

THE CROWD WENT NUTS!

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE *Overall Horse Of The Year*

BY SARA PIZZUTO

The crowd often plays an integral role in any sporting event. Whether competing on a football field, a basketball court, or in the hallowed grounds of Freedom Hall, the louder the spectators cheer, the better each athlete performs. Therefore it's only fitting that one particular American Saddlebred, aptly tagged as The Crowd Went Nuts, has lived up to his name with crowd pleasing performances. His remarkable campaign in the three-gaited division coupled with his recent title of world's grand champion have helped him earn your vote as the People's Choice Overall Horse Of The Year.

Breeder Julie Behrends-Jones was thrilled with the arrival of a bay colt in the spring of 2016. She selected Undulata's Nutcracker as the sire and Elegant Heirloom as the dam of the foal that would later be known as The Crowd Went Nuts.

"I am one of Nutcracker's leading fans," Behrends-Jones said. "He has been very integral to my breeding program. I have had two reserve world's champions prior to a world's grand champion and I bought the mare specifically to breed to Nutcracker. I knew she would cross well with him."

Julie Behrends-Jones immediately noticed that her newest homebred was exceptional and gave him a name fitting for a future champion.

"I knew he was special from the day he was born and I thought, 'This is going to be a great name for this colt,'" she said. "And secretly you say to yourself, 'Please let this be true. Please let me be right.' You always hope to have a good one but when the really good ones come along, most of the time you can tell right off the bat."

She explained that The Crowd Went Nuts matured and continue to stand out never once losing any of his superior qualities.

"He stayed special," she said. "He never fell apart as a weanling or yearling. Usually they can get kind of gangly but he never did. He never got unbalanced, he never fell apart. He always had this snaky long neck that went straight up in the air and a really good four-cornered square trot with a lot of athleticism. And he was always a good thinking colt. He was a really good minded boy too."

Trainer Neil Visser took note of the enthusiastic youngster while under the direction of Tre Lee, initially purchasing him for Elisabeth Goth. He soon after approached fellow Visser Stables client Diane Sembler Kamins in the summer of 2018 with the opportunity to add The Crowd Went Nuts to her show string.

"Neil said 'I've got the one for you that's going to be able to win the three-gaited stake,'" Sembler Kamins said. "That had been my dream. Neil said that he had the horse and I had the opportunity to look at him, and all he had to do was make two passes and I said I would love to buy this horse. Even when he is just in the long lines, you watch him work and your jaw drops. Anything he does is just special."

The Crowd Went Nuts made his show ring debut in 2018. He garnered instant success and an immediate fan following after his first ever appearance, where he was crowned the Two-Year-Old Three-Gaited Section One World's Champion with Jesse West. He continued in 2019 as the ASHBA National Futurity Three-Year-Old Three-Gaited World's Champion with Neil Visser. The Crowd Went Nuts was then met with immense support from Freedom Hall spectators as Visser garnered

the third place finish aboard the then three-year-old in the Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship. That same year, The Crowd Went Nuts also added the UPHA Three-Gaited Classic Grand Championship win to his growing resume at the American Royal. His quest for three-gaited domination also included the 2020 Junior Three-Gaited Over 15.2 World's Champion title as well as the prestigious reserve tricolor as the Three-Gaited Reserve World's Grand Champion. Julie Behrends-Jones explained that The Crowd Went Nuts' widely successful show ring career is due in part to his tremendous physical qualities.

"He has wonderful conformation," she said. "You really can't pick him apart. He has that layback shoulder where the neck just comes right straight up out of it. He's got a beautiful pole, nice throatlatch. He's attractive headed. He has a nice long hip, long legs. I like a nice long legged horse for a walk/trot horse or a fine harness horse."

Trainer Neil Visser echoed this statement.

"The thing that intrigued me most about 'Forrest' was first how he looked," Neil said. "He was a very unique looking horse. I hadn't seen one look like him. He has been a nice training horse from day one. Most things come very natural to him. I focused on getting him more confident and stronger each season."

As the 2021 show season unfolded, The Crowd Went Nuts began his year with a sweep of Asheville's open three-gaited ranks before traveling to Louisville. He was poised to once again contend in the Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship, in an attempt to make Diane Sembler Kamins' longtime dream come to fruition. With Neil Visser once again in the saddle, The Crowd Went Nuts began his week as the Three-Gaited Over 15.2 World's Champion. He then returned to the green shavings to contend in the most prestigious three-gaited championship offered for the American Saddlebred. The Crowd Went Nuts indeed had the support of the crowd, as well as all three judges, as he earned the coveted blanket of roses and the title of the Three-Gaited World's Grand Champion.

"That was a 28 year dream," Sembler Kamins said. "So the anxiety was so much greater and the emotion was so much more magnified. How do you not smile? It's fascinating because I love buying a young horse and watching them go through the process. 'Forrest' has been what 'Forrest' is now almost from the beginning. His natural ability what you see today is what I saw four years ago when I bought him. He just kept gaining confidence in himself."

It was equally memorable for Julie Behrends-Jones, as the horse she raved about as a foal lived up to the expectations set for him.

"Oh my gosh there are no words," she said. "It is every breeders' dream to have a horse like this. I know how blessed and how lucky I have been. There are so many people that work so hard for so many years and never get to achieve something like this so I am beyond grateful. I really try to practice gratitude every day. It's like Thoroughbred people winning the Kentucky Derby. It's what you breed them for."

