

Wes and Sena Bowling

Sharing a Passion for Saddlebreds at Taylor Creek Stables

By Jennifer Grey

Wes and Sena Bowling of Taylor Creek Stables in Davison, Michigan, are not only gifted trainers and breeders, they are two of the most genuine, likeable people you will ever meet. Their extraordinary work ethic driven by their mutual passion for the American Saddlebred is legendary. Wildly successful, they have also experienced and survived adversity. A devoted couple who are each other's best friend and strongest supporter, they are enjoying a long and happy marriage. Read on to find out what fuels their success and why everyone who knows them says "They are such good people!"

Growing up in Booneville, Kentucky, Wes rode with Warren Bugg and Don Harris for most of his juvenile career, showing the five-gaited star, CH Bell Hop, to many thrilling victory passes in the junior exhibitor five-gaited division and often catch riding for other trainers. Considering the great Don Harris as his second dad, Wes also feels very fortunate to have spent time with Tom Moore and Mr. Garland Bradshaw, witnessing and learning different training techniques from three people Sena describes as 'the greatest horsemen ever'. "That exposure shaped a great love and respect for the Saddlebred industry," Sena reflected. Wes also developed his talent for recognizing potential in a young prospect – a skill learned at a young age at the feet of these masters.

While Wes was a young man living at home, he and his dad had both horses in training as well as horses at home that they would purchase, work for a while, show at the county fairs and then sell. His early experiences made him eminently qualified to be a trainer, but before he chose that career, he owned and operated his own coal business near his Kentucky home until the opportunity arose to train full time at Sailaway Farm in Linden, Michigan.

Encouraged in her love for horses by her father, Sena Bowling (née Miller) grew up riding and showing Morgans, working with well-respected trainers including Lori Marino-Beasley, Ann and Mike Slomkowski and Kevin and Donna Connolly. Her distinctive, elegant profile frequently caught the

judge's eye, placing her at the top of the cards in both the performance and the equitation divisions. Attending the University of Michigan after her junior exhibitor years, Sena was destined for law school with the intention of coming home to run her family's insurance business, but by graduation time, she knew her passion for horses far outweighed her desire to work in an office.

Approaching her parents, Sena made an impassioned plea to be allowed to pursue a career with horses. Even though they tried to talk her out of it, they finally relented, but her father insisted that she challenge herself by finding a job outside her comfort zone of Morgan horses. It was an excellent piece of advice that led her into the world of American Saddlebreds where she met Wes Bowling, her future husband, who had joined Sailaway Farm in 1990.

Sena laughed at the memory of her younger self when she first met Wes, saying, "As fate would have it, shortly thereafter in February of 1991, into that barn walked a crazy blond wanting a job giving riding lessons; who then got completely run off with by the first Saddlebred she ever sat on, but still managed to get the job!" She had arrived with a portfolio of photos from her time spent showing Morgan horses. Flipping through them, Wes stopped at a victory pass of Sena, not long out of the junior exhibitor ranks, winning the Morgan Park Saddle Ladies Gelding Grand National Championship riding Sunbay Sea Spray under the Showcase Stables banner.



Wes and Sena Bowling of Taylor Creek Farm in Davison, Michigan are each other's best friend and strongest supporter. Along with their well-trained team, they train 40 horses at Taylor Creek and several more at Meadowland Farm each day, in addition to managing a flourishing breeding and lesson business.



This is a treasured photo of Wes jogging the great World Grand Champion sire, Northern Blues.



Wes, Sena and Lauren were on hand to congratulate Coventry's Too Fast, Too Furious and Gianna DeSimone, the Country Pleasure Junior Exhibitor 14-17 World's Champions.

Knowing this was a significant win that would not have happened without a first class horse-woman on board, Wes decided to try out Sena's skills on a five-gaited Saddlebred. Admitting she had no idea how to ride a gaited horse but was willing to try, Sena listened to Wes's admonition to stay light in the bridle and not dig in her heels. After two failed attempts, Sena told Wes that if he would show her what to do one more time, she would get it. "I was mortified and my ego was bruised," she admitted. Watching carefully the third time, Sena got back on, followed Wes's instructions and everything fell into place. Riding a gaited horse for the first time was such an exhilarating experience that the gaited performance horses have become a lifelong avocation for Sena and a passion she shares with Wes.

