



Aleia Brown

2014 People's Choice Saddle Seat Equitation Rider of the Year

BY JENNY GREY

Aleia Brown reached the pinnacle of equitation success in 2014, winning the coveted NHS Good Hands Final in Springfield, Illinois and the USEF Saddle Seat Medal Finals in Kansas City, both jewels in the saddle seat equitation Triple Crown.

Aleia began riding when she was five years old. She attended the Dayton horse show with a friend who was riding at Cape Cod, then began taking lessons from Kathy and Erin Boggs on a pony named Snickers. She loved the experience and by 2005, she became Cape Cod's first Academy Walk-Trot rider and the first very young child they taught. By 2006 she moved into the show program with Erin Boggs as her primary instructor and has trained with Erin for her entire equitation career. Erin's husband, Reese, trains Aleia's equitation mount, Madeira's Fame (Thomas), and teaches Aleia what he has learned about her horse. It is a highly effective combination of skills. She considers them all her extended family and was proud to be a flower girl at Reese and Erin's wedding.

Erin Richey holds Aleia in high regard, both as a rider and as a person. "She is a very special young woman," said Erin. "Our journey has been a wonderful combination of ups and downs. I truly believe it has not been the glory moments that have made her the competitor and champion she is. It has been the trials and tribulations that have taught her to dig deep inside and fight just a little harder. She not only made her dreams come true by winning the finals, she made my dreams as an instructor come true as well."

In order to be competitive in the 14-17 age group, Aleia needed the right horse. She certainly found an outstanding partner in Thomas although she was far from convinced when she first saw him. Looking at a video of a different horse, Erin accidentally came across Thomas. Her trainer's intuition told her he was special but when she and Aleia went to Missouri to see him, their first meeting presented some challenges. Aleia was already unsure because he was a five-gaited horse who had not been equitated. Erin, however, was very persistent and the decision to buy him was made during the car ride home. Erin's intuition was correct. Thomas is steady enough for equitation but 'turns up the heat' when he enters the ring. It is a very special horse that can fire up on the rail then settle down to perform a precise pattern.

Aleia gave thoughtful, articulate answers to our questions. Her focus has changed a little with each competition year. "Every year you get a little better," she observed. "The last two years I have been trying to make my horse better." In 2014, everything came together in an incredible show



Aleia Brown had the surprise of a lifetime when she not only won the NHS Good Hands Final riding Madeira's Fame, but found out a few minutes later the title was earned with a unanimous vote of the judges. Her mom, Beth Brown, had the excitement of joining Aleia in the ring when the results were announced.

season. She won the NHS Good Hands and USEF Saddle Seat Medal qualifying classes early on at the River Ridge show, then at Lexington Junior League she won the UPHA Challenge Cup 14-17 and the Saddle Seat Equitation Championship. At the World's Championship show in Louisville, Aleia won a well-deserved victory pass on the green shavings as the Saddle Seat Equitation 16 Years World's Champion.

The Good Hands final at the Mid America Mane Event horse show represented everything Aleia had worked for during her equitation career. Aleia and Erin followed their routine of taking turns walking the patterns and discussing what needed to be done. They were stabled in a wide aisle so Erin also read the patterns to Thomas, as is her custom, walking them several times in front of his stall. After the first, figure eight pattern, Aleia was called among the top twelve riders to move onto the next phase. Another clean workout put her in the top ten. Placings were announced backwards and Aleia found that she was in the top two. It was an amazing feeling when she was announced as the champion. This was the first time she had won a final and the win was affirmation of everything she had worked so hard to achieve. There was still a surprise to come – the announcer, Tuffy Owens, added that Aleia's NHS Good Hands win was earned with a unanimous vote of the judges. She could hardly believe it. Her family and friends went crazy and she spent the rest of the evening on the phone listening to their congratulations.

It was an equally exciting experience for Aleia's mom, Beth, who was called into the arena when the final two competitors were



Aleia Brown, who began riding at Cape Cod Farm when she was five years old, has enjoyed Erin Richey as her equitation instructor for her entire career. It was a dream come true for trainer, Reese Richey, Erin and Aleia, when she achieved the pinnacle of success as the USEF Saddle Seat Medal Champion.

waiting for the results. Being there for such a significant win was a unique and moving experience. "She is such a hard, dedicated worker," said Beth. "She never gives up and always comes back trying harder."

There were still important events on the horizon. Aleia won the reserve championship in the UPHA Senior Challenge Cup National Championship and was well-positioned to be a top contender in the USEF Saddle Seat Finals. She had a very difficult pattern in which she had to ride a circle within a circle, keeping both of them even. There was also a difficult choice about how best to exit the ring. Aleia prevailed, earning the USEF Saddle Seat Gold Medal in her last class of an amazing show season.

In addition to show ring triumphs, Aleia has fond memories of time spent with her mom and of just talking to Thomas, who nickers back. She gets emotional knowing that 2015 is her last junior exhibitor year but quickly switches to the positive by saying she intends to stick with equitation and have fun! She would like to take this opportunity to thank her parents, Erin and Reese, and her barn family and friends for their love and support during the junior exhibitor years and to Thomas, for making her dreams come true.

We have interviewed many equitation riders over the years. Without exception, those who have developed the discipline to achieve what Aleia Brown has accomplished are outstanding young men and women who are already carrying these skills into adulthood. She has worked incredibly hard and made sacrifices to be where she is today. We hope that her 2015 show season will be one to remember for the rest of her life!