The Crowd Went Nuts will continue his crowd pleasing performances in 2022 with Diane Sembler Kamins' daughter Erin Eichenbaum in the saddle. They already excelled at the Ocala International at the conclusion of 2021 and will once again prepare under the direction of Neil Visser.

"I am looking forward to Erin having the joy and opportunity to show him because she is the one that started it all," Sembler Kamins said. "We started with a half-leased horse and a rented suit so for her now to be showing a world's grand champion is a mother's dream and a mother's joy. In my mind, she has earned the opportunity to show like this."

Diane Sembler Kamins and the team at Visser Stables will continue to ensure that this legendary Saddlebred will be well prepared for the upcoming show season. Sembler Kamins explained that "Forrest" is a busy body and tries to involve himself in the happenings of the barn. Special stalls were therefore designed at Visser Stables to accommodate him. Those stalls were once again re-designed after "Forrest" returned home from Ocala International.

"This past October when we were at the World Equestrian Center, there were windows on the doors," Sembler Kamins explained. "'Forrest' loved being able to put his head out and look all around. He really is a social guy. We are now getting new doors for the barn and 'Forrest' is getting a window. There are a lot of things I have done just for this horse because he is so talented and he is so special. He has given me so much that he deserves to have a life well lived."

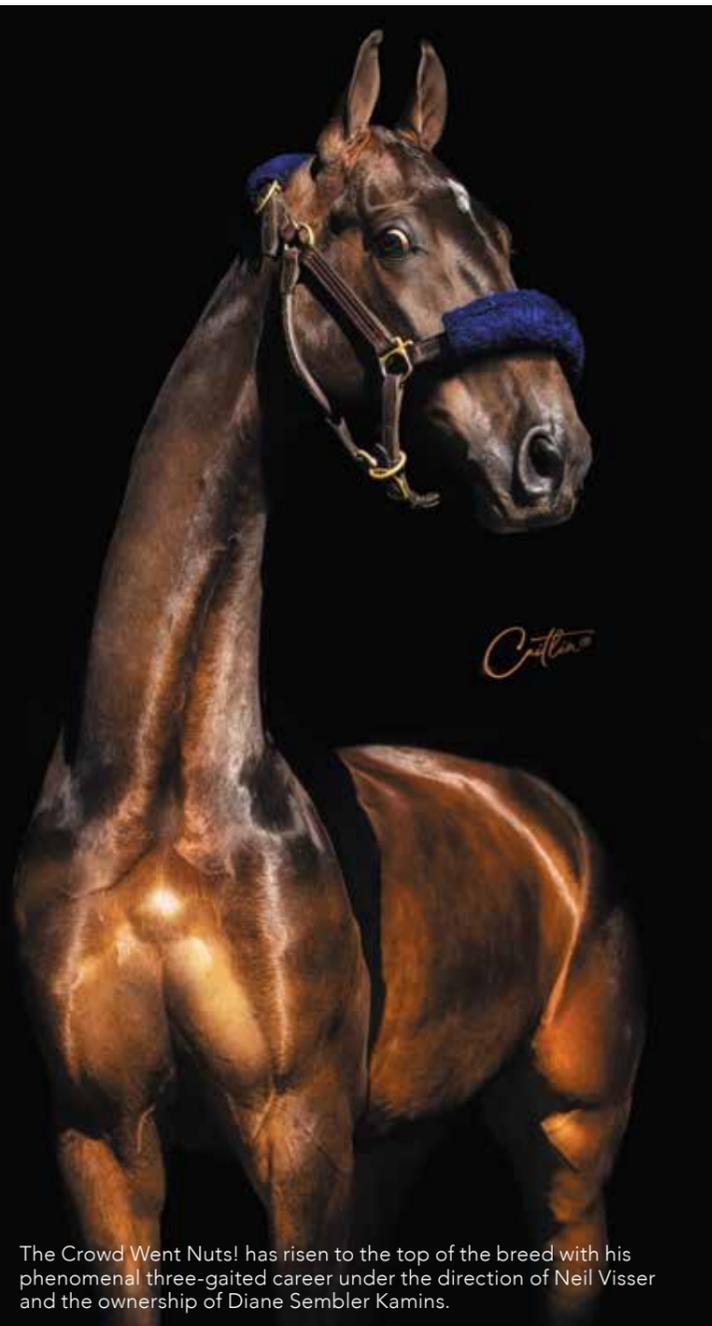
In his young career, The Crowd Went Nuts has positively impacted the Saddlebred industry as he has risen to the top of his breed. He has set the standard for three-gaited excellence and will forever be remembered as one of the greatest walk/trot horses from this decade. As a new season unfolds, Julie Behrends-Jones as well as fans of The Crowd Went Nuts can look forward to the development of a full sibling of "Forrest" now owned by Susan Swope, as well as an additional full sibling due this coming April. And the crowd and those who have become enamored by this three-gaited athlete, can look forward to more crowd pleasing performances from this aptly named performer.



The Crowd Went Nuts! was crowned the 2021 Three-Gaited World's Grand Champion-achieving a longtime dream for owner Diane Sembler Kamins.



Breeder Julie Behrends-Jones knew immediately that The Crowd Went Nuts! was special from birth. The son of Undulata's Nutcracker and Elegant Heirloom continued to mature and develop, winning his first world's title at the age of two.



The Crowd Went Nuts! has risen to the top of the breed with his phenomenal three-gaited career under the direction of Neil Visser and the ownership of Diane Sembler Kamins.