

# CANDOR

## THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE *Parade Horse Of The Year*

BY SARA PIZZUTO

Joan Todd has defined versatility in the show ring. She has been linked to five-gaited campaigners, walk/trot mounts, and even dabbled with western and hunter pleasure teammates. However, there one was division that had eluded her for most of her equestrian career, one that she secretly harbored a desire to participate in—the parade horse ranks.

"I have always wanted a parade horse, but I have heard every joke in the book about them," she said. "When I was a kid, the parade classes were very popular. I saw these beautiful ladies in all of their sparkly stuff with their silver saddles and fancy horses and glitz and glitter and to a child, that bling really did it for me."

She stumbled across a stunning Ted Flowers parade set that had been restored six years ago and decided to purchase it.

"I bring it home and my husband said, 'Well what are you going to do? Turn around and sell it?'" she said. "I said, 'No. I think I will hang onto it for a while.' Then my best friend said to me, 'When are you going to buy a horse to go under it?' and I said, 'I do not need to buy another horse.'"

It wasn't long after that a Half Saddlebred, Half

Dutch Harness Horse, named Candor entered Joan's life to fulfill her parade dreams and allow her to utilize her parade set. Together, under the direction of trainer Shelley Fisher, Todd and Candor have earned multiple world and national titles in the parade horse ranks and have now earned your vote, as the People's Choice Parade Horse Of The Year.

After much convincing, Shelley Fisher agreed to begin searching for Joan Todd's parade horse partner—a search that would ultimately lead them to Candor. Todd had been advised by her friend Rick Wedel that the Saddlebred/Dutch cross might be the perfect option for her, as they were all show horse but with a temperament suited to what she wanted to do. Both Todd and Fisher happened to see an ad for a Saddlebred/Dutch entry who trainer Stan Bodnar had at his Merriehill Farm in northern Illinois and made an appointment to try him. Todd was immediately drawn to the striking chestnut who towered over 17 hands.

"There are few horses in your lifetime that make the hair stand up on your skin and he was one of those," she said. "We get in the car and Shelley said, 'What do you think?' and I said, 'Oh my god. That is the one.' and she started laughing and she said, 'I was thinking the same thing.'"

Joan Todd had a strong desire to show in the parade horse division throughout much of her equine career. She ultimately made the decision to purchase Candor, her Half Saddlebred, Half Dutch Harness Horse cross, who has now been named the People's Choice Parade Horse Of The Year.

Fisher agreed that Candor would make the perfect partner for Todd's first foray in her new division.

"First of all, he was big and stout enough to carry all of the silver equipment, but also was a handsome horse with a pretty neck and quality features," she said. "Secondly, he was beautifully marked with four white legs that I thought would stand out, like a majorette in a parade. The way he moved and his charisma were what sealed the deal for us as he was already kind of 'marchy' in his trot and just so expressive. As game as he was, he still didn't love to go fast. His natural trot suited him very well for parade. Although he had to learn all of this from scratch, his kind and agreeable nature allowed for the training to make it happen."

Todd made an offer to buy Candor from breeder Kari Lundin on their drive home from Merriehill Farm back to Ohio. Her new horse, affectionally tagged as "Chuck" quickly settled into Fisher's Sugar Knoll Farm and began being primed for his parade debut.

"When he was learning parade, we spent more time under saddle with him as he had to learn how to set his head, rate his speed, steer, transition, etc. with one rein and no martingale," Fisher said. "Like many Dutch horses, he was very game and bold in the beginning. He was so eager to please, though, that he learned verbal cues and picked up on what we wanted pretty quickly. He also had to drill a lot on the halt. That was a little tricky for him early on as he didn't understand why he had to stand so long,

With the help of trainer Shelley Fisher and the team at Sugar Knoll Farm, Candor successfully debuted in the parade horse division with Todd in 2020.



photo by Julia Shelburne Hitti

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Candor and Joan Todd have amassed a nearly unblemished show record in the parade division. Together, they have been named the Parade Horse World Champions for the past three years. They were also crowned the 2020 and 2021 Parade Horse National Champions as well as the 2022 reserve national champions.



Preparing to show in the parade horse division is very time consuming. Much work and detail go into Todd's show clothes, parade set, and the decorations that are placed on Candor.

but now he absolutely knows it's as big of a deal as any other gait."

Fisher also explained that one of Chuck's initial challenges was staying relaxed while also being collected.

"He finds his cadence pretty quickly, but can get tight," she said. "I think he just has so much ambition and is so enthusiastic that he doesn't know what to do with himself sometimes. He is very responsive and reliant on voice command and if you ever hear Joan chatting to him from the rail, that is why. He counts on his rider to tell him everything is okay."

Part of Candor's parade horse training also included getting him accustomed to the equipment that he would wear at horse shows and ensuring that he could mentally handle it. Todd explained that she had been advised to not put her good parade set on Chuck until she was certain that he would tolerate it. So Todd got creative with the help of her husband. Together, they got carpet samples and hung weighted plastic, chains, and noisy materials off of it. They placed it on Chuck to see if he would eventually tolerate the serapes-the flat elements that hang off of either side of the saddle-and to hear the noise all over him. He immediately adjusted to it.

