

The One and Only CENTERFOLD

by Bob Funkhouser

The Hackney community just lost an icon of the cob-tail division, the legendary Centerfold. The son of Carnation's King and Souvenir's Pin Up Girl (by Dutch White's Souvenir) was 40 at the time of his passing.

Bred by Bridget Parker, Parker View Farm, the colt was registered by first owner Maggie Mayfield as Center Fold, but the athletic young star was always shown as Centerfold. It was under Mayfield's and partner Joe Listerman's watch that Centerfold won his first World's Grand Champion Hackney Pony title. It was 1980, his three-year-old season. Listerman and Centerfold made a great show to win the Junior Hackney Pony class and then returned on Saturday night and as just a three-year-old took on two of the greatest ponies of that era. Reserve World's Grand Champion on that night was Dun-Haven Crystal King with Bill Robinson driving for Art Birtcher. The championship yellow went to Apollo Sand, Gib Marcucci driving for Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Wheeler.

So, his career began on the path to becoming one of the all-time greats. Multiple World's Grand Champion and World's Champion of Champions honors were a part of his lengthy resume, showing until the age of 24.

"I saw him when Listerman brought him out as a three-year-old at Rock Creek," said Rich Campbell who was just honored, along with his training team as the AHHS Bill G. Robinson Trainer Of The Year. "Listerman said he had put him in a straw pen that winter and it really opened his shoulders. Centerfold was a true great one, probably one of the top five ever."

It took a great one to beat him the next year and at Louisville Poinsettia's Reality and Art Birtcher topped the young stallion in the junior stake. Centerfold and Listerman would be reserve to that same team the following year but it would be in the Hackney Pony World's Grand Championship.

Centerfold had but three owners in his career. In November of 1983 Bob Vesel selected Centerfold for Pat and Art Viles of Flying V Farm. Pat and the dynamic stallion became quite the team and part of their success that first year was the World's Champion Amateur Hackney Pony qualifier over Dutch Director and Mrs. Ron Bittle only to come back and win



Mrs. Landen P. Eckard and Centerfold were crowned the World's Champion of Champions Amateur Hackney Pony team in 1996.

the World's Champion of Champions Amateur Hackney Pony roses over Sallie Wheeler and Tijuana Starlet. In '85, Viles and Centerfold were twice reserve to Tijuana Princess and Ben Lester. What a wonderful era for cob-tails this was.

Also during this time Centerfold was proving to be quite the sire. With a limited

number of foals he was number two on the charts with among other offspring, multi-titled World's Grand Champion I've Arrived, Copa Cabana, Center Of Attraction, Center Stage, and All That Glitters. His son, Silver Screen, went on to be a sire of champions as well.

Gelded in 1989, Centerfold was purchased by the Eckard family's Drowning Creek Farm as a replacement for Mrs. Eckard's Dun-Haven Crystal King and Last Edition.

"I was sitting in the audience at Louisville when Centerfold won the World's Grand Championship as a three-year-old and had no idea I'd ever get the opportunity to sit behind him," recalled Mrs. Landen P. Eckard. "He was just a wonderful pony. I really enjoyed driving him. It's hard to believe he's gone. We've enjoyed him for so many years. He showed until he was 24 and lived to be 40.

"I used to talk to him when I showed him. I told him we were both mean and I would just laugh. Then we would go out and whip 'em. He tried to kick me out of the buggy sometimes and Lewis would yell, 'Mom, don't hit him.' I enjoyed getting out there and having the opportunity to beat some of the good ones. My greatest memory was beating Mrs. Wheeler. She was very sweet and gracious. It was always a pleasure to compete against her."

"We actually went to Flying V to look at Lilac Time to replace Crystal King but I wasn't sure she would be enough so I asked if we could look at Centerfold," added Lewis. "He was let down for the winter and they had gelded him, but I loved him that day. I had always been a fan.

"We bought him and I knew we were going to have to step up. I had a guy named Zeno Nordwick working for me at the time and we jogged 'Petey' a mile everyday like clockwork. He had a program and it worked. Mom liked a pony with a little pizzazz and he had it. She knew he was going to be good if he was dancing around when we hooked him."

A few years of ladies and amateur titles at regional shows and a couple reserve world's championships prepared them for things to come. In 1992, Centerfold was reserve in the ladies cob-tail qualifier at Louisville with Mrs. Eckard and then returned as the reserve world's grand champion with Lewis. Same thing for 1993, except it was reserve in the stallion/gelding class and then the world's grand championship, both with Lewis.

Returning to the winner's circle he knew as a three-year-old, Centerfold was crowned the World's Grand Champion Hackney Pony again in 1995

at the age of 18. Voted the UPHA Hackney Pony Of The Year that season, Centerfold and Lewis defeated the legendary Mark Of Excellence and Larry Ella on that Saturday night in Louisville, as well as Heartland Classic, Night Passage, Dr. T and Mr. Hawkeye.

The world's grand champion showed no signs of slowing down the following season but this time the focus would be on the amateur division and Mrs. Eckard. Lewis had both his mom and "Petey" just right to give her the thrill of a lifetime driving down victory lane as the Amateur Hackney Pony World's Champion of Champions. They defeated a host of household names, including reserve world's champion of champions Heartland's Triumphant King and Mrs. Alan Robson, Ann DuPree and Lady Lalique, Rudy Driscoll and Gotta Lotta Pzazz and Carolyn Groves with Playful Polly in the top five.

In his last few years of showing he was truly a family pony with niece Gina Lail also getting in on the fun. Centerfold showed until the age of 24 and he didn't want to stop then. Showing is all this pony ever wanted to do.

"He didn't like being turned out," said Lewis. "He would go out for a few minutes and then wanted to come right back in. At the age of 30 we brought him back to the show barn because that's where he wanted to be. He lived there the rest of his life. We had several opportunities to sell him, but mom never would. He's buried here on the farm with some other greats.

"There are so many things I remember about him. Centerfold had a unique, springy, airy trot and he wore a six-ounce shoe. He was natural, it was all him. You could count on him to make a bad week look good, but he did things his way. As long as you understand that, you were okay. He was also a very popular pony, well liked. He was good in the stall and loved his peppermints. The year mom won, Sallie Wheeler brought him a peppermint wreath.

"I'll never forget mom and Sallie in a two-pony workout. Sallie was showing Tijuana Starlet. They were two different ponies, but two grand ponies. It was fun to be a part of that. The fact that Centerfold only had three owners and three trainers his entire life, it was also an honor to be a part of that."



The year prior to his mom winning the amateur championship at Louisville, Lewis Eckard drove Centerfold to the World's Grand Champion Hackney Pony title, the pony's second.



Centerfold was an extremely popular performer as he was shown in many venues for his three lifetime owners. Mrs. Landen P. Eckard had many of those winning drives.