

## *Celebrating the Shiflet Patriarch*

# CLAUDE

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

**T**here are some awesome people in this world and then there is Claude Shiflet. He took that adjective to a whole new level. It's hard to describe the depth of love and respect people from the horse world and the Asheboro, North Carolina community had for this Virginia native.

With a twinkle in his eye and a smile that could light up the dreariest of days, there wasn't anyone who met Claude who wasn't instantly smitten with the horseman who grew up in a large farming family where horses were a way of life.

"We were sheep and cattle farmers, and fed a lot of cattle in the winter," said Claude in a 2006 Horse World interview. "We raised corn, wheat, hay and oats. We didn't even have a tractor until I was 12. We used mules to plow the corn.

"Our dad dealt in horses, broke them to drive and sold many to the Mennonites about 15 miles down the road. We kept draft

and Saddlebred-type horses and a lot of ponies that we learned to ride."

A physician neighbor bought a pair of Saddlebred stallions in Kentucky and the Shiflet family bred a couple of mares to one of those stallions, Playmor King (by Edna May's King). From that point on that was the horse of choice for the youngest of the clan, Claude, as well as brother Riley.

They got a gray mare from that breeding and the Shiflet family decided to send that mare to a Saddlebred trainer nearby but when that trainer couldn't get her to rack they brought her home and Claude started working her.

"She was one of the first horses I racked and I beat him [the previous trainer] with her that summer," recalled Claude in that Horse World interview. "That really was the way we got started in Saddlebreds."

Claude and his brother Riley broke most of the family's horses for the trail. On horse show days they'd bring a horse up out of the field, trim and wash it and go to the show. Claude had described most of their rings as a rope put up around a high school ball field and that there would be a big supper between the afternoon and night sessions. This was a precursor of things to come as anyone who knows a Shiflet knows that if food is available, especially if it's free, they're there!

He continued farming during the day and training horses at night and then the best thing that ever happened to him occurred. Her name was Alice Campbell. He had originally wanted to go out with Alice's girlfriend but when she turned him down, he called Alice. Next thing you know they're a serious item.

Following graduation, she went to Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia. He went to visit as much as he could but soon grew tired of their long distance relationship.

Ms. Alice said in that earlier interview, "Claude told me, 'I'm tired of driving all the way over here. Why don't you come home and we'll get married?'" My plans to be a physical education teacher went right out the window."

With a little reservation, Dr. Campbell walked his daughter down the aisle December 6, 1952. Claude and Alice lived on the farm with the Shiflets their first year of marriage.

The Shiflets purchased a stallion named Warlord from Ray Harney of Asheboro, North Carolina. They in turn sold the stallion to Dan Mize. When Claude delivered the stallion to Lexington, Kentucky, he stopped at the spring sale and bought two horses. He brought them home and gaited one mare, later

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DOUG SHIFLET



*Raised on a large farm in Virginia where horses and ponies were a part of everyday life, Claude Shiflet (far right) turned the skills he learned there into a successful profession in the American Saddlebred world. He is pictured with siblings (l-r) Earl, Charlotte, Christine, Lenwood, Lola, and Riley.*

taking reserve in the Five-Gaited Championship at the West Virginia State Fair. Following that class, he sold the mare to Senator John E. Amos who eventually offered Claude his first training job at Highland Green Farm in West Virginia.

After four years there, they moved back to Virginia, then to North Carolina, where with a growing family of boys he worked for Dr. W.L. McLoud's Lou Mar Farm. It was also there that he first met Mrs. David Ray and her son Calvert who would later become longtime customers.

A.E. Knowlton of the famed Emerald Farm brought the Shiflets to Ohio for four years. There, Claude gaited and made his first world's champion, Tinsel Wings. Other stars at that stop included Black Emerald, Red Emerald and Purloined Emerald.

The legendary Earl Teater invited Claude to join his staff at Dodge Stables in Lexington. It was a great opportunity and experience with an added perk for the entire industry. It was there that Mrs. Frances Dodge Van Lennep gave Claude's son Doug a camera.

