

A MAN OF MANY TALENTS

Lance HAYES

By Erica Faulkner



Lance Hayes showed Carmelita Santana to the reserve ribbon at Lexington Junior League in 2000 in the Fine Harness Mare class. Owner Guy Smith later took over the lines to win at Louisville that year.



Hayes had the honor of caring for World's Grand Champion Five-Gaited CH Imperator when he worked for John Champagne at Dutel Farms.

Variety is the spice of life and if you know Lance Hayes, owner and trainer of Lance Hayes Stables in Neenah, WI, you know that to be a true statement. Born and raised in Miami, FL, Hayes was exposed to horses at a fairly early age. His grandparents, Leo and Lucille Grassman, owned Nob Hill, a Saddlebred farm in Wisconsin. In the 1950s they relocated to Hallandale, FL. Although retired, they continued to support the horse industry and constructed another horse facility. During this time, Hayes's mom was still in Wisconsin. Eventually she grew tired of the cold and relocated to Florida where she worked as a school teacher. It was after this move that she met the man that would become Hayes's father.

When Hayes was three years old his grandparents sold their farm to Bud Gray who operated as Oakwood Stables. "Every time my mom would drive by the farm while taking me to school, I would beg her to stop and take me inside to see the horses," says Hayes. "Back then I just had this vision of having a horse tied to a tree in my backyard. I hadn't realized how much went into running a farm."

That vision soon changed. "Eventually I think I annoyed my mother enough and one day she just stopped at the farm. Bud Gray was sitting out on the front porch of the barn," Hayes described fondly. "Bud was sitting there in the sun of Florida. My mother was very blunt, she just walked right up to him and told him that I just insisted that she bring me there. Bud sent me into the barn and put me to work right away. I guess you could say that was the day that started it all."

Oakwood Stables at that time was putting out top horses and riders that are still active in the show community today. Hayes says "Bud always had a lot of good horses and riders. It was during my years with him that I had the pleasure of meeting Susi Rambler (now Day) and David and Erin Rudder, prime examples of the talent that was at Oakwood Stables."

These days David Rudder enjoys watching his daughter Alex show, but he too recalls the times at Oakwood Stables with Hayes. "I remember Lance as always being an outgoing guy with a great personality. Everyone always enjoyed Lance and he was popular with everyone in Bud's barn. Lance was always eager to assist with the work around the barn and had a lot of interest in learning about training."

That eagerness to learn and the willingness to work, two traits which Hayes displayed at such an early age, helped to fuel the successes he would encounter in the coming years. It was during a trip to the Tampa Charity Horse Show while working for Gray that Hayes met his now longtime friend Phyllis Harris. "I met Phyllis and the next thing I knew I was standing on the doorstep of her already established barn and we started working horses together." Hayes spent his summers going to horse shows with Harris and as he says, "we quickly became the best of friends."

While at the Southeastern Charity Horse Show at Stone Mountain Park, about a year or so after meeting Harris, Hayes met John Champagne and took a job working for him. "I moved to Louisiana after I was out of school, back in the fall of 1983."

It was with John Champagne that Hayes got the experience of a lifetime, working with the great world's grand champion Imperator. "John was the head trainer at Dutel Farms, which was owned by Billy and Dorothy Dutel," said Hayes. "Billy Greenwell was the assistant at the time. I was hired on and was given one specific job. I was to care for Imperator. I remember interviewing for the job. At the time I had been flying home pretty often. I told John and Mr. Dutel that I would stop flying home if they gave me this opportunity."

Hayes's recalls making the long trip from Louisiana to Simpsonville, KY, to pick up the gelding. "It was a long drive to get him, that's for sure. I remember pulling onto Don Harris' property and walking into the barn. I was intro -

duced to Don and I explained to him where I was from. Don looked right at me and said, 'well, wouldn't you believe it. I have another man coming today from Louisiana to pick up Perry.' I couldn't help but chuckle. He hadn't realized that I was the one he was expecting."

That day was the start of the unique relationship between Hayes and infamous Emperor. "It was magical working with him. I rode back to Dutel Farms in the back of the trailer with 'Perry.' My sole job was to make sure he was taken care of and safe. It was a time in my life that I will never forget."

