

HORSE WORLD
VIPROFILE



Holly Nichols drove CH Heartland Bejeweled to win the Harness Pony Stallion/Gelding Stake at Louisville this past year, and returned later in the week to be named Reserve World's Champion of Champions Harness Pony.

JAMES & HOLLY NICHOLS

BY ERICA FAULKNER

Over the years, longtime supporters of the saddlebred industry, James and Holly Nichols, have contributed to the show horse community in many ways. James has been involved with American Saddlebreds for over 40 years as a trainer, owner, breeder and exhibitor. He is also a judge, a lifetime member of the ASHBA and current board member of ASHBA, and is President of the American Road Horse And Pony Association. He has also served as President of the UPHA, been on the UPHA Executive Board, the USEF National Breeds and Disciplines Council, ASHBA Rules Committee, and USEF Roadster Committee. His record in the show ring boasts wins in many divisions with many horses, one of which was the winning road horse, Genesis, with

whom James won the USTA Roadster To Bike Classic at Louisville in 2017, along with the Roadster To Bike National Championship at Kansas City that year.

Holly is active in the community as well, as a lifetime member of ASHBA. She also has served for six years on the ASHBA board and committees and is a lifetime member of AHHS. Currently she is serving on the Hackney Society board.

Holly has been showing and competing with horses and ponies for over 40 years. He's Born To Lead, CH Vuarnet, CH Moon Charmer and Fox Grape's Blue Streak are just a few of the champions she has partnered with. From 2017 to 2019, she campaigned the harness pony Heartland Money Talk to wins at Kansas City, Lexington, Kentucky Spring Premier, Southern Saddlebred Spring Fling, Lawrenceburg and more. One of the highlights of their career together was when they were named the 2019 Kentucky County Fair Harness Pony Reserve Grand Champions at Louisville.

Riding has always been in Holly's wheelhouse, yet the past couple of years her desire to drive has

grown stronger and more prevalent. When it comes to sitting in a cart, she enjoys it best when it's behind a Hackney harness pony.

"I knew a few years back that I really wanted to have a harness pony. I have been riding for a long time, but I wanted to gain more driving experience. When Heartland Money Talk became available, James and I thought he was the perfect pony for the job."

Holly fell in love with driving after sitting behind Heartland Money Talk. He gave her a good foundation and confidence behind the viceroy. When the chance to buy CH Heartland Bejeweled (LLF Top Of The Mark x Heartland Sweetheart Girl) came available, she and James jumped at the opportunity.

"We really were not thinking of buying a pony at the time," Holly said. "I always loved Smitty (CH Heartland Bejeweled) though, so when he came available I was very excited about the chance to own him."

The 2020 World's Champion and Reserve World's Grand Champion Harness Pony made an impression on both James and Holly, catching their eye, and their interest, every time they saw him show.

"We leased him at first," James said. "But it was clearly a match and so we purchased him for Holly to show."

Their first show together as an official team was in 2020 at The American Royal, where they put in two great performances in classes full of other champion ponies. They were victorious both times taking the blue and tricolor back to the Majestic Oaks stalls.

"He is perfect, and so much fun to drive," Holly said "When we are done showing he is ready for his peppermints. He has such a fun personality."

"He is just a great pony all around," James commented. "After Kansas City last year, he was let down for a few months in the winter. He has been winning in the show ring for quite some time, so we all agreed he deserved a little break."

After his winter off, he was back to work at the start of the 2021 season. Smitty came out in the spring just as strong as ever. The J.D. Massey Horse Show was their first performance of the season, and they were victorious in the Harness Pony Stake. From there they went to the Asheville Saddlebred Classic and earned the judges' nod in both the Harness Pony Championship and qualifier. On to wins at both Cleveland Tri-State Charity and Lexington Junior League, they paved a blue-ribbon path to Louisville. This special pony would make Holly's dreams come true, earning her first World's Champion title (and Smitty's fifth) when they won the Harness Pony Stallion/Gelding Stake. They also earned the Reserve World's Grand Champion title in the Harness Pony

Grand Championship (with a first place vote).

"James has been such a huge supporter in my dream to win on the green shavings," Holly said. "And he just knew this was the pony to do it."

This fall they have won the Harness Pony Stake at the North Carolina State Championship as well as the Kentucky Fall Classic, and are primed and ready for Kansas City.

James and Holly also own Romeo's Capital Gains LF, who has been shown with great success this year by Maureen Campbell, Remi Adams and Chelsea Dragan. James and Holly show their ponies out of Majestic Oaks Hackney Farm. When it comes to horses, Spoonful (aka Sugar), is currently their showing star. By Fox Creek and out of Million Heir, this fancy mare is no stranger to the winner's circle (she was the 2014 World's Champion Three-Gaited Park Mare champion with then owner Bambi Childress Bollin). Holly and James purchased the mare early this year, and so far, the partnership has been perfection showing out of Cascade Stables.

"This mare has just been phenomenal for us," James said. "She is a very game mare, yet very low maintenance and loves her job."

Holly describes her as her heart horse; the one that was meant to be hers and every day give her confidence in her ability as a rider and horsewoman.

"I remember when she came up for sale, I was so nervous others were going to buy her before we had the opportunity. I got the chance to catch-ride her under Barbe Smith's guidance, and I remember leaving the class and they announced that I was the new owner. The funny thing is, I never even heard the announcement. Barbe asked me as we exited the ring, 'Did you hear what they said! You are the new owner.' I started to cry. I was just so excited.

"Everything clicks between Holly and Sugar," James said. "She really is a special mare and has done so much good for Holly."

Holly and James are looking forward to the future with high hopes for a grand foal out of this mare, as they pulled an embryo and bred her to Nutcracker's Nirvana.

James and Holly continue to be a dynamic duo, giving back to the saddlebred horse, hackney pony and road horse communities in a variety of ways. Outside the ring they are very family oriented and enjoy spending time with their children and their families, Jay Nichols, Kate Totterdale and William Nalty. Passing down their love for the horse, all three children had successful show ring careers and Kate's daughter, Ryals, is currently showing now. James and Holly have a true passion for the show horse industry and we are all better for that.



James Nichols met his wife Holly at the outgate of Freedom Hall after she won her first world's champion title with CH Heartland Bejeweled.