

From The Most Unlikely Places

THE PARTNERSHIP OF JANIE DENNING AND PAULA MESSIER

By Christy Womack



Hannah McBain rode WYP Suite Alimon to the Grand National Classic Pleasure Saddle Youth Finals win for trainer Phil Fountain and owners Paula Messier and Janie Denning.

This year's Morgan Grand National was a moment to be proud of for friends and business partners Janie Denning and Paula Messier. Over the last five years, they've crisscrossed the countryside looking for special Morgan horses in the most unlikely places. And this year at Morgan Grand National they had the delight of watching six of their "finds" earn top Grand National and World Championship honors.

"We like picking up stones and going places other people wouldn't think of going," says Janie Denning when speaking of her partnership with Paula Messier. "When we first talked about going to an Amish sale in 2012, people told us we were crazy. 'Don't think you'll find anything at an Amish sale but work type horses,' they said."

Not heeding the critics, Messier and Denning headed to their first Amish sale. "We were certainly outnumbered by the Amish buyers," said Janie. "We walked in to find 250 horses consigned. While walking through the barns looking in all of the stalls, we found a horse that was hot as a firecracker, very upheaded and snorty. He hadn't been handled a whole lot, but we loved him. We bid on that horse and won. This was the first partnership horse and that got everything going."

That first horse turned out to be BRMF Lailani's Fireball and that year he won the World Champion English Pleasure Three-Year-Olds with Cortney Schafer under the direction of Mike Wahl.

"He was the first horse in our partnership, and the first world championship for our partnership. That really helped forge our relationship with the Amish," said Paula.

Tim Roesink bought Lailani's Fireball for Laura Lyons, but before Laura had a chance to throw a leg over him, Kristen Cater purchased him for Sara Foy. She had seen him in his debut at Blue Ridge and thought he was just right for Sara. Just right is right. This year at Morgan Grand National, Sara and Fireball won the World Championship English Pleasure Ladies Amateur honors amid a star studded class.

"So we went back and bought his full brother BRMF Final Explosion a two-year-old at the time," said Janie. He was sold last year to Ali Denzel and agent Kristen Tramposh.

He turned out to be another great find. BRMF Final Explosion won the Reserve World Champion English Pleasure Ladies Amateur with Erin Hudy, who purchased him shortly thereafter. Final Explosion and Erin are under the guidance of Indian Creek.

Success continued with DRF Charlemagne. "We found him on DreamHorse and liked him from a description. Although there was no picture provided on the internet, we took a chance on him. He's a Byzantine son and is such a cool horse," says Janie. They bought him in 2013 and sold him to Doug and Taddy Stacy, a client of Peeper's in 2014. He had a very successful trip to Oklahoma this year. Phil Fountain drove him to the Grand National Pleasure Driving Stallion/Gelding title and then returned to win the Reserve World Championship Pleasure Driving to Dragonsmeade Icon.



Janie Denning and Paula Messier have an eye for outstanding horse flesh and a passion to help the horses reach their full potential.

"We've gotten to be good friends with the Amish over the past several years," said Paula. "We bought Turned Up who won last year's Three-Year-Olds English Pleasure World Championship, from David Helmuth and saw a beautiful stallion at the time that turned out to be Warchest. While we didn't have the funds to purchase him, we showed a picture to Phil Fountain. Phil bought him for Brian Butler and won the World Champion Pleasure Driving Four-Year-Old last year."

Turned Up was this year's Morgan Grand National Four-Year-Old Mare champion with Kurt Hufferd filling in on the lead for Phil Fountain and owner Erica Dorwart.

Clearly these two smart ladies have the eye.

"We really like to see them in person if possible," said Janie. "They've got to be something that can wear leather. I don't care how big they can trot if they can't wear the bridle. We're looking for the 'IT' factor, a horse that rises to the top."

"We want horses that have not been in the ring before," said Paula. "We like fresh prospects with that something special."

"We do like hocks," Janie laughs. "Hocks are good. We don't care what division a horse is in, hunter, western or park – we want something that stands out visually."

"We found What's Up at a Standardbred farm, and you wouldn't have given him a second look, but there was something special about that horse," said Janie. Phil Fountain showed him at Gold Cup this year to a debut win, and then David Rand purchased him for Dantree Farm and took him to the World Championship Park Harness Three-Year-Old and Grand National Park Harness Three-Year-Old. Also by Robert Mondovi, Amped Up was another selection of this amazing partnership. Amped Up and Phil Fountain won the Grand National Pleasure Driving Three-Year-Old and were reserve in the World Champion Pleasure Driving Three-Year-Old Class.

Janie and Paula bought WYP Suite Alimon, knowing that he had been a rescue horse. Gina Torrez nursed him back to health and then Janie and Paula bought him. They asked Cameron Kay to catch ride at Oklahoma last year and won a reserve Grand National title. This year Hannah McBain catch rode to win the Grand National Classic Pleasure Saddle Youth Finals. The partnership still owns this talented entry. For now.

Janie and Paula purchased Acorn Ridge Dutch Design at an Amish sale a few years back. He was a sight and was the sale topper. They fell in love and had to have the charismatic stallion! David Rand purchased the now gelding for Julie Rohrer, and she drove him to win the yellow streamers in the World Champion Classic Pleasure Driving Masters.

So what's next?

"We just found another one. We need to get her vetted, but she reminds Paula of her former mare Enthusiastic, now owned by the McBain family. She's black with a lightning bolt down her face. She looks really hot – probably for English or Park. We like a little attitude and she certainly has it," says Janie.

"We're always keeping an eye out for more prospects," says Paula. "It doesn't matter where they come from but we've found the Amish to be very honest and straightforward."

"They were breeding when no one else was breeding. Everyone had stopped for a while. But the Amish kept breeding. And they breed for show horses. They are very attentive to bloodlines. They get such enjoyment out of seeing their babies go on to show successfully. They want to see them in the ring," said Janie.

"We buy them to sell and make new owners happy," said Paula. Currently this winning partnership has horses with Phil Fountain, Kristen Tramposh, John Hufferd and Lloyd Crawford.

They certainly have found a winning formula and this year it paid off in a big way. Maybe in the future we should all just follow them around to the most unlikely places.