

QUEEN'S SEBASTIAN GCH

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE
Morgan Horse Of The Year

BY SARA PIZZUTO

Erin Kelley and her husband Chip were in the market for a new prospect late in 2018 when trainer David Rand presented them with two young products out of the Queen's River Farm breeding program. One of them, an enthusiastic two-year-old trimmed in chrome, stood out.

"David said, 'You take a week to think about it. I will work the horses and we will all come together and see what we want,'" Kelley said. "I said there is a spark in this young, little black one. We decided to take a chance on him."

Queen's Sebastian GCH was the young horse that piqued Kelley's interest. The son of Queen's Dirty Deeds and WRR Miz Wildfire has since exceeded all of Kelley's expectations, creating a buzz amongst the Morgan community with his performance as the 2019 World Champion Stallion at just two years of age. Since then, the highly touted campaigner has amassed an additional three world titles in both the harness and saddle divisions, culminating with his tricolor as the 2022 English Pleasure World Champion last season. Queen's Sebastian GCH earned the unanimous vote

of the judging panel in Oklahoma City and now has earned your vote as the People's Choice Horse Of The Year.

Queen's Sebastian, affectionately tagged as "Rocky," has made Maine his homebase since Kelley purchased him. Erin Kelley explained that when she first saw her newest acquisition, she was convinced he was a gelding, and not a stallion.

"When I went to register him, I noticed that we didn't have the date from when he was gelded," she said. "So, we called Queen's River Farm and asked when was he gelded and they go, 'What do you mean? He wasn't gelded.' From the day we found out he was a stallion, his whole demeanor changed. But in the stall, he is sweet and nice and he loves attention so he's not your typical stallion. He was sweet from the get-go. But the day we found out he was a stallion, he changed."

David Rand has guided the stallion throughout his entire show ring career. He explained that Rocky has been an enthusiastic horse since his first day of training.

"Rocky still to this day always has a party," he said. "His theme in life is let's just party. Getting him to focus

and do his work has always been the challenge. He has always been the one to snort and blow and flag his tail. We tried to cultivate that and have him put the fun, positive energy into doing a job with that much enthusiasm, which has been a challenge at times but there was never a part about breaking him that was difficult, other than his enthusiasm."

The charismatic performer turned heads in his show ring debut in 2019, when the two-year-old was crowned the World Champion Stallion as well as the Junior World Champion Stallion and the Futurity In-Hand Two-Year-Old Stallion World Champion. He then continued his winning streak in 2020, starting under saddle as the English Pleasure Three-Year-Old World Champion before adding to his resume as the 2021 Pleasure Driving Four-Year-Old World Champion.

"I never expected any of this," Kelley said. "I never expected his in-hand success. I never expected him to win as a three-year-old and then go back and win again as a four-year-old. None of this has been expected for me and it's been a true joy. He is dramatically talented, and he is in this unique package with his white bold face and his four white feet. He is absolutely mesmerizing to watch. He has a lot of power, but he is able to stay

Queen's Sebastian GCH skyrocketed to success in the Morgan breed in 2019, when Erin Kelley's young entry was crowned the World Champion Stallion at just two years of age—his first of many world titles.



David Rand has trained Queen's Sebastian GCH throughout his show ring career. The pair won additional world titles in both 2020 and 2021 en route to their victory in the English Pleasure World Championship in 2022.





Queen's Sebastian GCH wore the blanket of roses as the 2022 English Pleasure World Champion with David Rand. Owner Erin Kelley, along with Rand's son Presley, joined in to celebrate the remarkable achievement.



The young stallion is not only leaving his mark in the show ring, but in the breeding shed as well. Both David Rand and Erin Kelley are excited for his potential as a successful sire.

graceful. His heart is huge. His character draws you in. People walk by and they stop and come back because he just has this aura about him."

Following Queen's Sebastian's success as a junior horse, the young stallion dabbled in both the open pleasure driving and open English pleasure divisions in 2022. Despite his stunning beauty and athleticism, David Rand explained that Rocky lacked focus, which presented challenges early in the season.

"We were initially showing him in harness, and he would be successful but then he himself would make mistakes just because he was playing around," Rand said. "We got through New England, and he ended up being reserve there just because he wouldn't put himself together. It was from lack of focus. We got home from New England and Jason [Douglas] was like, 'You really just need to ride him. He's so beautiful under saddle.' And so we had to pull it together."