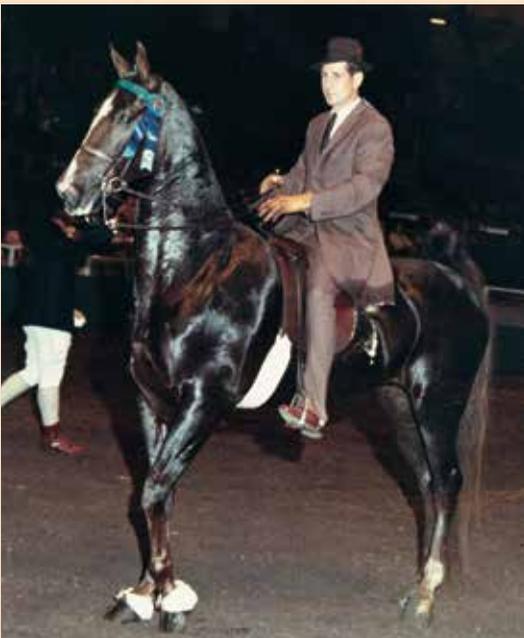
CLAUDE SHIFLET



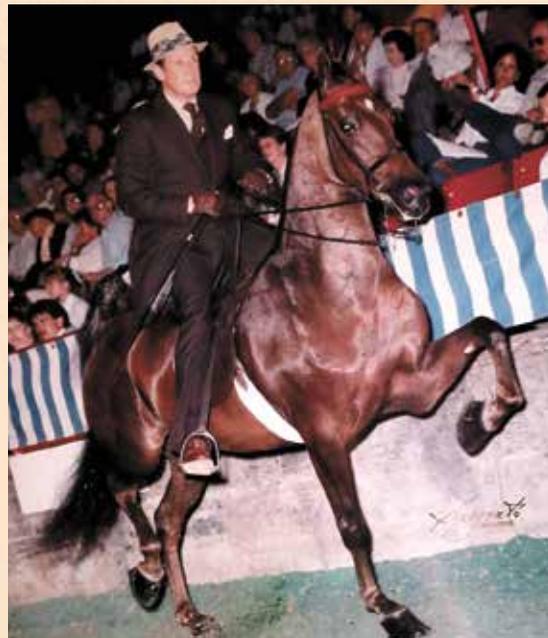
Claude was quite good with a gaited horse throughout his career. This was Cause A Flutter at Madison Square Garden for George O'Bryant.



The top showman had much success with Senator Russell Walker's and his daughter Susan's, Lonely Wine, a daughter of Vanity's Sensation of Crebilly out of a CH Anacacho Shamrock mare.



Tinsel Wings was gaited and developed by Claude Shiflet while at Emerald Farms. The CH Wing Commander daughter was his first world's champion. She won the Three-Year-Old Five-Gaited World's Championship for Mrs. A.E. Knowlton.



Claude won the Three-Gaited 15.2 & Under Stake at Pin Oak (pictured) and Madison Square Garden with Starcade for the Ray family. The noted horseman also gave back to the industry serving on the American Horse Show Association Hearing Committee.



Phyllis Brookshire presented Claude and Alice Shiflet with induction into the Carolina Horseman's Hall of Fame. They were surrounded by their four boys and the rest of their loving extended family.



The dapper young horseman moved his family from Virginia to West Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio and Kentucky before returning to Carolina and settling in Asheboro.  
photo by Flash McAdams • unretouched

## CLAUDE SHIFLET

After three years with Dodge Stables, Claude helped the likes of George Gwinn, Jim B. Robertson and Donna Moore before he, Alice, Harrison, Doug, Mark and young Shane loaded up and headed to Asheboro, North Carolina where Claude put out his own sign in 1972. He was excited about the property as Ray Harney had worked there and it was the barn he had visited when he purchased Warlord. It was also there that son Harrison had his first opportunity to really be involved now that Claude wasn't working a private job.

"I hadn't been able to participate much until we moved to North Carolina," said Harrison in that earlier interview. "It was great to get involved and Daddy needed the help. Daddy came from the old school where you worked for what you got. He taught us how to work hard and how to persevere. If you went to the barn, it was all business. You went to work, not play. He wanted things done his way. It wasn't like he gave you a horse and then turned you loose."

As Claude established himself in the Carolinas and built a loyal customer base it became clear that family was a priority to the Shiflet clan. A clan is what it became. Someone once remarked that you could throw a rock in any direction at a show in the southeast and be pretty assured that you would hit a Shiflet.

Harrison and his wife Beverly spent several years associated with the Asheboro facility and then following a few stops settled in Cherryville, North Carolina, with their own barn. Son Grant and his



*CH Victory Tide Blue was one of many gaited stars the man from Asheboro showed. He later sold George O'Bryant's mare to Art Simmons.*

## *Christ, family and horses* AND IN THAT ORDER.



*1986 was a most memorable year for the Claude Shiflet-trained CH Stanly County Fox and Barbara Baker. Among others, they were crowned the World's Champion of Champions Amateur Three-Gaited team and the National Horse Show Amateur Three-Gaited Grand Champions before he was sold to Joan Hamilton.*

wife Missy have followed in the family profession. His sister Taylor has always been involved with the family operation.

Doug took that Christmas present from Mrs. Van Lennep and turned it into a profession. He and his wife Debbie provide the photography services at major shows across the country, including the World's Championship Horse Show.

Brother Shane eventually went down the same path as Doug and he too shoots a variety of top shows, including the Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration. His wife Suzy runs her own training stable there in Asheboro. In addition to her world's champion success, Suzy and Shane's daughters Coley and Payton both show.

