

The Winning Ways of West Wind

By Erica Faulkner



CH A Sweet Treat and Kim making their victory pass in the Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship in 1999.



Peter showed CH Breaking News to the Five-Gaited World's Grand Championship honors in 2008. They also won the triple-crown that year.

Statesville, North Carolina, located a couple hours west of Raleigh, is a town filled with southern hospitality, stunning North Carolina landscapes, and some of the most competitive show horses in the Saddlebred community. West Wind Stables, owned and operated by celebrated trainers Kim and Peter Cowart, stretches over roughly 60 acres of rolling pastures and houses 30 to 35 show horses at any given time. A training barn, a 24'x250' indoor arena with a cathedral-style turnaround at one end, a colt barn with its own indoor bullpen, along with run-in sheds in the pastures are all part of the stunning facility that is West Wind.

Kim Cowart grew up in Connecticut, making the move out of New England after she graduated high school. Following her childhood dreams, Kim attended William Woods University in Fulton, Missouri, with the intent to eventually run a successful training barn. "I knew from a young age that I wanted to be a horse trainer," she said. "I got my first pony when I was five."

That first pony was the start of what was to become a long-lasting love for the horse. "I have always loved horses," she said. "We had Morgan's when I was a young girl, but my family was never really into the horses, not like Peters family was." As a child, she had her horses in her backyard and thoroughly enjoyed the hands-on experience. "My family never really had a lot of money." She said. "I started

riding at a local farm in Madison, Connecticut. I would help there as much as I could. Getting horses ready for lessons and helping with barn chores." It was just a matter of time before Kim's hard work paid off.

Peter grew up on his family's Heathermoor Farm in Alabama. Learning all he could from his father, the late John Cowart. He continued to gain experience throughout his young adult years while working for other trainers such as Charlie Smith, Mitch Clark and Carter Cox. Training horses was in Peter's blood, and when he met Kim during his time working for Cox, it seemed inevitable that the pair would open their own farm. West Wind Stables was formed in 1989, the same year that Peter and Kim tied the knot and said "I do" to one another.



CH I'm McDreamy and Kim in 2007 winning the Three-Year-Old Three-Gaited class at Louisville. CH I'm McDreamy is one of Kim's personal all-time favorites.



Megan McClure and CH Justa Rascal showed under the West Wind Stables banner, winning at major shows all over the country. CH Justa Rascal went on to win for Camille Cowart as well, and is now retired at West Wind Stables.



CH My Wonder, who is still winning today, also campaigned under the West Wind Stables name. After Tom Scott debuted the horse, he made the move to West Wind, where Kim showed him to an undefeated season in 2012, topping off the year with the Ladies Five-Gaited World's Champion of Champion honors.

It did not take long for West Wind Stables to make their name known. Their list of champions and world champions is impressive. Together they presented horses such as CH A Sweet Treat, CH The Daily Lottery, CH Real Action, CH Breaking News, CH My Wonder, CH Lace's Last Tango, CH Deputy's Heir, CH Memories Of Cabo, CH Callaway's Born To Ride, CH He's In Style, Heir Head, Kalarama's Delightful, among many others, to blue ribbon success.

It was a memorable win for all of those at West Wind Stables.

"I would have to say one of my all-time favorite horses we have had, is CH The Daily Lottery." Said Kim. "He was just a cool horse. One of the most fun horses I have ever ridden." It was 2014, and Louisville was fast approaching. "We were trying to decide where we were going to put him. If we were going to try for the ladies' class with me riding, or let Peter show him in the open." They decided to go for the Open Five-Gaited class, and the decision paid off. 2014 was the second time that Peter Cowart was found in center ring accepting the tri-color and roses in the Open Five Gaited World's Grand Championship.



CH Real Action and Kim winning the Ladies Three-Gaited 15.2 and Over Stake at the World's Championship Horse Show in 2012.



Peter and CH The Daily Lottery winning the Five-Gaited Gelding Stake in 2014 at the World's Championship Horse Show. They came back to win the World's Grand Championship that year, earning West Wind Stables their third World's Grand Championship title. CH The Daily Lottery was one of the all-time favorites for Kim and Peter.

