

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Alex Rudder

The People's Choice Junior Exhibitor of The Year

By Erica Rae Faulkner

The winner for the People's Choice Junior Exhibitor of The Year, is the talented and gracious young lady, Alex Rudder. This is the second year in a row that Alex has received this award. She couldn't have accomplished this achievement without her three show ring stars, WCC Soquili's Curious George (George), Roxie In Vegas (Roxie) and WCC Kalarama's Prospero (Prospero). Both George and Roxie also won a People's Choice Award, with George being named the reserve winner for the junior exhibitor three-gaited 14-17, and Roxie earning the people's approval for the reserve five-gaited pony award.

Daughter of David and Marie Rudder, Alex was born into a very successful equestrian family. David says of his daughter "Alex always had an interest in horses. I can remember when she was little, she never seemed to want a doll or anything like that to play with, it always had to be a Breyer or some sort of play horse." Moving on from Breyers to real horses, Alex got her first riding lessons with Bret and Suzi Day at Grey Ridge Farm when she was just four years old. "I remember riding an old pony named Oreo," says Alex. "After riding for about two years with Grey Ridge, I actually switched to riding jumpers." However, she soon realized that the jumping discipline was just not where her heart was. "After riding jumpers for about six months, I just decided that I really missed the excitement of riding Saddlebreds. I switched back to riding saddle seat, and have stuck with it since!"

After her short stint with jumpers, Alex re-entered the show world under the direction of Chris and Stephanie Brannan at Wingswept Farm. "I started training with them when I was six," Alex said. "And I cannot express how thankful I am for them. Over the past ten years they have taught me so many life lessons and knowledge of the equine sport. I am so thankful to have them as a part of my family." Stephanie also holds Alex in high regard, "She is the hardest working kid I know," says Stephanie. "She is always the first to arrive at the barn, and the last to leave. She spends as much time riding as she can. She certainly has nice horses, but she does not take them for granted at all." Chris and Stephanie have teamed Alex with great



After a breathtaking ride, Alex and Soquili's Curious George take their last lap around Freedom Hall as the World's Champion of Champions in the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 division in 2015.

horses over the years, helping her to achieve success at the highest level. One of her first show horses, CH The Proof Is In The Heir, helped to shape Alex into the grand rider she is today.

David recalls many fond memories of watching his daughter show this special horse. One memory stands out in particular. "I remember when she was 11 years old and showing at Lexington Junior League for the

very first time. We walked up to look at the ring before her class and as we walked back to the barn I could tell something was on her mind." He asked his daughter if everything was ok, "she looked up at me and said there was no way she could compete with the 'big' names and horses that were going to be in her class. I told her that she could ride as good as anyone and just go in and ride like you always do and have fun. Well,

she entered the ring and had a flawless ride and won unanimously. When they announced her as the winner, I had tears running down my face. It will always be a moment that is very special to me because she never looked back and since that time, she has always ridden with great determination and focus."

Winning at numerous top shows all over the country, this team closed out their career together in 2014. That year they were named the champions of both the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 13 and Under Div II class and the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 13 and Under Championship at the World's Championship Horse Show, along with winning the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 13 and Under qualifier and the Championship at Kansas City. The duo was also named UPHA Junior Exhibitor Three Gaited Horse Of The Year and USEF National Horse Of The Year – Junior Exhibitor Three Gaited.

Over the years, Alex has shown a variety of horses, with continued success. The past two years, Alex has teamed with the impressive walk trot gelding, Soquili's Curious George, winning nearly every time they have hit the show ring. George had made quite an impact on the industry with his exhilarating win in the Ladies Amateur Three-Gaited Championship at Louisville in 2014 with Kate Foy. Chris and Stephanie Brannan knew that this horse was special, and flew to New England with the Rudder family to try him out. "It was so much fun getting to visit Cater Stables," Alex said. "David and Kristen were so welcoming and have such a beautiful facility." And when it came time to get on George for the first-time, Alex was beyond excited. "I will never forget that day!" She says with a smile on her face. "Riding George for the first time was such an amazing feeling."

The decision was made that he was the perfect horse for her, and George made the trip from New Hampshire to Kentucky that winter. Alex spent the winter getting acquainted with her new partner, and when they hit the show ring at the Kentucky Spring Premier Horse Show in 2015, it was evident that this team was going to be tough to beat. Winning both the qualifier and stake in the junior exhibitor three-gaited division at the show, they set the stage for an undefeated year.

Alex and George have garnered wins at many major shows, including the World's Championship and the American Royal, as well as being selected as the UPHA Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited Horse of the Year in 2015 and 2016. However, Alex says her most memorable win with George was this past year at the Asheville Lions Club Charity Horse Show. "There was a workout in my championship at that show. George and I won, which was so exciting since it was both George and my first workout!" It is obvious by their success together over the last two years, winning 24 of their 25 classes, that this duo has already developed a bond in the show ring. Alex says that George truly fits his name, as he has a 'curious' personality. "He always stands at the front of his stall to see what is going on in the aisle," says Alex. George also has a big work ethic just as Alex does. "Every time he comes out of his stall to work, he has his ears up," says Alex.

Alex has proven that she is a versatile rider; not only winning in the three-gaited division, but also taking home many blue ribbons and champion honors from the five-gaited division, three gaited and five gaited pleasure and road pony under saddle divisions. "Although my first show horse I ever owned was a five-gaited horse named Callaway's Kit Carson, Roxie In Vegas is my first ever five-gaited pony." Having no preference of one division over the other, Alex says, "Both three-gaited horses and five-gaited horses are a thrill to ride!"

Roxie was purchased for Alex at Louisville in 2015 from Alliance Stud. By Northern Vegas and out of Miss Roxie Hart, this



A crowd pleaser wherever they show, Alex and her five-gaited pony Roxie In Vegas had a stand out debut at the Southern Saddlebred Spring Fling this past year. They were victorious in both the Five-Gaited Pony qualifier and Championship.

game mare is quickly learning her lessons in the show ring. Still a young horse, and completely new to the show ring, Roxie made her debut with Alex at the Southern Saddlebred Spring Fling Horse Show in Murfreesboro, Tenn., this past year. "Showing her at Murfreesboro was my favorite experience with her this year," Alex commented. "It was a great learning experience for me, to get to show a young horse for their first time in the ring." After the first show, Alex and Roxie went on to earn top ribbons at shows such as Asheville Lions Club, Rock Creek, Lexington, Louisville and the Kentucky Fall Classic. Roxie is all business and show horse when she hits the ring, but back at the barn, "She is the type of horse that would live in your house with you if she could," says Alex. "My favorite thing about her is her loving personality. When you go in the stall with her she will lay her head in your arms."

Alex is looking forward to working hard in 2017 with Roxie and George. Facing each challenge with determination and a will to succeed, Alex is sure to continue to be in the winner's circle. When she isn't riding at Wingswept Farm, Alex enjoys playing basketball and improving her skills as a rock climber. "Horses of course, are her priority and dedication," her father comments. "She has great athletic skills and is constantly encouraged by the basketball coach at her High School to play for the team, but she always says it will take too much time away from her horses." With such a dedication and love for all things horses, Alex is sure to succeed at her career goals of becoming a veterinarian. "She is always going along with our veterinarian on calls, trying to learn all she can. She is very hands on with everything she does," comments Stephanie. The future looks bright for Alex, so keep an eye out for this young lady in the upcoming year. She will put on performances you won't want to miss.