

More Than Meets The Eye

Casey Surface

and Carousel FARM

by Erica Faulkner

IN THE BEGINNING

Bluefield, West Virginia, a small town nestled in the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains, is home to Carousel Farm. A training facility for American Saddlebreds and Hackney ponies, Sherri Surface and her son Casey Surface offer everything from riding lessons for the beginner, to show experiences for the accomplished. The barn hosts a number of horse camps, partakes in the Christmas Parade with their own float, has annual Halloween parties and runs an academy program that highlights showing on the winter tournament schedules. There is never a dull moment at the farm.

Owned by Sherri and Ben Surface, Carousel Farm has been in the family for years. Today, Ben works a day job as a UPS driver, but he is always willing to help with the barn chores when the need arises, and Sherri heads up and organizes the lesson and training programs. Casey is a major player in the farm's success as well, working with Sherri training the horses. This dynamite duo works to ensure the horses are in top order for the customers, between the two of them, no detail is missed.

Sherri grew up with horses; Racking horses, Saddlebreds and here and there a few Hackneys. Since she always had them in her life, it was only fitting that her only child follow suit. Born in the West Virginia's capitol, Charleston, Casey, was not interested in riding horses as a young child. However, at 11 years old he just up and decided out of the blue that he was going to see what riding was all about, and took it upon himself to get in the saddle.



Casey and his best friend and fiancé, Leigh Kauffelt, met on the show circuit and after years of friendship and five years of courtship, they are now set to be married in December 2020.



Sherri spends much of her time these days giving riding lessons and working horses at the barn, however, she still finds time to enjoy showing herself. Here she is pictured showing a young Guy's Sweet Caroline at the Bluefield Shrine Horse Show.



Kauffelt offers moral support and a helping hand when it is needed at the horse shows. Here, she met Casey in center ring to pin the blue on Guy's Sweet Caroline when they won the Three-Gaited Junior/Novice Park class at ASAC in 2016.



Casey purchased the black five-gaited gelding, Rappe, in 2018 from Nancy Troutman. Purchased simply for the pleasure of it, Casey has enjoyed campaigning this gelding all over the South, and when their show ring days are done, he will retire him and let him live out his days at Carousel Farm.



Kauffelt has had a heck of a time showing the fancy road pony, Heartland Well Spoken. Kauffelt and Casey both showed this pony to victories in 2018, however, for this past year, Kauffelt has been the only driver.

"One day, I just decided I was going to start riding," he said. "We had an old school horse outside name Sally. I figured I'd go out and catch her, figure out how to put the tack on (although I did have some help), and then I would ride."

Casey's determination to be successful at anything he does, shined through. It was not long before he set his sights on his first horse show.

"I told my mother I was going to show at the West Virginia State Fair," he said with a smile. "She said there was no way. The show was fast approaching."

But Casey doesn't take no for an answer when he has his mind made up to go after something.

"This was mid-June, when I told mom my plan. The fair was the 2nd week of August. I don't remember much, but I do remember when the time came to show in my first academy class, I was as nervous as a long tail cat in a room full of rocking chairs!"

Nervous or not, Casey prevailed and left his first ever competition with a red ribbon, a well-earned 2nd place."

That winter Casey got his first show horse, and as he said, "it's been a whirlwind ever since!" Once he got his foot in the stirrup, he never looked back; his one and only job throughout his life has been working horses and helping at the farm.

EXPERIENCE BEYOND HIS YEARS

Sherri had made Carousel Farm into a successful operation even before Casey joined the team as a full-time trainer. Yet his addition as trainer has helped

spur them to new levels of success. Not only does he help train the horses at the farm so they are ready for customers, but he has also can be seen in the ring



Casey is an excellent horse trainer, just as he is an excellent people person. With a witty and fun attitude, he is able to connect with his riders, explaining the good and bad parts of their rides, or drives, as he is doing here.

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himself from time to time, and over the years he has garnered an impressive career in the show ring.

Casey's personal rides in competition include campaigning champion horses and ponies such as Conestoga Night, French Resistance, My Mountain Heirs, Central Park West, Success Soleil, He's Somethin' Else, Shadow Mountain's Black Ice, Mucha Muchacha, VL Trump Card, The Daily Show, Southern Hemisphere, High On Coal, Treasures In The Park, Watch It, Louie The Fabulous, Central Time, Heartland Well Spoken, Rappe, Blue Curacao, Harlem's Lotta Love and more.