"That horse just has so much heart," Kim said. "I really think that if they were to look at the size of his heart, it would be one the size of Secretariat. He was the same horse 40 minutes in to the ride that he was at the start. He is special."

It was a memorable win for all of those at West Wind Stables that year. However, it was not the only World's Grand Championship win that the barn had experienced.

The year was 2008, and it was the first leg of the Triple Crown for the Saddlebred industry. The Lexington Junior League Horse Show saw Peter and CH Breaking News leave the ring with the win in the Five-Gaited Championship, after winning the gelding qualifier earlier in the week. It was the third show for them that year. Having previously been a top amateur horse for Emily (Hess) Levine, CH Breaking News was making his name in the open division. With wins at J.D. Massey and Asheville earlier in the year, the Lexington Junior League win put him on track as one of the favorites heading into the World's Championship Horse Show. And he did not disappoint. Peter and CH Breaking News put in a thrilling performance, impressing the crowds and the judges to be named the Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion, ahead of industry greats such as CH According To Lynn, CH Callaway's

Karla, Calif First Night Out, and others.

A magical moment for sure for Peter, who then capped off that year with the Open Five-Gaited National Championship win at Kansas City. Peter did it, he won the Triple-Crown for American Saddlebreds with his trusty partner. A feat that only a few trainers can claim.

"It was a dream come true," said Peter, in regard to his World's Grand Championship win that year. "I think that if you're a train-

"I think that if you're a trainer, and you're not setting your sights on winning the big one, you're not aiming high enough."

er, and you're not setting your sights on winning the big one, you're not aiming high enough." And it is that attitude, that desire to be the best and to present horses at a top level, that continually puts the West Wind competitors at the top.

It's not just Peter who has brought home the roses for West Wind Stables. Kim also contributes greatly to the list of accolades that this team has garnered. She also brought a blanket of roses home from the World's

Championship Horse Show when she earned the top honors in the Open Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship in 1999 with CH A Sweet Treat.

This once-in-a-lifetime horse was already a champion in the harness division, however it was with Kim that she earned her Three-Gaited World's Grand Champion honors.

"In the qualifier that year, we had a workout with the reigning champion, CH Hollywood Excellence and Elisabeth Goth," said Kim. "Anyone in Freedom Hall that year certainly remembers the electricity that was in the arena that night. "It was a great class, great horses. The workout was incredible. I remember going up that chute and I had never ridden anything that electric in my life. She was just amazing."

Kim knew they had a chance at the win before they got to Louisville that year. "She was just a great mare, another big-hearted horse." But, as she points out, "you never know when you go in the ring what the outcome will be."

We are really proud of the horses we have turned out, both today and in years past," said Kim. And the list of memorable ones is long.

"I will never forget when I first saw CH I'm McDreamy," Kim said. "I saw him at Midwest. He had a mane then." She knew she just had to have that horse in her barn. "We trimmed him that morning at Louisville



As is common with Kim and Peter, they often swap horses, campaigning them in a variety of division until finding the one that suits the horse best. Kim and Peter both campaigned CH She's A Red Hot Chili Pepper to blue ribbons and tricolor in the five-gaited division.

before I showed him in the three-year-old three-gaited class." Another good decision made by Kim and Peter, as CH I'm McDreamy and Kim left the ring as the champions that year (Kim also earned the champion honors that year with CH Platinum's New Look in the Ladies Five-Gaited class).

"It (three-year-old three-gaited) was a huge class," she said. "I had a little trouble the first way, but when we reversed through the middle of the ring he swelled up. His neck came back in my lap, he was just amazing." In and out of the stall, CH I'm McDreamy exudes personality, and after his great start with the Cowarts, he has gone on to be a champion that this industry will never forget.

CH My Wonder, the reigning World's Champion of Champions in the Ladies Amateur Five-Gaited class (with owner Nancy Leigh-Fisher), got his start with Tom Scott, but the Cowart's quickly saw his talent and ability and encouraged customer Stephanie Sanchez to purchase him. "Stephanie got him as a junior horse.