Wes, a natural salesman who could probably sell any commodity he chose, showed Sena around the farm that day. When she expressed interest in a nice three-year old she thought her

father might purchase, he wasted no time. By the time she arrived home, Wes had already made a phone call and her father was interested in buying the horse. More importantly, she was offered a job at Sailaway and has never looked back or regretted her decision.

Now married for 23 years, Wes and Sena agree that their mutual respect and support have been the keys to a happy and successful partnership. They have enjoyed great success in addition to weathering the ups and downs of life. "We are each other's harshest critics yet biggest supporters," Sena observed. "We love each other, our horses and the life we live every day. And we are truly best friends!"

After the Sailaway Farm experience, the couple made a decision to start their own training business at a farm owned by one of their clients which they quickly outgrew. Moving to a bigger farm in Rochester Hills, an affluent Detroit suburb, they amassed a huge group of clients. It

was home for over 8 years but with 'only' 32 stalls, they needed to move again; this time finding a home at the Meadowland Farm, owned by the Sheroski family, where they remained until 2008.

While Wes and Sena have enjoyed a high degree of success with one of their best show seasons last year, life has not always been easy. Every business has its challenges and for Wes and Sena, there were two cataclysmic events that they needed to surmount. In 2004, Wes was hit by a drunk driver while at the River Ridge show. Badly injured, Wes was forced to be less physically active but the circumstances made the couple think more about diversification as vital to the health of their operation. To that end, he started what has developed into a thriving hauling business. Both Wes and Sena credit Peyton Bowling, Wes's son, for helping to make this venture a big success saying, "He's a great driver -- and the main reason we have been able to grow the horse transport side of our business. He has such



The Taylor Creek horse transportation business is an important part of Wes and Sena's plan to be as diverse as possible while still maintaining a high standard of excellence.



Wes's son, Peyton Bowling (right) is the primary reason the Taylor Creek horse transportation business is flourishing. An excellent driver with a positive, upbeat personality, he also takes great pride in keeping the farm looking picture perfect.



Wes and Sena's assistant, Lauren Greenwald, keeps everything organized and on track. In addition to helping to work horses and giving lessons, she is an integral part of the breeding program.



Harlem's Lucky Charm (above, left) was the first horse Sena broke to ride. They won a very competitive three-year old five-gaited class at Alabama Charity in 1995. Another favorite is Jocelyn Hagerman's Noble Charm (above, right); he is a horse that keeps everyone on their toes but is an absolute thrill to ride.



a positive, upbeat attitude – a real people person.” When not driving one of the rigs, Peyton takes great pride in keeping the farm looking beautiful.

Wes discovered the current Taylor Creek Stables location in Davison, Michigan, a few years before they were able to purchase it. A lovely facility on forty acres that had gone out of business, Wes and Sena tried to buy the farm, but a builder managed to beat them to it. Wes tried to make a deal for the barn and some of the acreage but the new owner refused until the Michigan housing market became soft. They were able to purchase the farm and go about the process of cleaning up and rebuilding the property which had fallen into a state of disrepair. Months of hard work restored Taylor Creek Farm to the beautiful facility we see today. Unfortunately, the timing of the move coincided with the 2008 financial crisis. It proved to be a very challenging year, although Wes and Sena were able to weather the storm and come back stronger than ever. With Michigan hit early and hard in the economic downturn, Wes and Sena were faced with the reality of going from 29 customers to just a handful in a very short time. To make matters worse, many of their clients insisted on quick sales for their show horses. “We had all of our finances tied up in this place,” remembered Wes. “It was very scary.”

Fortunately, Taylor Creek had an excellent reputation for raising good, young stock. Wes let it be known that he had a special colt, He's Here for the Party, for sale. “We were on a mission to get him started because we knew he showed potential and was really our only shot at turning our situation around in the crippling economy,” said Sena, remembering the challenges of the business climate. Sold as a two-year old to Virgil Helm, this talented youngster was racking up and down the barn within six weeks of being broke to ride. In a win-win situation for all involved, He's Here for the Party was crowned the Three-Year Old Five Gaited Stallion/Gelding World's Champion with Bob Brison in 2010. Proceeds from the sale helped to keep Taylor Creek afloat until

the economy began to rebound and the client base grew in record numbers.

