

# A Walk Down Memory Lane with Morgan Rhoads

by Leeann Mione

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. - When the 97th annual Santa Barbara National Horse Show ended Saturday July 9th, trainer Morgan Rhoads had a chance to reflect back on his long history of showing there. The show has been a part of his life and career as a horse trainer since he was a young man showing and training Tennessee Walking Horses with his dad Ray Rhoads.

Growing up in Pomona, Calif., it was just natural that Morgan would follow in his dad's footsteps. They started showing at the Santa Barbara National Horse Show and Flower Show before the present day arena was even built (in honor of California Governor and United States Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren) and in fact the Rhoads family history at the show began in the mid 1940s.

For many years Santa Barbara National was one of three shows that brought exhibitors to the city and part of the to-die-for list of shows in California. Channel City Horse Show took place in April and in the fall, there was The Amateur Show. In those days it was the Del Mar National (not Charity Fair) that was held during the fourth of July weekend. In present day, those dates have historically been reserved for the Santa Barbara National. This was the first year in a very long time that the show took place the weekend after the holiday.

The stories of the American Saddlebreds, Hackneys, Roadsters, Tennessee Walking Horses and their legendary owners and trainers that lived and showed on the west coast circuit could fill pages and pages of industry journals.

The Santa Barbara National facility can accommodate upwards of 600 horses and the prestigious show, from its beginning, attracted the best of the best of every breed that participated. With its multiple warm up rings and expansive grounds, the show also hosted hunters and jumpers, Welsh ponies, Shetland ponies, parade horses and stock horses (western division) in the very busy 10-day schedule.

A veritable Who's Who in the show horse industry came to this show every year to take on competition in big, deep classes. For example in the 1973 horse show program the list of horses and exhibitors that participated is more than seven pages long and numbers almost 600.

Names like Royce Cates, Bob Lewis, Art Birtcher, Bill Robinson, Bud Kinney, Cynthia Wood, Wil Botfield, Mrs. John C. Pritzlaff, Mrs. Virginia P. Roth and Ellen Scripps Davis were on the list of owners and trainers who were able to claim victories at Santa Barbara amongst their most coveted and hardest to earn. It's a show that has always been known for its amazing trophies, many of which are still given today.

Rhoads and his father were very successful trainers in the Walking Horse industry and very fortunate to show wonderful Tennessee Walking Horses for clients who were prepared to buy nice horses. Morgan learned a lot from his dad and they had a pretty good rivalry going for many years. Friendly competition always but naturally both wanted to claim victory over the other.



Morgan Rhoads teamed with Daybreak's Count Me In (CH (SA) CCV Casey's Final Countdown x Dee Day Dancer) to win Santa Barbara's Open Five-Gaited blue ribbon. He was joined by his wife Dora after the class.

Morgan showed many great horses at Santa Barbara including a beautiful young Walking Horse mare named Special Sonata for owners Winston Delta Tire Company. They won the 1972 and 1973 Walking Horse Championship Stakes but Ray Rhoads didn't compete in those classes. Morgan was back yet again in 1976 riding a stallion named Chief Blu Boy and this time his dad was one of those challenging for the tricolor. Charlie Judd was judging and when the class lined up he asked Morgan "How would you like to beat your old man?". Morgan grinned. It was the one and only time that he would beat his dad in the show ring and it's a memory that he treasures still today.

For a long time the circuit included February horse shows in Indio [Calif.] and Phoenix, Ariz., and the Rhoads showed at both of them for years. They had the distinct honor of each winning their respective Walking Horse Championships on the same night in 1973. Morgan did it in Indio and his dad did it at the Phoenix show.

The circuit also included a huge show at the Los Angeles Forum. Like Cow Palace in San Francisco, the show offered the unique opportunity to show in front of huge crowds. The horses and their riders and drivers loved

## MORGAN RHOADS



*Special Sonata and Rhoads were crowned Santa Barbara National's Walking Horse Grand Champions in 1972 and 1973. The horse show was already over 50 years old by that time.*



*The 1973 show was dedicated to Holland and each class winner received Delft collectors' item trophies. Over 200 of the trophies were given out at the show.*

those victory passes in front of an enthusiastic and supportive audience.

The west coast circuit with its beauly California venues, great weather and some of the best competition in the country has always made exhibitors eager to bring their horses and ponies and Santa Barbara is arguably one of the most pleasant destinations on the list. Exclusive hotels, shopping, great restaurants and the almost constant sunshine and warm temperatures make time spent there feel like a vacation.

"Santa Barbara really has always been a jewel on the circuit," said Morgan. "There used to be so many great shows and so many noteworthy owners and trainers on the circuit. Mrs. Roth, for example, was like a third grandmother to me. There is a reason the ASHA Sportsmanship Award is named after her. She was a great lady."

Time spent with those many legends of the show ring adds to the memories that Morgan Rhoads has made showing on the circuit and especially at Santa Barbara National.

"When my dad and I left the Walking Horse industry I eventually ended up in Colorado. I hung up my shingle to start my training business again and Bob Kellert and Mary Cockriel were the first people to send me a Morgan to train.

Morgan's career also included training Rocky Mountain Horses and other breeds in addition to Saddlebreds and when he came back to California he settled in San Juan Capistrano. His return to the Santa Barbara National Horse Show in 2010 was his first time back at the show in 30 years so each year since Santa Barbara has become a treasured stop during the show season.

This year he had the honor of receiving the Wil Botfield Memorial Trophy for winning the Open Five-Gaited class. The beautiful trophy, sculpted by artist Douwe Blumberg, was just one of this year's stunning trophy offerings and it was especially meaningful to Rhoads. "He was a good

friend to both my dad and myself and he trained both Saddlebreds and Walking Horses. Wil's two daughters and I grew up going to the same shows," said Morgan.

The Saddlebred that earned the trophy this year with Rhoads was a mare named Daybreak's Count Me In. Sired by 2007 Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion CH (SA) CCV Casey's Final Countdown and out of the mare Dee Day Dancer,



*The Wil Botfield Memorial Trophy went home this year with Morgan and Dora Rhoads and has special meaning to Morgan. He was a good friend to both Morgan and Ray Rhoads and trained both Saddlebreds and Tennessee Walking Horses.*

the mare entertained the Santa Barbara crowd on her way to the presentation of the coveted trophy.

"She's one of those horses that acts differently at a show than she does at home. She's all mare and I just have to get on her and go out and do it," said Morgan.

When Morgan and wife Dora were shopping for horses they went to Daybreak Farms in Illinois to see a different horse that had caught their eye. When it came time to discuss price the negotiations didn't work out. "We just couldn't agree on a price for that horse," said Morgan. "They showed this mare to us even though I suspect they had originally planned to keep her for themselves and we really liked her.

"You know, my dad always said you can put a front end on a horse but they have to be born with the back end. The way she moved in the back was part of what attracted us to her."

Being able to display the beautiful and meaningful trophy in their home adds another precious memory from Santa Barbara for the Rhoads, in addition to time spent with friends both old and new.

"When I got away from the horses completely and then focused on other breeds it changed my perspective. I think I appreciate what we have on this circuit even more than I used to. Santa Barbara National is a jewel and I don't take it for granted now.

"Our industry can't survive on Lexington, Louisville and Kansas City alone. We need the smaller shows throughout the country to support the show horse industry. There has to be a place for young trainers coming up through the ranks to be able to take horses."

At 97 years young, Santa Barbara has been good to Morgan Rhoads and his family and provided a wealth of memories and opportunities. Hopefully year number 98 will continue that tradition.