



Mary Carlton

People's Choice Trainer of the Year

BY JENNY GREY

Mary Carlton, who was the People's Choice Instructor of the Decade for 2000 to 2010, Trainer of the Year for 2011 and Instructor of the Year in 2012 and 2013, has been recognized yet again as the 2014 People's Choice Trainer of the Year and the People's Choice Reserve Instructor of the Year. Mary's success is legendary, bringing with it a kind of mystique that escapes definition. With several factors that come together to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts, Mary has a recipe for success that cannot be bottled.

One of the few people to have ever won the equitation Triple Crown, Mary has 'walked the walk'. She understands the level of dedication and motivation needed for success in our highly competitive sport. Belief in the Crystal Farms program is of paramount importance, along with absolute trust that Mary is doing everything possible to train each horse and rider team to its fullest potential. "When they are completely committed, good things happen", said Mary. "But when a person loses their commitment or trust, then they lose their focus." This rarely happens.

Jenny Miller, winner of the 2014 Hunter Pleasure Ladies Amateur World Championship with Merriehill Black Label, believes the distinguishing factor in Mary's coaching is her long-term focus. "With each ride, the progress a horse and rider makes is often imperceptible. I'm sure every rider can



Mary Carlton, who was the People's Choice Instructor of the Decade for 2000-2010, Trainer of the Year for 2011 and Instructor of the Year for 2012 and 2013 has been recognized yet again as Trainer of the Year and Reserve Instructor of the Year for 2014.

attest to the frustration of feeling as though little progress is being made despite hours of dedicated practice and it is easy to let short-term failures undermine your confidence.

But Mary never loses sight of the end goal, and patiently allows changes to come to fruition in their own time. As I worked with my hunter this summer, Mary's most quoted phrase to me was 'Believe in the program', in other words, trust that achievable, short-term goals will get you to the seemingly unachievable long-term goal. This may take weeks, months, or even years, but Mary is able to keep her riders focused on the end goal so they stay confident through the ups and downs of training."

Chris Brown, father of Jessica Brown, the 2014 Reserve World Champion in both Classic Saddle Seat Senior Equitation and Hunt Seat Senior Equitation, loved Mary's coaching style from the time he watched Jessica's first lesson at Crystal Farms. Chris, who coaches basketball, is acutely aware of the impor-

importance of motivation. "Motivation comes from within", observed Chris. "What Mary does is recognize and key in on what makes a person tick and then pushes the right buttons. She has expectations of excellence and her passion is contagious. She is leading, coaching and playing to people's strengths. She gives them the opportunity to succeed." Chris also believes in the maxim that 'perfect practice makes perfect'. The Crystal riders work so hard at home that by the time they get to Nationals each year, the muscle memory and basic skills are second nature. Each rider can focus on the subtle points of performance such as ring positioning and a bold attitude.

Mary is supremely gifted at matching a horse with a rider. A highly intuitive person, she quickly understands both a person's abilities and their challenges, then matches the animal's qualities with what she perceives in her riders. After the match is made, teaching and learning are tailored to the horse and rider combination. One of the best examples is of Hagerbrook Superman and Amy Embury. "Mary and I always joke about her finding Superman", said Amy. "I was not actively looking for a horse but remember the morning well when she texted me." Mary sent Amy a video of herself with ponytail swinging, 'blasting' down a rail on a chestnut horse. Believing he had great potential, she



At the New England Regional show last year, Crystal Farms riders were at the top of the ribbons in the Hunt Seat Equitation Championship. (l-r, Hayley Broich, Mary Carlton, Liz Thomas and Jessica Brown.)

thought of Amy as a possible owner. "I bought my first Morgan from Crystal Farm many years ago and I always knew she has great vision when matching a rider and a horse; so I just trusted her judgment", said Amy. "She is able to see what can be later versus just what is in front of her."

"It's worked so well for so many years because she has allowed a partnership between us", Amy added. "This last year she knew I needed more purpose to my riding/showing with Superman; so when I said, 'I think Superman is ready to share with a junior exhibitor', she was willing to give it a chance. She was able to balance Superman's training needs with having an amateur and junior exhibitor (Karsyn Draime) show him successfully. It takes a true trainer to balance all that. It was an amazing experience to see Karsyn and Superman have such a great first year in their experience together and I know this was guided by Mary's expertise as a trainer." Amy and Superman were victorious last year as the 2014 Amateur Hunter Pleasure World Champions.