On a recent visit, we drove through a pretty subdivision and over a fenced bridge leading to a soaring, two story frontage. Receiving a warm welcome along with the smell of freshly baked cookies, courtesy of Wes, we were treated to a tour of this first class operation, lovingly restored with hardwoods found in the local area. Their clients have a magnificent gathering area complete with an antique bar that was salvaged from the Stroh's Brewing Company. Windows along the side of the observation area allowed us to watch their assistant, Lauren Greenwald, work a horse in the huge indoor arena adjacent to the office and staff living quarters. The other side of the barn houses around 40 stalls, tack rooms, etc., all restored with the same meticulous care with which Wes and Sena approach everything they do. Walking outside, we saw beautiful pastures where mares and foals graze and where Wes loves to work his driving horses on the large, outdoor track. Sena, Wes and Lauren train over 40 horses at the Davison property and several more at a farm nearby, along with teaching lessons and working with clients, so the daily schedule must be executed with precision timing.

When we met Wes and Sena at the farm, it quickly became apparent that they both have an unwavering work ethic that they practice with the same level of enthusiasm and commitment in everything they undertake, whether it be a beginner lesson or a trip to the World's Championship Horse Show in Louisville. When we last spoke to Sena on a rare day off, she was racing back to the farm after an abandoned shopping trip to help Wes with a foaling. Just understanding what they accomplish in a day makes us wonder how they find the energy to do it all and do it exceedingly well. Fortunately, they have a great assistant trainer in Lauren Greenwald. “She does a fantastic job helping to keep things organized and on track,” said Sena appreciatively. “Lauren not only helps to work horses and gives lessons, she is also

an instrumental part of the breeding program. All this every day stuff is what inspires me. The blue ribbons are just the icing on the cake!”

Lauren, a native of Texas, grew up showing at SGF Winning Ways Farm owned by her mother, Sherry Frankel. A graduate of William Woods College, she worked part time for Wes and Sena's friend Virgil Helm in Missouri. Hearing that Sena was having shoulder surgery, Virgil suggested that Lauren would be a good fit to work at Taylor Creek. She was offered a job and soon afterwards she was established as Taylor Creek's assistant trainer. Wes and Sena have now been wonderful mentors and her strongest supporters for over three years. “It was a good vibe with a close knit feel...that's important to me,” Lauren told us. “I get up every day and want to go to work. Sena is like a big sister to me. She does everything with her heart and soul. She leads us by example and will never ask us to work harder than she does. That's motivational. Wes and Sena are an excellent team; there's so much going on but it always runs so smoothly.”

Lauren Greenwald's mom, Sherry Frankel, began riding when she was nine years old and has worked with a number of different trainers over the years. With several horses in training at Taylor Creek, she has found Wes and Sena to be exceptional. “I just love Wes and Sena,” she told us. “I can't say enough good things about them. They have never steered me wrong.” With few opportunities to practice at home in Texas, she needs to rely on her horses being ready for her to ride when she gets to a show. She is thrilled that they are all beautifully prepared for the diverse divisions in which she competes, ranging anywhere from the five-gaited division to Hackney pleasure driving.

“They enjoy what they do and want the best for their customers,” Sherry told us. She also knows they want the best for her daughter, Lauren, of whom she is intensely proud. Knowing that it is a rare commodity in this highly competitive environment, Sherry loves the warm, supportive atmosphere at the barn. “I love being

there! Wes is hysterical. He loves to tell jokes and will play tricks on you. It still takes me a while to catch on!" Taylor Creek takes showing seriously but they have also developed a great reputation for having fun. Not only do the clients know their horses will be perfectly ready to show, they enjoy the camaraderie and teamwork that drives long-term client relationships. Junior exhibitors continue to ride as amateurs and parents often buy horses for themselves after their children leave for college.

Sherry Frankel recognizes the team's extraordinary talent to bring out the best in a horse and rider. "I have not seen too many trainers who are able to mold the horse to the ability and personality of its rider. What's nice is that they all confer about how to work each horse and they respect Lauren's input. They are careful about where to show each horse and place them appropriately where each horse and rider will succeed."

Lauren Greenwald described being at a show where there is always a moment of communication and positive reinforcement after a class. "They take the time to teach me and provide as much opportunity as I ask for. That has changed me a lot." Her favorite times with Wes and Sena occur while driving home from a show or stopping for dinner on the road. "They always talk everything out. They relish the good moments and bounce ideas around about what to do better. I love that!" Lauren describes Wes as the person you want to have around in a crisis. "When anything is not perfect or I'm kind of nervous, Wes is the most calming, reassuring person in the world," said Lauren, remembering working a horse that was giving her some major challenges. "He is always in your corner, no matter what." She also made a point of telling us about Wes's uncanny skill of looking at a horse and telling within five seconds what the rider needs to try. He challenges everyone to think in a new way and to move out of their comfort zone.



