

Forever A Show Horse

CH Eleanor Rigby

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

Named for the 1966 Beatles hit, Eleanor Rigby was far from the sad loneliness described in the Paul McCartney/John Lennon lyrics, she was an individual that could flat light up a show ring with her presence and elegance. She was forever a show horse!

The grand mare died May 14 at the age of 26. Bred by Barbara Overton of Bonsall, CA, Eleanor Rigby was a California product through and through. Her sire was CH Buck Rogers, Michele Macfarlane's World's Grand Champion Fine Harness Horse. Eleanor's dam, Peregrine (by The Kaiser's Falcon), was bred by Bill Rowan, first shown by Rob Tanner and later by Overton.

It was Dena Tanner Lopez who bought and started Eleanor Rigby. She first brought Eleanor to the show ring as a three-year-old placing reserve at Winterfest, both in harness and under saddle. That next year as a junior mare Eleanor and Dena racked up nine wins at every top show on the west coast before shipping east to Freedom Hall, placing a disappointing fifth in the Junior Five-Gaited Mare Stake. Back to Winterfest, Eleanor swept the junior exhibitor five-gaited division with Andrea Nelson.

"She was the real deal," exclaimed Lopez. "She was a show horse every day, all go forward. Sometimes that got in her way as a young mare; too much go forward. She was also very athletic, just like her sire. What made her different was her natural charisma and that she loved to work. You can't train those things."



Dean Lopez was the first to show Eleanor Rigby and was quite successful on the west coast.



Purchased as a gaited horse, Eleanor Rigby and William Shatner found long-term success in the harness division.



Ann Fitzpatrick and Eleanor made an elegant team on the green shavings of Freedom Hall.



Pat McConnell had the good fortune of showing the great mare a few times, including winning the 1998 Fine Harness Mare Stake at the American Royal where the band would always play "Eleanor Rigby" when the mare would win there.



Although unexpected, CH Call Me Ringo was Eleanor's first foal. He proved to be a world's champion performer and sire for William Shatner.

"When I sold her to Donna [Moore] it was over the phone. She got her home and called me and said 'she's exactly what you said she was.' That mare was great for Shatner and everyone who ever had her."

The late Donna Moore selected Eleanor for William Shatner's amateur gaited mount and in 1994 they debuted at Rock Creek, winning the qualifier and taking second in the amateur championship. Early that fall they moved to the harness division debuting at ASHAV with two remarkable classes.

The American Royal, Rock Creek, Lexington, Louisville, they won them all, including two Amateur Gentlemen's Fine Harness World's Championships, a World's Champion of Champions Amateur Fine Harness title and a Reserve World's Champion of Champions title. The same year she wore the Louisville roses (1996) she had her first foal, a colt by Sultan's Great Day that was loaded with personality and athletic ability. His name was Call Me Ringo and like his mother, he would win World's Champion of Champion Amateur Fine Harness honors with Shatner.

"Eleanor Ribgy was a great mare. I rode her to many victories and I drove her to other victories," said William Shatner. "The greatest victory of all was her baby, Call Me Ringo, who won many championships. I loved her and will remember her for a long time to come."

Mid-summer of 1997, Rosalind Fitzpatrick of Hilton Head Island, SC buys her daughter Ann's first real show horses and Eleanor Rigby is among them. Under the direction of Pat and Julie (Kaufman) McConnell when they were in Illinois at Trinity Farm, Fitzpatrick first showed Eleanor at the Illinois State Fair where they won both classes. Two weeks later at Louisville she wins the Amateur Fine Harness World's Championship and following a four-horse workout, the Reserve World's Champion of Champions Amateur Fine Harness title against the likes of World's Champion of Champions CH Our Canary Diamond and Misdee Wrigley, third place finisher CH Crystal Illusion with Sally Parker and fourth place finisher Absolutely Fabulous with Susan Phillips. Not bad for her first year showing!

Fitzpatrick and the brilliant mare would also win at Lexington, Kansas City, All-American Classic, the Wisconsin Futurity and the Kentucky Fall Classic over their three and a half year career. It's funny how things work. Fitzpatrick purchased Shatner's Belle Reve Farm in Versailles, KY and named it Rigby's Green. From there Eleanor showed the last few years of her career and had eight more foals,

five by Fitzpatrick's own stallion, World's Champion CH Great Day's Came The Son. They all went to the show ring and won classes, including A Ticket To Ride, Bungalow Bill and Father McKenzie.

"Of all the horses I've trained she's in the top three of my all-time favorites," said Pat McConnell of Eleanor Rigby. "My favorite memory of her is the year we went to the Wisconsin Futurity when it was at Milwaukee and we were warming up in that little barn in the back. Ann was driving and there were two little girls playing out in the middle of ring and watching her warm up. The one girl looked at me and said, 'wow, I could watch that all day.' I thought to myself, 'I could too.' She was cranking that night, just floating through the air and that was cool to hear.

"She was different. I was in awe of her every day. I never thought I would get to touch a horse like her every day, much less train her."

Eleanor Rigby was indeed different. Her ears. Her eyes. Her incredible beauty and her way of going, it was a different package that was hard to beat.

"I remember the first time Ann [Fitzpatrick] showed her at the Illinois State Fair the mare was fabulous and it was a nice class," said Nancy McConnell. "As the judges were walking the line up and coming towards Eleanor I noticed Pat [McConnell] kept talking to Ann. When we got back to the barn I asked what he was saying to her and he said he told her to get ready because when the judges stopped at them it was going to get real loud. And it did."

Fitzpatrick loved her time in the ring with Eleanor and she loved watching her be a mom to A Revolution, A Ticket To Ride, Bungalow Bill, Maybe I'm Amazed, Father McKenzie, Ask Me Why, Because, and What Goes On.

"She was just a thrill to show," said Fitzpatrick. "She was the same if you were driving her in the barn or in the show ring, she just took over. Sometimes we won, sometimes we didn't, but I always had a good time.

"At home or in the ring she also had a huge personality. She was demanding, always wanting her mints but it was her personality that really stood out. Her last foal, What Goes On, has that same personality."

As her first trainer Dena Lopez noted, she had so much God-given presence and desire. Those two characteristics set the American Saddlebred apart from nearly every other breed and those same traits separated Eleanor Rigby from her challengers for years, giving her owners and trainers much joy along the way.