



Cheryl Ricci

People's Choice Amateur of the Year

BY JENNY GREY



After a long absence from the show ring, Cheryl Ricci took a triumphant victory pass as the Amateur Masters Pleasure Driving World Champion with Fox Hollow Talk About Me.



Cheryl Ricci's daughter, Victoria, who won the Junior Exhibitor Park Harness Reserve World Championship with Stardavari last year, was instrumental in persuading her mother to buy her own horse and return to the show ring.

Cheryl Ricci, your People's Choice Amateur of the Year, made a triumphant return to the show ring after a long absence. A life-long Morgan lover who showed at her first Grand National over 30 years ago, she ended the 2014 show season taking a brilliant victory pass with Fox Hollow Talk About Me as the Amateur Masters Pleasure Driving World Champion. In addition to highlighting show ring success, this story pays tribute to a dedicated parent who sat on the sidelines for several years while her daughter, Victoria, was growing up. When Cheryl decided to return to the sport she loved, the results were nothing short of spectacular.

Cheryl, along with her sisters, Roxanne Sardelli Greenway and Beverly Sardelli Fernandes, kept trail horses in their back yard in Warwick, RI, when they were kids. Cheryl, who owned a half-Morgan/half-Percheron, read every Morgan magazine and dreamed of someday having a Morgan to show. Until she was 18, she learned her early skills in the ring with a Thoroughbred hunter and a $\frac{3}{4}$ Arabian saddle seat horse. When her parents purchased her first Morgan, Paramount's Osohigh, from Jim and Ann Anderson, she embarked on a journey that would last for a lifetime.

Cheryl's first Grand National experience was in 1982, riding Ponderosa's Bleu in the park saddle division. In training with Ann Anderson at Hobby Knoll Stables from 1990 to 1995, she enjoyed great success with her well-loved Quail Run Warlord, Quail Run Buckaroo and Lady Hot Topic. She won many top ribbons around the country and at the Grand National show in the amateur and ladies pleasure saddle/driving and park harness divisions. A versatile and highly competent horsewoman, Cheryl would return to

the show ring years later to remind the world that she may have been absent from the ring, but her excellent skills were not forgotten.

After marrying Anthony Ricci and moving to Cranston, RI, Cheryl took a long sabbatical from the show ring to raise their daughter. Given the Sardelli family background, it was almost inevitable that Victoria would inherit her mom's interest in horses. "Victoria loved horses from when she was very young", Cheryl reminisced. "I think she has every horse movie ever made. She had Breyer horses, barns, a horse trailer, the toy saddles, blankets – everything made for horses. She was a horse-crazy kid!" Beginning lessons at age 11, Victoria dreamed of owning a black, Arabian stallion until Cheryl's sister, Roxanne, gave her a black, Morgan gelding named Sarde's Still Smokin'. From that time on, the Ricci family became dedicated members of the Morgan community.



Cheryl Ricci celebrated her first world championship victory pass in 2014 with her trainer, Nikki Rae Woodworth.

A devoted mom, Cheryl was cheering from ringside, while Victoria showed her outstanding Morgans – Sarde's Still Smokin in hunter pleasure, Stardavari in park harness and Graywood's Arthur, leased from Daisy Beisler, in classic pleasure. Believing that Cheryl needed to return to competition, both Anthony and Victoria embarked on a long campaign to persuade her to buy her own horse. Cheryl had occasionally shown good horses for other people from 2009 to 2012, but it was not until 2014 that she finally relented and decided to go horse shopping.

At her trainer, Nikki Rae Woodworth's suggestion early last year, they went to try out Fox Hollow Talk About Me at David Rand's stable in Maine. Cheryl remembers, "I told Nikki (my wonderful trainer), that I wanted a driving horse who could set his head just like my beloved Quail Run Buck A Roo." Cheryl could not have found a horse who fit the description as well as Toby. "I drove him and fell in love. I knew I had to have him. I didn't even go home to think about it."

Nikki loves working with this team. "I couldn't be more thrilled for Cheryl to be voted Amateur of the Year! Cheryl is someone who has been involved with Morgan horses for many years and truly loves and supports this breed. It is especially nice for her to share her passion for horses with her daughter, Victoria, and to have so much support from her husband, Anthony. I was more than excited to put the team of Cheryl and Toby together. It was obvious from the beginning it was a perfect match. Toby is 100% show horse and absolutely loves his job. Cheryl is extremely dedicated to the hard work that goes into competitive showing."



When Cheryl Ricci was looking for a new horse, she told Nikki Rae Woodworth that she wanted one who could set its head just like her beloved Quail Run Buck A Roo, who she showed during the 1990's.



Cheryl Ricci's family (Victoria, center and Anthony, right) waged a four-year campaign to get Cheryl back into showing. After a long absence, she achieved star status in less than a year.

