

A Different Kind Of Year For Phil Fountain

by Bob Funkhouser



Phil credits Ernesto and Herman with holding things together at the barn and for doing all the work on World Champion Junior Stallion Primal.



Phil and Julianne Rafferty with Payton Bartley and Shimmer, the World Champion Junior Exhibitor Classic Pleasure 14-17 team.



It was a very satisfying week for Dawn Fire and Phil Fountain.

July 14 is a day Peeper Ranch trainer Phil Fountain would like to forget. With a nice string of horses well underway for the 2015 season he ruptured his Achilles tendon on that day and the prognosis was he'd be out of commission four to six months.

"My first thought was, 'now what the hell am I going to do?'" exclaimed Fountain. "I was working without an assistant at that point and I honestly didn't know what to do. I called Howie [Schatzberg] thinking 'Howie knows everyone.' He said to let him make a few calls and he got right back with me. There was a girl named Julianne Rafferty who was just hanging out in St. Louis in between jobs. Howie said she came highly recommended by several people. She is a William Woods graduate and has worked at a few good barns, including Andy and Lynda Freseth at Hollow Haven. Juju, as we call her, had to leave Hollow Haven to take care of some family business and that is the only reason she was back in this area.

"She stepped right in and has done an incredible job. It was three or four weeks before I could even be at the barn. She was working horses she had never touched before. We were training by texts and we were on the phone a lot."

Fountain also credits his longtime caretakers Herman and Ernesto, as well as Danny, for stepping up and keeping everything flowing. They have been a part of the team for so long, they knew the drill.

"Those guys did a great job," said Fountain. "They know how I do things. Herman did all the work on Primal, the yearling that won the World Champion Junior Stallion title. That was the hardest part for me to watch was the in hand. There are just things that you instinctively do and the timing is everything. It's hard to teach that but Herman and those guys were great."

While the Peeper team was organized and ready for Oklahoma with the horses, the physical challenge was a big one for Fountain who was three months out of surgery and still wearing a plastic boot that wasn't a good match for nearly two weeks on concrete at Oklahoma.

"I went to the room much more often," he explained. "It's a long show and I did what I could and then went back and iced and elevated it. I give all the credit to the guys and Juju for keeping it going. She doesn't get flustered at anything and the customers love her."

Back in July, Fountain was wondering how he would even get the Peeper Ranch homebred entries as well as those of the outside customers to

Oklahoma, much less have a great week. The communication skills between two people who had never met proved to be superb. Over the phone, on the ground, Fountain and Rafferty figured it out. When the last ribbon had been hung on the black and red drapes it was a most impressive sight with the likes of Primal, Jake Ryan, Graycliff Tony GCH, Seriously, Wood Valley Odyssey, Shimmer, Turned Up, LLL Tzar Alexander GCH, Superbad, Amped Up, Livewire, DRF Charlemagne, SPR Pompeii, and WYP Suite Alimon all contributing to the winning streamers and coolers. It was also a week where fellow horsemen such as Rick Lane, Forest Nealon and Kurt Hufferd pitched in where needed.

"It was an incredibly satisfying week in many ways," said Fountain. "I'm extremely proud of what we accomplished and how everybody hung in. Charlemagne was the biggest surprise of the week. I didn't anticipate him doing that. We drove him in a limit class at Gold Cup and we only drove him here because it fit in the schedule. We thought we might as well.

"When we beat last year's World Champion in the stallion/gelding class it was only his second harness class. We were pleasantly surprised. I'm also really proud of Dawn [Fire] with Jake Ryan. That was a tough situation for her. She had only cantered him twice in the round pen before showing him. She did a wonderful job. Then you look at the Tzar Alexander horse. He went four for four in classes of 39, huge classes. Out of 12 votes he got 10 firsts and two seconds.

"Tony was awesome and then his get had a really good week. People are starting to see that he's a good breeding horse. Also, Pam Curry Siemers winning her first personal World Championship. She's been with me for a long time."

Right down the list there were special meanings for each and every winner. It was teamwork at its best. Now that the show trunks have been put away for another year where does it go from here?

"I may be out of the boot soon and then will have to take it slow and continue with physical therapy," said Fountain. "Then it starts all over. We hope that Juju stays. Everybody here loves her. It worked out very well. The thing that made it work was she was very honest with me throughout all of this. If she were having a problem she would tell me. It wasn't just what I wanted to hear.

"And one of the biggest things I learned from this? You learn to let some things go."