Although Casey has many fond memories with the above-named horses, Rappe, his current show horse, stands out as one of his favorites. Casey purchased him just over a year ago from Nancy Troutman, with one goal in mind; to have fun.



Casey had a memorable 2019 World's Championship Horse Show with many of his students putting in exceptional rides and drives. One such student, Morgan Hylton, drove her pony Tommy Hawk to the third-place honors in the Amateur Road Pony Championship class.



Blue Curacao is just one of the horses that Casey took a chance on. As is typical for Casey, to dare to do the things that other deem impossible, he has put in the work with this horse and it shows. He showed the horse one time (pictured), winning the Open Five Gaited Stake at Raleigh Invitational this year, before handing the reins over to his talent rider, Madison Law.

"I always thought he was interesting, from the first time I saw him, right up until I had the chance to buy him. He is 17 years old, however he does not really act that age. He is a little on the silly side."

This grand gelding will know no more owners, Casey said, as he plans to keep him until the end and when the time comes give him a grand retirement where he can live out his days in the green pastures of Carousel Farm.

Leigh Kauffelt, Casey's Fiancé, knows first-hand just how talented of a trainer Casey is, commenting that he is exceptionally gifted when it comes to working challenging horses. She proudly points out that Casey has been known to take the most difficult horses and create competitive athletes. At times, he has been successful at making such horses, mannered enough for the junior exhibitor rider.

"Casey is good with, and enjoys, training horses that are not already made. I have seen him work with the toughest horses there are and make them successful show horses," Kauffelt said. "There isn't much that can unseat him. He loves a project horse."

A perfect example of this was He's Somethin' Else, or "Jimmy" as he was known at the barn. Casey first campaigned Jimmy in the junior exhibitor five-gaited division in 2008. Throughout the years, they grew and matured together, eventually progressing from the junior exhibitor division to the open. Sired by Gypsy Santana and out of Fizzical Chemistry, this tough bay gelding earned Casey's respect and admiration. Casey stuck with Jimmy through thick and thin, never giving up on him, and in doing so, gained the respect of his peers.

"He was known to be difficult," said Kauffelt. "He was one of gamest horses I have ever been around. He would swell up when it came time to show and he

gave Casey everything he had every time they hit the ring."

"The minute you brought him out of the stall, you had better be ready to go," Casey added.

Casey's grandfather, Bill Jackson, would have to hold Jimmy for Casey when it was time to get on, because once Casey's butt hit the saddle, Jimmy would

"The minute you brought him out of the stall, you had better *be ready to go.*"

get going and would not want to stop until the ride was done.

Some people were scared of that horse, but not Casey. He could ride him. And he was one of Casey's favorites.

"He was a once in life time horse," Casey said. "He was a great one."

Today, Casey continues to face new challenges head on, with a determination like no other. Recently he chose the big moving gaited gelding, Blue Curacao, for one of his young riders, Madison Law. At Raleigh Invitational this year, Casey and Blue Curacao won the Five-Gaited Championship. Since then he has turned the reins over to Law, and coached them to the reserve honors in the Junior Exhibitor Five-Gaited Stake at Dixie Cup. Many have questioned Casey's decision in purchasing such a game contender for his young rider, however they are off to a great start, and just as

Casey has done in the past, he will work to prove the nay-sayers wrong.

TYING THE KNOT

Casey is supported in his passion for training horses by his fiancé. Kauffelt is also a long-time horseback rider and exhibitor, getting the 'horse bug' from her grandmother, Ginny Kauffelt, who owned Shadow Mountain Farm.

Kauffelt, however, does not work at Carousel Farm. Instead, she holds a full-time job as a Service Provider, helping families rebuild their home in order to regain custody of their children they have lost. When she isn't helping families at work, she helps her father, David, run their farm at home, where there are five horses and more than 70 cattle.

She started riding when she was six and over the years has made quite a name for herself in the show ring, campaigning horses and ponies such as High Time Encore, Rolex, Heartland High Alert, Shadow Mountain Mattalee, Hollyroller, LA Sir Top Hat, Treasures In The Park, Shadow Mountain's Black Ice, Greedy Gator, Callaway's Anticipating The Blues, Heartland Well Spoken, and others.