Many of Mary's riders have been training with her since they were very young. Sara Heidenreich, last year's Senior Western Seat Equitation World Champion, started in the walk-trot division. "There are different challenges working with new people versus those who have been around for a long time", observed Mary. "With the new people, you have to get into their heads and understand what they and their horses need. If I have a rider for a long time, the biggest challenge is to keep things fresh and keep it moving." Sara's win with Knolltop's Heir Apparent was one of Mary's favorite memories of 2014. In her words, "It was awesome!" She taught Sara from the time she was a small child and brought her to the pinnacle of success in her last year as a junior exhibitor. Mary also has a big cadre of successful adult riders, including Sara's mom, Stacey Heidenreich, owner of Raintree Rebecca GCH, who has taken many victory passes in Oklahoma City.

Another memorable win last year was that of CBMF Cease Fire and Katie Collins, who won the Junior Exhibitor English Pleasure 14-17 World Championship. Cease Fire and Katie are a perfect example of a horse and rider fitting each other both physically and mentally, translating to a picture perfect show ring performance.

One might infer from these discussions that all of this is easy and you will be guaranteed a victory pass in Oklahoma if you do the right things. Mary's customers will tell you that there are plenty of ups and downs along the journey. "It is not fairy dust!" said Mary. "It's a lot of hard work." It is also true that when people have a strong belief in what they are doing, they will reach the goal, even if they meet roadblocks along the way. The key



Mary was on hand to celebrate with Katie Collins after her first World Championship victory pass in her final year as a junior exhibitor. Aboard CBMF Cease Fire, Katie won the English Pleasure Junior Exhibitor 14-17 World Championship.

is to keep riders motivated and learning from their mistakes.

After taking some time for rest and relaxation this winter, an event occurred that caused Mary to be reminded about how much personal satisfaction she gets in helping people with anything related to a horse. Misty Pleiness, who is currently riding on the hunter/jumper circuit, came to her because she felt that her form and timing was a little 'off'. She asked Mary to help analyze what was wrong and how to fix it. Mary was able to find the cause of Misty's problem and help her move forward. "It was a nice turning point", she reflected. While competing at a show in Florida recently, Misty and her horse, Mickey, were champions in their division.

With the approach of the 2015 show season, Mary has taken the time to consider where she would like to be in the next 10 to 20 years. She ran a big show string last year with about 35 horses in training, always managing to maintain a quality product, but after an exhausting, though highly successful, Grand National show last year, she began to ask the question, "How big is too big and where do I want to be in the next 20 years?" At the same time, Mary recognized that she needed time for herself in order to arrive at Crystal Farms every day feeling energized and rejuvenated. To that end, she is making it a priority to practice yoga in order to balance the body, mind and spirit.

An intelligent and thoughtful person, Mary has decided to reduce the size of her show string, not only to reduce the workload, but also to allow more time to introduce more people to the simple love of the horse, whether they ever plan to show or not. "Horses are so cool", said Mary. "There are so many facets of what they can do for people. I want to think about what is the next big thing for Crystal."

The Crystal Farms show string is alive and well and this healthy change may bring even more show ring success as time goes on. There are many definitions of success, however, and this is just one element of what is likely to become a more multifaceted business. In recognition of Mary's coaching and instructional skills, she is frequently asked to teach clinics. She is both excited and honored by an opportunity to have the opportunity to be a guest instructor for adult American Saddlebred riders at the famous DeLovely farm.

Mary Carlton has found a recipe for success with her show string that will continue at its current level of excellence but as any successful business owner knows, one needs to constantly examine priorities to keep moving forward. With everything in balance, the show program will continue to flourish as it has in the past but there will be a whole, new set of objectives in place at Crystal Farms to keep the business vibrant and flourishing into the next decades.



The team of Liz Thomas, Chris Lasky (with Frank) and Mary Carlton enjoyed a highly successful New England Regional show last year.