Sena has many wonderful memories including when a special young lady, Lindsay Hensler, won the 10 and Under Walk-Trot Equitation World's Championship in 2001.

By far the most exciting, memorable occasion for Lauren was that of being a part of team Taylor Creek, who put its collective expertise and passion into earning a first world's championship for Coventry's Too Fast Too Furious (Connor) who won the Country Pleasure Junior Exhibitor 14-17

World's Championship last year with Gianna DeSimone in the saddle for Sherry Frankel.

Winning her first world's championship with Connor was also a dream come true for Gianna DeSimone who began riding at Taylor Creek when she was nine years old. "Wes and Sena work together amazingly well," said Gianna's mom, Gina. "Sena has an unbelievable work ethic and she's compassionate; every horse at the barn means something to her." Remembering as if it were yesterday when Connor and Gianna were announced as world champions she said, "Sena and I were both crying tears of joy. I think there may have been a tear in Wes's eye too. He was standing there by the horse looking super proud. I couldn't wait to give Sherry a big hug -- she is so supportive. We are all good friends and very close." It was a memorable, first victory pass on the green shavings for Gianna at Louisville in her final year as a junior exhibitor.

Gina and her husband, Dennis, both agree that riding Saddlebreds at Taylor Creek has made Gianna the confident young woman she is today. Painfully shy as a young girl, their daughter flourished in this close-knit environment where she grew her skills to achieve the pinnacle of success. "I'm so glad that ten years ago we came to Taylor Creek," said Gina gratefully. "I can't imagine doing this without Wes and Sena's guidance and support."

In addition to their banner year in 2015, Wes and Sena have been responsible for the early training and development of many show ring stars, most notably, the five-gaited sensation, CH Bravo Blue. Wes first saw Bravo Blue, who is by their stallion, Northern Blues and out of Amp Leigh, when he was by his dam's side. Knowing he was something very special, Wes became obsessed with acquiring him from his breeder, Ray Yoder. Able to work out a deal with Ray to purchase both the mare and foal, Bravo Blue and Amp Leigh arrived at the farm shortly afterwards. Growing up at Taylor Creek, he began his training as a two-year old. Wes and Sena started racking him as a three-year old, then sold him to Virgil Helm at the end of the year. "He has been a grand horse and we are so proud of his accomplishments," said Sena of this amazing show ring star who won the Five-Gaited Gelding World's Championship with Virgil Helm in 2008. He was subsequently crowned the Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion in 2012 with Rob Byers and more recently, the Five-Gaited Reserve World's Grand Champion in 2014 and 2015 with his current owner, Elisabeth Goth.

Along with Bravo Blue, Taylor Creek has started many other great show ring stars including world champions Rockin' the Blues, Gaitway's Once in a Blue Moon and Small Packages as well as reserve world champion It's Yabba Dabba Doo Time. Their show string has earned hard fought world championship victory passes Ricochet Memories SF, I'm Good To Go and Desert's Rise N' Shine and reserve world championships with High Times Spartan, The Beginning of Time and Live For the Moment. These are in addition to countless national and state championship titles. They also directed Lindsay Hensler to an equitation world's championship title in Taylor Creek's earlier years.



Not only does Taylor Creek take showing seriously, they are also dedicated to having fun. Wes, Sena and the lady riders are pictured here winning a hotly contested golf cart decoration contest in 1998. Two of the women on the team are still riding.

While favorite horses are hard to pick, both Wes and Sena have been blessed with many who have given them so much in life. Harlem's Lucky Charm, then a young stud, was the first horse Sena broke to ride, then gaited and showed at Alabama Charity, winning a very competitive three year-old five-gaited class. "He was so special and meant the world to me." Sena also had two beloved five-gaited horses early in her career – Diplomatic Son and CF Chief's Torch Bearer. "They were comical and a blast to show... They taught me to be as competitive as they were and really set the tone for my riding style. Of course, Bravo Blue falls in the category of favorite horses. He was challenging to break but oh so intelligent! I cried my eyes out when we sold him." Sena also feels very fortunate to train and show Dr. Amie Rowe's powerful gelding You Can Kall Me Lucky in the ladies gaited division. "He is so game but such a kind horse at the same time and so competitive in the show ring." Another favorite is Noble Charm owned by Jocelyn Hagerman. "This horse keeps us all on our toes but is an absolute thrill to ride." Sena also loves Jocelyn Hagerman's wonderful three-gaited champion, Undulata's Simbara, a horse who gives 100% every day.

