitor 14-17 Championship and the Classic Pleasure Driving Junior Exhibitor World Championship with Megan at whip. "It was really cool winning the classic driving for the second year in a row. "I know my grandparents love Nathan and it was really special to do so well with him."

The beautiful and charismatic Alexander McQueen, who won the English Pleasure 16-17 Grand National Championship earned a wonderfully sweet victory as the 2015 English Pleasure Junior Exhibitor 14-17 World Champion with Megan in the saddle. "I didn't even comprehend that I won the English pleasure class until I saw Shanna running through the gate", Megan remembered. "It was such a special moment to share with everyone at the barn, and, of course, my wonderful horse. I also loved seeing everyone who owned him before and how excited they were...I was nervous to go into both my classes at OKC but I could tell he knew what he was doing so once I was in the ring, I just had fun!"

For Shanna, it was a memorable trainer/instructor moment, watching Megan achieve the pinnacle of success. "I wanted her to know how very proud I was of her, no matter how it was tied. She rode a 'give you goosebumps' kind of class. I remember the crowd was really behind them; it was so loud. She rocked it out!" Megan had given Zander the

confidence to show his beauty and powerful energy in a world-class performance earning a triumphant victory pass to close out the junior exhibitor years.

With 2014 and 2015 representing the highlights of Megan's career to date, she is also very proud of having made it to the World Cup trials saying, "Although I did not make the team it was a wonderful honor to ride alongside all of the amazing horsemen – and I learned a lot. Being able to ride different breeds has been a great learning experience ... I hope to be able to show different breeds like Saddlebreds and continue showing Arabians. I also hope to make one of the saddle seat teams in the future. Going to the World Cup trials was such a unique experience from riding with different people to getting on and showing a horse I've never ridden."

When not competing, she enjoys the beauty of Indian Creek Farm, loving to ride outside on the trails in good weather and having sleepovers in the apartment above the barn. A senior at Park Tudor High School in Indianapolis, she is active in the choir and in technical theater and enjoys spending time with her friends and her five dogs. With college on the horizon, she is considering the University of Southern California, Pepperdine, Elon University or High Point University with a view to a career in marketing or business. One thing is certain; she will continue showing Zander in the amateur and youth divisions.

Megan spoke of her gratitude to those who have launched her to success saying, "Thank you to Kathy (Conflenti) for teaching me the foundations of riding and sparking my love of horses. To Kellie and Dalton (Budd) for helping me with equitation and introducing me to a whole, new breed. To Kurt for putting me on horses that were barely broke but taught me so much. To my parents for supporting me; my mom taking me to the barn every weekend before I could drive and a special thank you to my dad who can never go to horse shows or the barn because of his allergies but still watches every show online. And especially to Shanna who has been so dedicated and generous throughout the years to not only myself but also to every other person who has a passion for horses."

Fearless and willing to take on new challenges, Megan Buckley has ridden everything from 'barely broke' youngsters to seasoned world champions. Win or lose, she is a gracious competitor, always leaving the ring with a smile on her face and a pat for her horse. She has grown from a shy young girl into a versatile, world-class rider in just a few short years, reminding us of the power of horses to transform us and make us the best we can be. We congratulate Megan on being honored as the People's Choice Junior Exhibitor of the Year and look forward to seeing her in the show ring for many years to come.