

ALWAYS AN ENTERTAINER

Absolutely Fabulous

by Bob Funkhouser



Susan Phillips and CH Absolutely Fabulous were twice World's Champion of Champions to go with five Louisville blues.



In retirement, Stanley was a beautiful fixture to the pastures of Golden Creek Farms.

He had the color. He had the personality. He had the athletic ability. He was absolutely fabulous every time he entered the ring.

Registered as Summer Discovery by his breeder, Barbara Blacklaw, the gray son of CH Summertime Colors (by Secret Selection) and the Shamrock's Misty Flyte daughter, A Summer Surprise, received his new name, Absolutely Fabulous, from his last owner, the late Susan Phillips. He fulfilled many roles for Phillips throughout his storied career. For the past 12 years, Stanley, as he was affectionately known, ruled the pasture in retirement at Golden Creek Farms, Simpsonville, KY, before passing away this August at the age of 24.

The Singing Hills Stable product began his career in the winner's circle and he finished it that way. As a yearling he won the Washington State Futurity Yearling Colts and Yearling Champion classes. Summer Discovery won the two-year-old harness section of the Washington State Futurity the next year. The last show under the Blacklaw family's ownership was a reserve in the Two-Year-Old Fine Harness class at the Northwest Fall Classic.

With Dick Boettcher as trainer/agent, Martha Lampe Keck was the next owner of the then just turned three-year-old. They didn't have long before enjoying the fruits of their new purchase. Boettcher debuted his energetic student at Monterey in May of that year taking everyone's breath away with their winning performance in the Three-Year-Old Fine Harness class. As a three and four-year-old, Boettcher showed the colt seven times, winning all seven, while Keck got the final two drives, winning the amateur harness qualifier and championship at the 1995 Monterey Springfest.

"What a great horse," said Keck. "He tried every day; ears up, eyes bright. He got a great start with Danny Musselman and then Dick [Boettcher] got him before he went big time. We bought him for me as a three-gaited show pleasure horse. I wanted to win the championship at Kansas City. He figured out he wanted to be a harness horse and I got to show him in two classes. What a thrill!"

"Then what Mary McClean did for him at the end of his career was one of the kindest and most gracious things I've ever seen."

Enter Susan Phillips of Alpha-Sun Stables. Phillips young son Matthew had tragically died. Alpha-Sun trainer Rich Robertson had been working at having something for her to show again thinking a new project would be good for Phillips. They purchased and showed Harlem's Valentino but ended up keeping him for a breeding stallion and were looking for another harness horse. Robertson told her of a horse on the west coast and they made arrangements to visit Dick Boettcher.

According to good friend D.D. Dutel, Phillips was not particularly fond of horses that weren't traditional chestnut, bay or black so she was a little taken back when they led out this gray horse. Even though the horse was everything he was represented to be Phillips still wasn't sure she could buy a gray horse. After much convincing from Robertson during the car ride back to the airport she did buy "Stanley" and changed his registered name to Absolutely Fabulous.

It turned out to be a great decision, as they would win 38 classes and 10 reserves over the next six seasons. Among those titles were two World's Champion of Champions (2001 & 1998), five World's Championships, two Reserve World's Champion of Champions and one Reserve World's Championship. Additionally, Phillips and the gray horse won four consecutive Amateur Fine Harness National Championships (1999 – 2002) at the American Royal. Trainers for that six-year era included Rich Robertson, Mitch Clark, Donna Moore, Mike Tunstall and Nelson Green.

In case you weren't around when this grand horse was showing just to give you an idea of what caliber world's champion he was, when Stanley won his first World's Champion of Champions roses he turned back the likes of CH A Sweet Treat and Sallie Wheeler, CH Our Canary Diamond and Misdee Wrigley Miller, CH Eleanor Rigby and Ann Fitzpatrick, CH Preferred American and Susan Bartlett and CH Mercer Raceabout with David Latham. Talk about an all-star line up!

Loved in and out of the show ring, "Stanley" made an impression on all those around him at Golden Creek. He was a huge presence while enjoying his golden years in comfortable surroundings and lush Simpsonville pastures. Now he is reunited with Susan, no doubt nickering for a peppermint.

"He was what his names says, Fabulous!" exclaimed Mike Tunstall. "He was all show horse, what you dream of having. Everything about him was good: working, showing, trimming, and hauling. He was such a neat animal."

"What many people might not know is how great he was under saddle. You could have trimmed him and made a strong run for the walk-trot stake. Back then we didn't have Park or I bet Susan [Phillips] would have let me show him under saddle. She just didn't want to take his mane off. He was her driving horse."

"One funny story is each year he would get whiter and whiter. Well, Susan went to her hairdresser and wanted her to put dapples on him. She did and he looked purple. I had to put my foot down and not let that happen again. It didn't look natural and it irritated his skin. Susan wasn't happy with me, but I had to say, 'no more.'"

"As a trainer you're lucky if you get to have one horse like this in your career."