"The first time you put that stuff on them, you are not on their back so if they do do something, you are not endangering yourself or the horse," Todd said. "Well Chuck could not have cared less. He just thought it was great. Literally a week later we put the equipment on him, and he just stood there and looked at himself and said, 'Yes, finally, someone has figured out that I am a king, that I can wear this.' I was amazed. We walked him around in that and I just got on him, and he was really good."

While Chuck was being prepared for his new division, Todd also ensured that her horse would look the part in the show ring with proper equipment and décor. She explained that her parade set needed repair and was properly restored with the help of Bob Glessner who owns Loon Creek Leather in Northern Indiana. Glessner determined that her saddle dates back to before 1959. It needed constant oil and polishing in order to be maintained. Todd's husband and sister additionally helped her with the tapaderos-the 20 pound stirrups that hang off the saddle. They put in wooden blocks along with bicycle toe clips to allow Todd to properly reach the stirrup and clip into

it to better utilize it. Todd also worked diligently to design and decorate her own riding outfits as well as the decorations that are placed on Chuck when he shows.

"I make all the braids and the tail stuff at home in advance because it would take twice as long if I had to braid him there," she said. "I pre-make those with pipe cleaners and good quality satin ribbon and I spray the flowers a color that I like to go with the various outfits. All that stuff is ready when we get to a show. I make my own outfits too. Some of the outfits I have created from existing things that I could find like embroidered western shirts. I love that you can be a creative individual."

The preparation to show in the parade horse division also continues once at a horse show. While Todd polishes her saddle, Fisher takes Candor to work lightly in the morning before he shows to loosen him up and allow him to be more relaxed for his class. He is then brought out on crossies to begin the unique process of taping and glittering his feet.

"Joan came up with the tape idea so as not to damage his feet from glue being put directly on them," Fisher said. "Then we can just pull off the tape as soon as he is done showing. We do two layers of small pieces of tape all over his feet, spray glue, then lots of glitter. Then he gets his mane braids put in, the tack put on, which is quite a few pieces and a very heavy saddle, his tail braced, the flowers for the tail put on and secured, and finally, the bridle."

Unlike most show horses, Chuck's bridle simply contains a snaffle rather than a curb bit. Fisher explained that it is what he prefers most.

"The rules allow horses in this division to be comfortable and are very inclusive," she said. "I think it says a lot about Chuck that he can be so big and powerful, yet perfectly controlled by his petite lady rider with just a snaffle bit and a single rein."

Both Todd and Fisher agreed that Chuck is perfectly behaved and especially patient throughout the lengthy get ready process.

"It's a lot of work but I am very fortunate to have this horse," Todd said. "He just loves it. He gets so excited about going to horse shows. We have got this down to about 90 minutes. We are a well-oiled machine. I have a lot of helpers now because Chuck is very charming and engaging and people want to pitch in. He is very sweet about it. He doesn't lose patience."

Their work has paid off in spades as Candor has

developed an impressive record in the show ring. Since their debut, Chuck and Todd have celebrated a nearly undefeated résumé in the parade ranks. They were the 2020 and 2021 Parade Horse National Champions as well as the 2022 reserve national champions and also are the defending three-time Parade Horse World Champions. Todd's dreams of parade horse success have come to fruition in a remarkable way.

"I was fortunate enough to find this incredibly special horse and have a trainer that was willing to put up with my crazy," she said. "Shelley and I have been together a long time, over 15 years. She would often say 'I would not do this for anybody but you.'"

Fisher explained that it is Chuck's personality that makes him such a success in this division.

"Chuck is one of the most happy, ready to work, willing horses I have been around and that has made it so much fun to do the parade division," she said. "At shows, he is in his happy place. He lives to perform and visit with everyone back at the stalls. He loves anyone and everyone. He absolutely loves being around people and getting any kind of attention. Sometimes he sticks his tongue out for someone to play with him and just to be adorable."

Todd is quick to encourage other horse enthusiasts to try the parade horse ranks. She hopes others can experience the thrill of this division that she has yet she cautions that the division requires patience.

"You need to allow yourself time to find the right horse," she said. "Be sure to ask questions. Most parade people are very willing to share their expertise. I have met some of the nicest, most wonderful people doing this. Be creative and have fun with it. Expect that it is going to take more time and work than you can envision because it does. It is labor intensive, but it is certainly a labor of love."

Todd's commitment and dedication to the parade ranks has allowed both her and Candor to flourish in this division. She has a true passion for a parade horse and has become incredibly knowledgeable about this division. Her immense success aboard the popular Candor have fulfilled a lifelong dream that began as a young child.

"There is nothing more fun than going in the ring blinged out," she said. "Spectators love it. You have a nice charismatic horse who wears his ears and loves to show off. It means a lot to me because it's like a dream come true. I had always hoped to do this."