We got him right after Kansas City from Tom." Kim showed the big bay for the duration of 2012, and did so in undefeated fashion. That year was the first year that CH My Wonder won a Worlds Champion of Champions title. Kim was on board and brought him to the tricolor victory in the Ladies Five-Gaited Championship.

"Another favorite of mine," said Kim, "is CH He's In Style."

Another horse that was purchased by Stephanie Sanchez. "We got him when he was young too. He was only three." A trend for the Cowart's, they're able to pick a stellar show horse at an early age, not something everyone can do.

"You have to be able to really see the horse. See the ability," said Kim. However, she is quick to note that what really matters most, is having customers that are ready and willing to act, and trust your decision. "They have to trust you. Your customers," she said. "And we are so fortunate to have the best customers anyone could ask for.

Their trust means more than anything."

By building this trust, West Wind Stables has cultivated a group of customers who have been with them for the long haul. "Most of our customers have been with us for years. And we appreciate that." The Lackey/Sanchez family has had success with West Wind since 1989.

Megan McClure, another long-time customer of West Wind Stables, recalls what it was like when she first became

a customer. "I was with a local barn at the time, and had come to a place in my riding and with my horses that we were ready to take the next step. My family is close with the Lackey/Sanchez family, so we knew of Peter and Kim through them and of course seeing them at the shows in the Carolinas." McClure continues, "We went to the barn one day to visit and see what it was about and honestly we got

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Camille Cowart was all smiles when she made the victory pass in the Open Five-Gaited Stake at the North Carolina State Championship in 2013 with CH Callaway's Born To Ride. This victory was one of her favorite memories with this horse.

back into the car and there wasn't a discussion on what we should do. It was as if we all knew West Wind was the place for us without saying a word."

Fifteen years later, McClure still feels the same. We've never looked back."

It is not just the long-time West Wind customers who see the value in what Kim and Peter do, and the positive and trusting atmosphere they provide. Susan Swope, who moved to West Wind just a couple years ago, also sings praise to her trainers.

"My move to Florida was in the works for over an entire year. As much as I still love Kentucky - I still have a home in Simpsonville - I knew I wanted my show string closer to me."

Swope is no stranger to the show ring, so the Cowarts were a familiar name to her. "Having observed the talent and successes of Peter and Kim over a period of years, they were always in the forefront of my mind as to whom I'd like to have train my Saddlebred show horses," Swope continues, "They embrace each of my individual horses and have done fantastic things with all of them."

A fantastic job for sure, as just this year West Wind Stables took home an impressive list of wins and reserves from Louisville, for Swope. Swope herself showed Stanley Steamer to the Amateur Roadster Under Saddle win, as well as earned her first blanket of roses with her newly acquired Street Legal GRS. This team won the Open Roadster Under Saddle qualifier and the Roadster Under Saddle Championship. Kim showed the Swope owned entry On Higher Ground to reserve in the Ladies Three-Gaited

Championship and qualifier. Swope is quick to show her appreciation to the Cowarts, for taking on the challenge of a new division with her road horses.

"I think if you had asked Peter and Kim two years ago if they thought they'd have five roadsters in training, they may actually have laughed at the notion. Now? An excellent horseman is an excellent horseman regardless of breed or discipline," she said. "They are great at this stuff (road horses)! It's not for everyone, but I think we can all agree... this team has a need for speed that may have been brewing for a lifetime!"

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With so much show ring success that spans a variety of divisions, one might say that this impressive list of wins, and horses, could be Kim and Peter's greatest claims to fame. However, in their case, their greatest achievement is the raising of their daughter Camille.

An only child, Camille was born with the ability in the saddle that both her parents have. From the beginning, her drive, determination, and natural talent spurred her to the winner's circle. Of course, having world class trainers as parents didn't hurt.

"Having my parents teach and coach me can be both fun and trying, I think that they're some of the best horse trainers in the business and they always push me to be the best version of myself," said Camille.