Rand along with Bernie Flores got to work to fine tune Rocky and prepare him for the steep competition in Oklahoma City. They worked diligently following New England en route to the Morgan Grand National.

"I said to him, 'This is your job and even when you're not having a party, you still need to perform like you are,'" Rand said. "We just kind of worked super hard on the consistency piece. He is a cool horse and he always has tons of expression. When he would show, I would love it when he would be so high and so fun. But if he didn't have that buzz or didn't have that exuberance, then he would either be not good enough or make mistakes. So I just worked on helping him and taking the edge off of him but still having him give it his all. That was just the process of training him. There were no particular tricks. He was ready to hear what I had to say and do what we had to do."

Queen's Sebastian arrived in Oklahoma mentally stronger and ready to compete against the world's best. He and Rand began their week as the English Pleasure Stallion/Gelding Grand National Champions. Rocky then claimed the highly coveted blanket of roses as the English Pleasure World Champion-another impressive

accomplishment for the five-year-old stallion. Kelley joked that she was incredibly nervous leading up to Rocky and Rand's appearance in the English Pleasure World Championship.

"I couldn't eat all day," Kelley said. "I was excited but nervous. You have a stick of dynamite, and you want it not to blow, but you want it to be sizzling. I jumped up and screamed and I couldn't believe it when he won. I was so thrilled for David and Bernie because they have worked so hard with this horse. David is such a showman and Rocky loves a crowd and everyone fed off of everyone. When I looked around at all the talented world champions in there, I wasn't sure. It was a memory I will never forget. He is a treasure that I am so thankful to own."

Rand and Rocky's victory was one of two open world championships on Friday night in Oklahoma City won by Kelley's horses. Kelley herself was in the saddle aboard CFF Personal Advantage GCH a mere five classes before Rocky was set to show. They were crowned the Classic Pleasure Saddle World Champions-besting an impressive field and a workout.

"I kept my riding clothes on with a cap-all black and white like Sebastian," she said. "I remember thinking that no matter what, he gave it all he could at only five years old. I was bursting with pride. I remember waking up the next day and looking at my phone for assurance that it all hadn't been a dream."

Rocky will once again return to the show ring in 2023, much to the delight of his expansive fan club. Though Kelley herself has been on the lines of her stallion multiple times at home, David Rand suggested Rocky's return to the open division this season.

"He still has a lot to give and to do as a Morgan breeding stallion, so I don't want to shut his career down and I am grateful to Erin for being such an awesome owner," he said. "She allows me to keep this horse in the open ranks and to promote him and to have value as a breeding horse and to help make our breed better and stronger in different ways."

Both David Rand and Erin Kelley were quick to

mention Queen's Sebastian's future in the breeding industry. There are multiple babies sired by Rocky currently on the ground, including one that Kelley bred. She explained that her yearling, out of her mare Elizabeth Montgomery by Jake Ryan CH, draws strong contrasts to Rocky. Rand expressed his excitement for Rocky's next foal crop.

"He is throwing his charisma, his headset, and his legs," he said. "He has got a beautiful long front leg, gorgeous neck, and we are seeing a lot of that coming through. He's huge. He is 16 hands. We are seeing a lot of size, a lot of neck, a lot of his charisma coming through."

That initial appeal with Queen's Sebastian GCH that began in 2019 has since continued and grown. Kelley explained that what started with a fan club of fellow Rand barnmates, has turned into Rocky fans from all over the world reaching out.

"It's been unbelievable," she said. "I wake up every day and I have a fire in my heart. My husband always says, 'You have to have a passion.' This has given me a passion for horses that I have never felt before. We have this connectivity. Every day I wake up and I am ready for the next adventure. This horse has put it back into me. He is so talented that it gives me chills to think about."

In his short yet widely successful career in the show ring, Queen's Sebastian GCH has greatly impacted the Morgan industry with this effervescence, heart, and impeccable conformation. While his potential in the show ring is limitless, he also will now represent a new generation of Morgan stallions poised to leave their mark on the future of the breed.

"Rocky has this mindset where he never has an ordinary day," Kelley said. "To him, every single day is extraordinary. It makes everybody who watches him jump to a different level when he comes out. It's fabulous. Here is this little gal from New Hampshire and I own this beautiful stallion. I am so thankful that we have him. It's been a dream come true."