Hayes spent a lot of one on one time with the grand gelding, explaining that Perry was mostly a one-person horse. "He only had a few caretakers in his life. You could probably name them all on one hand. And that was it, my job for quite some time, was to simply cater to this horse. I'd help take care of a couple other horses here and there, but more or less my sole purpose was to keep Perry happy and comfortable. He had a door in the front of his stall and in the back of his stall. After we got done working with him he would hear me get the lead shank and he would start to whinny. Perry let you know very clearly what he wanted. I would walk him and cool him out. He let me know when he was cool. He would just stop in front of his stall with this look on his face as if he was telling me, 'it's ok, I'm cool enough. Now put me away.'"

Being one of the greatest open horses of all time, one might think that Perry would be hard to handle and high strung, however Hayes's explained his nature to be just the opposite. "He was very well mannered most of the time. Only every now and then would he show a little attitude. He was very particular about his space in his stall. He would be nothing short of a gentleman if I was just in there working around him. But, he seemed to have a real problem with people using his stall as a cut through seeing as though his stall had those double doors. If you tried to take advantage of this and walk through his stall, he would have no problem turning and kicking you."

Hayes also recalls how Perry was particular about his leg wraps, "I remember that I literally had to duct tape the bandages from top to bottom or he would tear them off. He was terrible with them. He definitely taught me a lot with his little quirks. You had to pay attention and do the leg wraps right, or he would have them off before you could get half way down the aisle."

Sharing his days with such an amazing horse only helped Hayes make the decision that he wanted to work with horses for as long as he could. He eventually found his way up to Royal Crest Farm in 1993. Mr. Brockman was running



The Cheetah is just one of the top breeding stallions that Hayes has stood to the public.

the facility at the time. Unfortunately, he was only able to stay at the farm for about 8 months, before having to relocate back down to Florida to take care of his parents. The years following led Hayes to move many times, always being offered new and exciting opportunities. The years continued to go by and Hayes ended up in Virginia working horses with John Champagne yet again. However, no matter where he was at the time, his mind always went back to the beauty of Royal Crest Farm, and he always felt in his heart that was where he would end up. Eventually Royal Crest Farm came up for sale, and he knew that he needed to step up and purchase it.

"My cousin was a real estate agent at the time," explained Hayes. "I decided that I was ready to go work for myself. And Wisconsin made sense; I don't mind the cold like some do. I got organized with my cousin, got the funds together, and in 1998 I purchased my first facility. Lance Hayes Stables were soon to be up and running."

It was not long before Lance Hayes Stables was turning out champions. "One of my favorites that I put in the ring, was the great harness mare, Carmelita Santana," said Hayes of the talented mare by the great CH Caramac out of Sultan's Mahogany. "This horse is special for a couple of reasons," Hayes continued. "Not only was she a fantastic show horse, but she is also the dam of some good horses that are out there today, including Kings Carma." Kings Carma is by The Cheetah, and is currently winning in the five gaited division today with Nissa Sultan.

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It was at the famed Lexington Junior League Horse Show in 2000 that Hayes got the opportunity to show the mare. "Guy Smith owned her at the time. We had talked about our plan with her and he agreed with me when I suggested we take her to some good shows, you know, get her out and get her seen. We decided to bring her to Lexington and Guy was going to show her."

However, things didn't go as planned. Carmelita was entered in the Fine Harness Mare class and Smith was the one who was supposed to drive her but he got held up with business matters and could not make it for the class. "I knew the mare still needed to be shown," said Hayes. "I will never forget it, showing her that year at Lexington. She was perfect in every way and gave me 100 percent every step of the class. We were reserve behind Lady Maya. That was a big deal! I would have to say that night was one that I will never forget." Carmelita Santana continued on that year to win the World's Champion Amateur Gentlemen's Fine Harness title with Smith.



Lance Hayes and Vicki Holston have worked together on the Oshkosh Charity Horse Show for many years.



Hollywood Heat and Sammy Jo Galica at Midwest Charity in 2015. Sired by Hayes' stallion, Santana's Tropical Heat Wave, Hollywood Heat was later sold to Annika Bruggeworth who is winning with the gelding this year.



Big Wave Dave is another champion that Santana's Tropical Heat Wave has produced. Here Paul Healy shows the nice horse the win the Shatner Western Pleasure class at Midwest Charity in 2014.