Although she is not at Carousel Farm as an employee, her job allows her to set her own schedule so she is often seen at the shows running to and from the ring to the stalls, helping Casey and Sherri with moral support for the riders who are showing.

Just this past February, after a five-year relationship with Casey, Kauffelt was pleasantly surprised with a marriage proposal.

"Over our years together, Casey would joke about how he was going to get me a gumball ring," said Kauffelt.



One horse who really challenged Casey was the game gelding He's Something Else. Casey and "Jimmy" had both struggles and victories, and over their years together they left many good, and some bad, memories on the hearts of those who had the privilege of watching them show.



Casey was named the UPHA Chapter 18 Trainer of The Year in 2015, along with the ASHAV Horse Trainer of The Year Award in 2018.

"A .50 cent ring at that," Casey joked.

Over the five years of courtship, Casey would, from time to time, get her such a ring.

"It was for fun at first. I would get her one of those cheap rings you get at the vending machines at the grocery store and give it to her. She would give me a look and laugh it off."

However, February 7th, the ring was more than just a cheap plastic toy.

"It was my birthday," Kauffelt recalls. "I was tired from working late. Casey wanted to go out to eat, and after dinner, he insisted we stop by the barn for his routine night check. He kept asking me if I wanted to see my pony Willis. I joked and said that I didn't need to, I had just seen him the other day and doubt much had changed."

"What she didn't know was that I had bought a real ring. Not a cheap one this time!" Casey laughed. "I had put it in one of those containers you get out of the machines at the grocery stores. She didn't want to go into the barn where I had the whole proposal planned, so I had to go to plan B!"

"He told me he got me a birthday present, and gave me this ring in the cheap container. At first, I did not realize it was real! I almost threw it away," Kauffelt laughed.

"She looked at it when I first gave it to her, and said, 'this is really getting old,'" Casey recalled. "Just as she went to toss it in her purse, light hit the ring just right and it shined. She opened it. And then there was the awkward silence. Seconds passing by like molasses in winter."

Kauffelt finally realized it was not fake.

"I looked at her and asked her to marry me. Then, another awkward silence. I thought to myself, 'this is not going as planned, at all!'"

Although it felt like hours, it only took a few seconds, and before Kauffelt beamed with joy and said yes!

"It took at least 24 hours for it all to sink in," Casey said. "True story, because you can't make this stuff up!"

Their wedding is planned for December 2020.

INSIDE CAROUSEL FARM

Together, Casey and his mother Sherri, along with the support of Ben and Kauffelt, have created an inviting atmosphere at Carousel Farm, where everyone is welcome, no matter how big their pocket book or experience level. They welcome everyone and anyone that has a love for horses, onto their 50-acre farm.



Casey has invested a lot of time learning how to properly shoe a horse, and thus has become not only one of the trainers at Carousel Farms, but also the farrier.

The farm itself has around 38 training stalls, a large 250 by 50-foot indoor arena and a 200 by 60-foot outside ring. Along with the training horses there are a handful of lesson horses, a group of broodmares, a pig, a goat, and even alpacas.

The vision of Carousel Farm, is for everyone who has a desire to learn to ride, to be able to do so.

"We do everything," Casey said. "We have those horses that others might call throw a- ways, all the way up to horses that compete with the best at the World's Championship Horse Show. I feel that variety is key and it enables those who may not have otherwise been able to be involved with horses, a chance to do so. The people with smaller pocketbooks love their horses just the same as the people with unlimited finances. Everyone is welcome at our farm, regardless."

Casey continues to explain that his desire to have his and his mother's farm appeal to people from all walks of life, partly comes from his own upbringing.

"I have never been wealthy," he said. "And I probably won't ever be. But that's just fine with me. I appreciate a horse as much as anyone, and I truly feel like everyone should have the same opportunity to experience this industry."

Casey is a young trainer in this industry, yet he has already accomplished so much with Carousel Farm. He was named the 2015 UPHA Chapter 18 Trainer Of The Year, as well as the 2018 ASHAV Trainer of The Year. He donates his time back to his community by serving as the Vice President of ASHAV, and he already holds his judges' card.

With Sherri's history and experience, and Casey's will to win, the possibilities are endless for this family farm, and the future is sure to be full of memories that only an operation like Carousel Farm can provide.