The self-proclaimed black sheep of the family because he didn't go into the business in some fashion, Mark married Jill Sando, well known for her championship rides, especially with CH Gypsy Supreme. He still enjoys going to shows and his sons Grady and Stone, and daughter Piper, as well as Jill, are known to help Doug and Debbie during Rock Creek and Louisville.

There's one more Shiflet involved, well, actually two for the moment. Harrison and Beverly's son Matt and his wife Whitney came back home working with Claude, eventually leasing the facility and finally purchasing it. And now with two children of their own, it looks like the Shiflet Asheboro legacy will long continue.

"I was so lucky to have spent a lot of time with him. He was just Paw Paw to me," said Matt. "I didn't really realize that I was in the midst of a legend. He was my Paw Paw, my boss. When it came to work, I didn't get treated any differently.

## CLAUDE SHIFLET



*Faith and family are what Claude and Alice lived by. They were gathered here to celebrate Alice's lifetime of work with the Presbyterian Women group.*



*Riding for Sandra and Melody Murphy, Claude and Midnight Senor showed them how it's done, winning the Open Five-Gaited class at Blowing Rock.*  
photo by Wes

"I think it was more after he passed that I realized what I had been in the middle of. I knew everybody liked my granddad. What I didn't know was how many lives he touched just being Claude. And don't think for a moment he was easy. You didn't ask if you didn't want to know the truth and he might tell you even if you didn't want to know. There was no back up in Claude Shiflet.

"It was like this for Paw Paw: Christ, family and horses and in that order. In this business you can get caught up in winning and the limelight, but he put all of that in perspective. He and my grandmother, those two are the best. He didn't just say it, he lived it.

"I'm just grateful for the opportunity I was given and the work ethic that I learned. He showed you what hard work was all about and he was such a great people person. No matter who he met, they loved Claude. There were so many lessons I learned and I didn't even know they were lessons, one being taking the high road.

"There's only one Claude. I can't be Claude I can just hope to remember the things he taught me, taught all of us. I hope to be the kind of person he was."

Matt had a funny story that tells us the type of person Claude was. Matt had this local guy out doing some fence work at the farm and one morning Claude was there. Matt introduced them and Claude said how nice it was to meet him and they struck up a conversation. A little time passed and the fence worker told Matt that he had been at lunch talking to a friend and that friend asked him if he knew John Wayne. The man said, "No, but I know Claude Shiflet."

This writer personally called him The Governor. Where ever he was there was always a crowd of people around him, especially women who wanted a hug. And with a tip of his hat, he was much obliged. Claude could hold court with the best of them.

As Matt stated earlier, Claude was great about not getting caught up in the blue ribbons as much as the experience and the good time. For that reason, he had many customers for decades, including the Loves, Walkers, Atwaters, Antiches, Rays, Murphys, Barbara Baker, the Freemans and the Leons. While he might not have gotten caught up in the blue ribbons, he and his clients won plenty of them. For that, Claude is a member of seven different Halls of Fame, including UPHA and the World's Championship Horse Show.

Horses like world's champion of champions Stanly County Fox, CH Knightwatch, Society Time, Ovation, Flirtatious, Cause A Flutter, Victory Tide Blue, Dark Lady Luck, Aire Of Love, So Scandalous, Laurel Hill Supreme, Pistols and Petticoats, Feudin Fury, Flight's Truly Fair, Fiesta's Pride, Attache's Touched By An Angel, Midnight Senor, CH Callaway's Northern Fling, Escriva, Spanish Tap, Elegant Dreamcatcher, and Harlem's Lucky Charm, were among his standouts.

## CLAUDE SHIFLET



One of Claude's great memories was sharing the ring with son Harrison (far left), grandson Matthew and great-grandson Clayton who was aboard world's champion of champions CH Honey Badger.

Not only was Claude gifted with bestowing lessons on American Saddlebreds and their riders and drivers, he was also pretty darn good with young people. Besides his own sons, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Claude has been a great mentor for many youth. Walking the walk, Claude and Alice served as youth leaders at all of the different churches they attended throughout their travels. He was also an elder at church. Giving back to the community he delivered meals for meals on wheels and right up until the time his pulmonary fibrosis worsened, he went to local groceries picking up food for the Community United Outreach Center.

His December passing at the age of 87, one day after his and Alice's 67th wedding anniversary, brought back all kinds of stories and memories for family and friends alike. One fitting memory was when Claude and Alice were honored by the ASHA with the Lifetime Achievement Award, son Doug went to the microphone at the presentation and said, "I think I can speak for all of my brothers in saying that when we get to dad's age if we can have HALF the people speak as highly about us as they do of him, we will have been truly blessed."

Christ, family and horses. What a great life you had my friend.



Harlem's Lucky Charm was a top prospect for Claude and the Murphy family. He won his debut at JD Massey before he met with an unexpected death.