Hayes continues to put good horses in the ring still today. It was just last year that he had the pleasure of watching his customer Alicia Sacotte and CH Fine By Me take home a reserve world's champion title in section two of the Adult Country Pleasure qualifier. Hayes also took Deker's All American and Alyssa Mitchell to a blue ribbon at Louisville as they won section two of the Junior Exhibitor Country Pleasure 14-17 class in 2009. Sammy Jo Galica was Hayes's first riding lesson student when he opened his farm. She went from riding lesson student to world's champion, winning the Junior Exhibitor Country Pleasure 13 & Under (Sec B) with Heart O'Summer for owners Scenic Heights who are still customers to this day. Today, Galica plays the important role of riding instructor at Lance Hayes Stables.

As if running a show barn isn't time consuming enough, Hayes choose to expand his resume during the years when the farm first opened and he took on the responsibility of restaurant ownership. "After I moved back to Wisconsin, one of the first things I wanted to do was visit my favorite restaurant, Calibans. However, a couple years had gone by since I last went there, and they had since closed their doors."

With the support of his partner Mike Bletsoe, they purchased the restaurant and got it up and running again. "At first I thought it was a great idea. But then it really just got to be too much. As anyone who owns a restaurant knows, you're a cook, a dishwasher, a waiter, you're everything. Whoever calls out of work that day, that becomes your job," explains Hayes. "Having the restaurant made me realize even more that the horses were where I needed to be. I was up at four or five every morning. I'd go in to open up the restaurant and get the day started, then it was off to work horses all day, only to return to the restaurant at night." Hayes decided to sell the establishment and refocus his full attention on working horses.

Along with training top horses, Hayes also has his feet firmly planted in the business of breeding quality Saddlebreds. One of his most successful breeding stallions is The Cheetah, who has sired a number of top show horses during his career, including world's champion That's Exactly Right, world's champion Happy Now, I Am Sasha Fierce, King's Carma, Gracey Grace, and Blue Calliou.

"Susan Phillips owned him when he was young. She stood him for the first time," said Hayes. "Susan used to tell me that they did not really show him because they didn't want to risk him getting hurt in any way. When Susan passed away, I took him in, as well as some of the older horses that were part of the dispersal sale. He was a favorite of mine for sure. We now have one of his babies, Tantrum, who is also in the breeding shed. We are very excited about Tantrum. Tantrum's dam, Carefulleigh, is sired by CH Caramac and is a half-sister to CH Unattached. He already has several colts on the ground."

Also worth mentioning is the sire Santana's Tropical Heat Wave. A prominent stallion of Hayes's breeding program he is the sire of notable horses such

as Hollywood Heat, One Hot Debutante, Innocent Lies, The Real American Princess, and Big Wave Dave.

If you can't find Hayes at the horse show with a rider in the ring or tending to the stallions in the breeding barn, you most likely will find him working the Oshkosh Charity Horse Show with longtime friend and customer Vicki Holston. "When I moved back up here in 1998, Oshkosh was a very small show. Two years after the show started, I was asked to take over and be president. It all happened very quickly. It is a fun show, yet still competitive. We offer everything from open classes to academy classes."

The show has been ongoing for 37 years with Holston joining the list of officials as the show secretary in 2007. "For many years I was the horse show secretary for Milwaukee Spring, and also show secretary for ASAW Summerfun Horse Show and WI Futurity Horse Show," explained Holston. "Lance asked me to take on the duties of the secretary of Oshkosh Charity and I accepted. Oshkosh Charity is a fun and relaxed horse show. Many people tell me it's their favorite show on the circuit. The Oshkosh Charity team does a great job to ensure that everyone is having a good time, from renting a bouncy house for the kids to providing wonderful appetizers and wine for the adults at their ringside seats. It has an outside picnic feel without being in the elements themselves."

Having worked together for so long, Holston and Hayes have developed a dynamic relationship, allowing them to work well together and to enjoy the hours they put in behind the scenes for the show. "Lance and I have a great working relationship. He's the yes man, as he can't possibly say no to anyone. In fact, he and I have an exercise that I ask him to practice saying 'no' before the show, but it's impossible. I'm the one that says, 'Do you really want to do that?' If he says no, it's me who plays the "bad cop" and tells whomever, no. He is always worried about keeping everyone happy at the show, including all the staff. I love working with him!"

It takes a unique individual to be able to balance a variety of tasks at once. Hayes has kept his hands full from the day he set foot in Oakwood Stables. He has enjoyed moments with a once in a lifetime horse, has trained horses to be world beaters, supports the Saddlebred with quality breeding stallions, runs a horse show that everyone wants to be a part of, and he does it all with a smile.



Mike Bletsoe, Hayes partner in life and in the horse business, is seen here driving CH Conway. This team experienced much success in the country pleasure driving division.