Kim and Peter are just as proud of their daughter, as she is of them, commenting that she has not always had the easiest of horses, but no matter the situation, she has risen to the occasion every time.

"After Megan McClure got done showing CH Justa Rascal, we purchased him for Camille," said Kim. "That horse is our forever horse here at West Wind," said Kim. At the time that Camille was



Kim and Peter congratulate Camille after her standout performance with CH Callaway's Born To Ride in the Open Five-Gaited Championship at the North Carolina State Championship in 2013.

showing this celebrated champion, she was a junior exhibitor, and although most of the year she could compete against other young riders, when it came to Louisville, she had to compete with the adults. "There was no junior exhibitor park at Louisville at the time." Said Kim. "I talked to Scarlett Mattson about getting a junior exhibitor park class at Louisville. There was enough competition in that class to warrant it."

The Cowarts were thrilled when the first year that Camille showed CH Justa Rascal at Louisville, earning a ribbon in the adult division. But the icing on the cake was when the junior exhibitor park division was introduced, and CH Justa Rascal won it in the first year it was created. "We were thrilled to be a part in making that happen. Getting that class at the World's Championship." Said Kim.

Camille recognizes the success of her parents' efforts with West Wind Stables, and is quick to compliment her parents on their ability to make it work, as a team. "I think West Wind is so successful because my parents bring out the best in each other. They both have their strong suits and without each other to complement the differences, things would fall through the cracks."

She also points out that besides their complimentary personality, their hard work behind the scenes is a primary factor in their success. "My dad has a dedication to perfection and my mom has a wonderful attitude that keeps us all driven and happy. However, What I admire most about my parents is how hard working they are. They earned their success by putting in work 24/7 and they never took the easy way out."

Camille absorbs all she can from her parents, noting that one of greatest pieces of advice her father has given her, came during a conversation while chores were being finished in the barn.

"When raking the hallways, my dad tells me 'life is a lot like raking, wherever there are high spots, there is a low spot right beside it. Keep everything as even as it can be.' I think success comes not from winning, but being able to accept your success as measures of hard work and your defeats as signs that things need improving on, it's not always about winning but about doing your personal best."

A trusting atmosphere at the barn for their customers, comes from more than just the Cowarts ability to choose a nice horse. Camille says that her parents always "stay in their own lane," so to speak.

"They focus on their horses and careers, rather than looking what others are doing, some people believe that they should be successful without any effort, my parents knew that they could be if they put in the time and effort."

Throughout the years, Kim and Peter have enjoyed watching their daughter grow into the rider she is today. Camille considers some of her show ring rides under her parent's instruction, as some of life's best memories. "My proudest moment in the show ring would be when I showed Callaway's Born to Ride at the North Carolina State Championship Horse Show in the gaited stake." Camille showed this game horse in the junior exhibitor division prior to this class. "He was just too much horse

for that division."

Camille smiles and recalls the ride. "The feeling of being able to ride that horse the way he deserved, was liberating. I knew it was a great ride because my dad called me 'little cheese' instead of Camille, on the rail (that's always what he tells me when I'm doing a great job). It was the best and last show I ever had on him as we sold him later that year."

Outside the ring Kim and Peter have raised a successful young lady who enjoys traveling abroad every chance she gets. "She completed a semester of college overseas in Florence, Italy," said Kim.

"She did it all on her own dime to. She works hard for what she has. She loves Europe and has commented on how she wants to go back."

Although Kim and Peter would be thrilled if their daughter chose to follow in the family business and take up training horses as a career, they would much prefer she follow her heart, no matter what that means.

"We love her, and we want her to be happy. Whatever she chooses to do, we will support that. We would never push it on her to get into the horse business," said Kim.

With loyal customers, a knack for finding a good horse, and a work ethic that sets them apart, Kim and Peter Cowart have created a place for champions at West Wind Stables.

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Another great performer from West Wind Stables, Deputy's Heir. Peter showed him to the top honors in the Junior Five-Gaited Stallion/Gelding class at the World's Championship Horse Show in 2014, and later came back to win the Junior Five-Gaited Championship.