Dr. Amie Rowe enjoyed a wonderful experience with You Can Kall Me Lucky Last Year that may never have happened had Sena not challenged her with a new goal – to win the amateur stake at Syracuse. After working incredibly hard, she and Lucky were unbeaten at Syracuse, winning the Amateur Five-Gaited class and the Amateur Five-Gaited Stake against deep competition. In reaching for what Amie would have thought unachievable, Sena and Wes gave her the skills and confidence to get the job done. "We worked so hard for this big moment," said Amie, relishing the memory.

Originally attracted to Taylor Creek's excellent reputation and their quality set up at the shows she attended, Amie brought her horses to Taylor Creek for training in 2009. She describes Sena as an amazing rider and Wes as someone who can look

at a horse and know immediately what it is capable of achieving. "We have bought many 'diamonds in the rough' and sold them," she reported, describing how Wes sees what the animals need and how Sena translates his ideas intuitively when she rides them. "Together they get the most out of them – Even more than you think is possible... I have never seen anyone work harder – it's a true passion."

"Wes and Sena really care about their customers," Amie observed. "It's not just about the horses." Having faced some of life's challenges recently, she really appreciates the support she has received, considering everyone at the barn a part of her family. One of her favorite activities is to ride to or from the shows with Wes in the rig. They enjoy talking about horses and life in general for hours on end, making the time pass quickly.

In addition to their roles as trainers and breeders, Amie gives Sena and Wes great credit for their support of the Saddlebred industry in Michigan, well away from the center of action in Kentucky. Sena has been on the board of the American Saddlebred Horse Association of Michigan 'forever' and she and Lauren Greenwald are key people responsible for producing the Michigan Saddlebred magazine, a first class, high-quality product.

A recent injury and other life priorities may keep Amie Rowe out of the show ring for a while but she is very excited about a new foal by Bluesville and out of Misty Marie – hoping for a new five-gaited star. The Taylor Creek breeding program, in fact, is an important factor in the continued prosperity of Wes and Sena's business. Showing great promise as a young stud, Bluesville, a full brother to Bravo Blue by Northern Blues and out of Amp Leigh, is carrying on a proud tradition of siring athletically gifted offspring in all divisions. In the three-year old year of his first crop of foals, he has already earned world champion sire status. The Brightest Blue (Bluesville x Undulata's Something Special), bred by Fairview Farm, won the 2015 Three-Year Old Five Gaited Mares World's Championship with Bob Brison in the irons and the 2015 UPHA Five-Gaited Classic National

Grand Championship with Daniel Lockhart up for Hillcroft Farm. This is a great beginning that heralds a bright future for this fine stallion.

"Every show season brings with it a new set of challenges and potential rewards for those that are committed, work hard and stay focused," said Sena, sharing the philosophy she and Wes espouse. She loves working horses at home, watching them improve and get stronger, then gearing them up for a horse show. They have also taken great pleasure in training the many dedicated and talented people in their program who share their passion and love for the industry. Sena enjoys working with horses that are difficult or 'quirky' by channeling their energy in a way that makes them enjoy their job. "I love making progress with any horse I am training but even more when it transfers over to the amateurs and kids," Sena told us. "My proudest moments have been watching people improve with their horses and reach the goals they set; whether that's a blue ribbon at Louisville or a good, clean ride at home."

One might think that with all they have accomplished in life, Wes and Sena would be ready to slow down a little but in fact they are planning to diversify again in a major way. Using the old Sailaway Farm as a base of operations, there will be a new program devoted to instruction where they plan to teach at least 200 lessons a week. This new venture will also act as a feeder program for people interested in buying show horses.

We have given you a glimpse of the life of two of the busiest, most dedicated people on the Saddlebred show circuit. Armed with their own innate talents, they have worked incredibly hard to convert their dreams into a reality. A devoted and caring couple, they are best friends who inspire each other in a way that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. When good people apply their character and integrity to their innate talents, great things happen. Great things are happening at Taylor Creek Stables and we wish Wes and Sena Bowling the continued success they so thoroughly deserve.



Other Sena Bowling favorite horses include (L-R) Diplomatic Son, a beloved five-gaited horse she showed early in her career as well as Favorite Things and Tashi Tashi.