



Leesa Galatz

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE AMATEUR OF THE YEAR

BY SARA PIZZUTO

Leesa Galatz arrived at the 2020 Morgan Grand National with a trio of show horses with which to contend against the world's best. She finished her week by besting a capable group of skilled competitors to complete a trifecta of sorts—earning world titles with each of her teammates. In addition to this great success, two of Galatz's proudly owned entries wore the coveted blanket of roses as open world champions and she celebrated the achievements of her homebred equines. Galatz and her string of champions rose to the top of the judges' cards throughout 2020 and now to the top of your list as the People's Choice Amateur Of The Year.

Galatz and her family have long been involved with the Morgan community as they have been engrossed in the equine world for decades. Their talents in the show ring coupled with their prosperous breeding program and their dedication to the industry have made them prominent members of the Morgan horse industry. Leesa Galatz in particular has established herself as a top riding amateur with the innate ability to successfully pilot any horse regardless of the division. She became interested in riding after watching her mother, Elaine, ride American Saddlebreds. Leesa Galatz took her first lesson at age seven and received a horse of her own two years later. Her father did legal work for the late Bob Morgan who owned Triton Morgans and was given Triton Foxy Joyce to ride.

Galatz's family's career with horses continued under the

direction of Rock Walker and eventually with Harold Angell, who joined the Galatz's at their own personal farm, Vegas Valley Morgans, in 1987.

More recently, the Vegas Valley Morgans show string was moved to the Kansas based Fire Stables, with Phil Fountain and Julianne Rafferty at the helm. Both Fountain and Rafferty have been responsible for the achievements of both Elaine and Leesa's entries, as the mother-daughter duo have blazed a trail of success amongst the Morgan community.

Despite the challenges of a pandemic-riddled 2020, the Vegas Valley Morgan owned show horses soared into the spotlight beginning with Springmill Superstition GCH. The aptly named "Perfect" joined the Vegas Valley Morgans family initially as Elaine Galatz's world titled teammate. Elaine Galatz and "Perfect" were named the 2017 Park Harness Amateur World Champions before daughter Leesa took over the driving assignments. Leesa Galatz and "Perfect" celebrated an undefeated season in 2020, topping the Park Harness Ladies World Championship for the third consecutive year. Galatz explained that "Perfect" truly loves his job.

"He's so powerful to sit behind," she said. "He's really strong, but so well behaved with a heart of gold. He's really fun. I got back to Fire more often than mom so I got to jog him a lot. He has fun doing what he's doing."

The Morgan legend wasn't finished with that victory pass in Oklahoma City. Springmill



Leesa Galatz has shared many special horse show moments with her mother Elaine. The Galatz family has a long and storied history in the Morgan world.

Superstition GCH returned a mere 24 hours later to land in the Grand National spotlight once again as the Park Harness World Champion with Phil Fountain on the lines.

"It was great to see," she said. "It was the first time Phil had the opportunity to win the Open

Park Harness World Championship. This was the first time since mom showed him that I got to see him. I was so excited and he looked amazing. Phil is such a great horseman. He wouldn't have done it if he didn't think he had a great shot at it."

On the same Thursday night

in Oklahoma that Galatz and Springmill Superstition were crowned the world champions, Galatz earned yet another set of roses. She once again partnered with Playmor's Prinz Of Bellair to repeat as the Pleasure Driving Ladies World Champions. She bookended the Thursday evening session in Oklahoma, beginning the night with her victory pass on the lines of Prinz Of Bellair and concluding the session with Springmill Superstition GCH. Her third world title of the week came aboard Warchest as the English Pleasure Amateur Masters Reserve World Champion.

Galatz explained that she remains active in order to switch between showing multiple horses in multiple divisions at any given show. She and her son ride in New Jersey with Kathleen Peeples and she makes sure to work out on her Peloton bike and treadmill in order to stay in top condition.

"Staying fit through the winter is important," she said. "It's only fair for the horses that I am in the best shape I can be."

In addition to Galatz's sensational show career, she and her family have a well-established breeding program. Many top champions bearing the VVM prefix for Vegas Valley Morgans have graced the show ring and garnered high praise. However, it is one particular homebred, VVM Another Dream, that has been heralded as a once-in-a-lifetime horse by Galatz. Galatz said that Another Dream was special from the moment she was born.

"She was pretty incredible-always a presence, always beautiful," she said. "She was small as a two-year-old so we kept her at home a little longer. We were thinking for the long haul so she didn't show until she was three. She could always stand up and model."

The daughter of Jake Ryan and VVM Dreamkeeper celebrated a sensational junior horse career that included being crowned the World Champion Mare in both 2019 and 2020. Phil Fountain then drove the mare to top the Pleasure Driving World Championship in 2020-an impressive feat for a then four-year-old.

"To be so successful already in her young career is amazing," Galatz said. "We've had a lot of nice horses but she's really the first to be so outstanding. It's the culmination of many years. She has lot of positive energy, forever a great example of the breed. It was really fun for mom to see."

The Galatz family's long and successful history in the Morgan breed has spanned decades. In addition to their passion for their equine teammates, Leesa Galatz explained that it is the people in the Morgan industry that have kept the Galatz's dedicated to the breed for so



Leesa Galatz credits Phil Fountain and Julianne Rafferty for all they do to help her achieve so much success with her horses. They celebrated many 2020 victories including Galatz's third consecutive Ladies Park Harness World Championship with Springmill Superstition GCH.

many years. While involved with horses, Galatz is able to enjoy a breather from her hectic schedule as a renowned surgeon.

"We love going to shows," she said. "I have so many friends there and am so comfortable around the people. They don't see me as Dr. Galatz. I can be Leesa, be myself. This is so different from my working world. I can relax here. I have been able to help others with some doctor referrals and what not. I guess that's my way of giving back to the Morgan world."

It is evident that Galatz's success in the show ring as well as the Morgan industry will continue into the new season. Her talents whether riding or driving, her ability to breed champions, and her passion for the breed have enabled her to rise to the top of her sport.

"I'm so fortunate to have all the horses we have right now," she said. "I may never have a string like this again so I feel incredibly lucky to do this. It's super fun, really a dream come true and I like to stay up for the challenge. I couldn't do it without Phil [Fountain] and Juju [Rafferty]. They keep it going."



Leesa Galatz was a frequent visitor to the winner's circle in 2020, both riding and driving. She matched up with Warchest for several victory passes topped off by a reserve world championship.