Victoria Ricci, who ended her own, highly successful 2014 show season as the Grand National Park Harness Youth Finals Reserve Champion and the Park Harness Junior Exhibitor Reserve World Champion for the third consecutive year with Stardavari, was instrumental in persuading Cheryl to return to the ring. "The biggest part I played in getting my mom back into the show ring was in pushing her for four years to get herself a horse...I knew that showing was important to her as it was to me...I only ever saw my mom show when we would watch her old VHS tapes together; I never actually saw her show with my own eyes."

Showing his bright personality at home as he does in the ring, Toby quickly asserted his presence at KGA Morgans. After finishing her first practice drive, Cheryl stood next to him while talking to Nikki. Feeling that he was being ignored, Toby grabbed her sweatshirt with his teeth and pulled it. "I knew at that moment he was meant to be mine", said Cheryl. "He nickers at you and is always looking for attention when you go into his stall. He has such a cute personality!" Victoria observed wisely, "I think trust is what's special about their relationship. They bonded instantly the first time my mom drove him at David Rand's stable. I could see the love in my mom's eyes when she saw Toby standing in his stall and how sweet he was when she went to pet him. Trusting your horse is one of the hardest things; but one of the most important aspects of showing. By trusting and bonding together as quickly as they did, it made an easy transition from not having shown in a while to driving a game horse. They have become an amazing team and I loved watching them grow together."

Anthony Ricci is thrilled that Cheryl is back in the show ring. He described the bond between Cheryl and her mom, the late Joan Sardelli, who were united by an abiding love for Morgans. Cheryl and their daughter now share the same bond, now further enhanced by their competing together. "I have been blessed with seeing the joy in Cheryl's heart in winning not only a world championship but a People's Choice award in the same year!"

Anthony exclaimed. "It is a special feeling for a special person who has devoted her life to Morgans." At the Ricci dinner table, most of their conversations center on horses. "With a wife and daughter committed to the breed, there will be many years of 'Morgan talk radio' ahead... Cheryl and Victoria each have their own trophy room. I'm getting squeezed out of storage space and I love it!!"

Starting the 2014 show season in wonderful form, Toby and Cheryl were the unbeaten Amateur Pleasure Driving Champions at the first three shows they attended. Looking forward to her first Grand National show since 1995, Cheryl trained twice a week with Nikki, often when someone else was taking a driving lesson or when Victoria was riding her horse in order to create 'traffic'. Cheryl's early show experience played a huge part in her success this year. "It made an easy transition to get back into the ring", she said. "It feels like I never left."

Cheryl's trip to Oklahoma last year was all that she hoped for. Her success was made even sweeter with the support of Anthony, Victoria and her sister, Roxanne Sardelli Greenway of Sarde Morgans fame. "There are so many people who are happy to see her back in the ring", Roxanne observed. Before her big world championship class, Cheryl was already ecstatic to have won the Grand National Pleasure Driving Amateur Master Reserve Championship and the Pleasure Driving Amateur Ladies Finals Reserve Championship. Knowing she had everything to gain and nothing to lose, she went into the Amateur Pleasure Driving World Championship to do her best and have fun. Roxanne recalled, "When she won the world championship, it was awesome. I cried! She was bolder and braver than everyone else. I couldn't be prouder."

Nikki Rae Woodworth expressed similar sentiments. "Going into the Grand National this year was just an honor. We had a great time showing all year long and Cheryl has the most positive attitude. To see the look on her face when they called her number as the world champion is a moment I will never forget; we couldn't be prouder to have her as a member of the KGA family."

Cheryl will remember her first world championship with Toby for the rest of her life. "The moment they called my number as the winner was the most exciting, thrilling, rewarding feeling in the world. There are not enough words in the English language to describe it... Taking a world championship victory pass is amazing...I will treasure it in my heart forever!" Cheryl still has fans from the 1990s who are cheering from the sidelines today as well as a new generation who voted for her as the People's Choice Amateur of the Year. "I would like to give a big 'thank you' to everyone who voted for me", she said with gratitude. "I am so overwhelmed, excited and honored to have received such a prestigious award."

While winning is a huge thrill, both Cheryl and Victoria agree that the quality time they spend together, sharing a passion for showing their wonderful Morgans is priceless. "Ever since I can remember, horses have been my life", said Victoria. "She has done so much for me in the last six years; trying to give me everything that I have ever dreamed of...we both support each other 100% from figuring out what to wear, to cheering along with the crowd." Cheryl feels exactly the same way. When they are at horse shows, she and Victoria love to sit and watch classes together, 'hang out' at their barn, visit friends and shop at the horse show vendors. "It means the world to me to be able to be able to share the Morgan horse with my daughter, Victoria. It's a mother-daughter bond between us that cannot be broken."

With a wonderful new horse in Fox Hollow Talk About Me, a World Championship title in Amateur Masters Pleasure Driving, a People's Choice Amateur of the Year Award and honors for Toby as the Amateur Masters Pleasure Driving Horse of the Year, Cheryl Ricci has achieved star status in less than twelve months. She may have gone for the rest of her life with her skills remaining dormant but her wonderful husband, daughter and sister persuaded her back into the ring to continue a career she began so many years ago. Cheryl's future in the show ring is full of endless possibilities but the ability to share this passion with her daughter is a gift one cannot measure.