



People's Choice Horse of the Year As Predicted GCH



By Jenny Grey



As Predicted GCH earned the honors as People's Choice Horse Of The Year to the delight of owner Deborah Hamilton and trainer Nikki Rae Woodworth.



As Predicted GCH and Nikki Rae Woodworth enjoyed showing off their Park Saddle World Championship roses, tricolor and cooler with a bareback ride joined by assistant Lupe DeLoya.

As Predicted GCH, son of the late Liberation First Star and out of Prediction, has once again proved himself a shining star in the park saddle division. His owner, Deborah Hamilton, only in her third year of showing, brought him to the winner's circle twice, winning the Amateur Masters Park Saddle Grand National Championship and then her first Amateur Masters Park Saddle World Championship with a unanimous vote of the judges under Nikki Rae Woodworth's direction. It is a rare animal than can switch from the Masters division to an open park world championship but with a big heart and plenty more to give, As Predicted and Nikki Rae Woodworth were the undisputed Open Park Saddle World Champions, again with a unanimous vote.

Starting his career at Playmor Farm as a four-year old, As Predicted (Skeeter) was already showing his big personality. Purchased for Chloe Deeb in 2011, he emerged from Oklahoma that year as the English Pleasure Junior Exhibitor 13 and Under World Champion. Before Skeeter came to Nikki for training in 2012, she followed his progress, remembering a video of him as a three-year old. "He stuck in my head ever since", Nikki recalled. "He just had this presence about him that can't be made. It's who he is."

Ending 2012 as the Open English Pleasure World Champion with Nikki in the saddle, he switched to the park division in 2013. "He felt good at the show but I knew I could get more out of him", Nikki reported. "He had the size, presence and capability that a park horse possesses." Immediately excelling in his new division, Skeeter earned the Junior Exhibitor Park Saddle World Championship and the Open Park Saddle Reserve World Championship in both 2013 and 2014.

Debbie Hamilton had ridden long distance trail but had never shown before 2013. Buying her first Morgan 17 years ago, she rode at

Barbara Ackley's stable in Vermont. Extremely helpful and supportive, Barbara and her daughter, Betsy, were primarily responsible for introducing Debbie to KGA Morgans and were excited for her when she decided to show. Attending her first Morgan Grand National as a spectator in 2012, Debbie was excited to take the next step with Nikki and Maggie Hood. "I was hooked", she remembered. "I ordered my first suit and day coat and started thinking about showing my classic horse the next spring." Beginning with Equinox Elitist in the classic division and SLLC Equity in English pleasure, she began showing in 2013, then began looking for her dream horse (something tall, dark and handsome) in 2014.

Describing Nikki and Maggie as wonderful people who love what they do, Debbie said, "From the very start of my relationship with KGA I've admired Nikki's calm, assured way with horses and the respect she commands in a firm, gentle way and the love she has for them ... Maggie is always the cheerleader; aware of the atmosphere in the barn and at shows, making it fun and comfortable for anyone there giving support to their horse-crazed friend or family member."

When Skeeter came up for sale, Nikki and Maggie asked Debbie if she was interested. "I thought she would fit him really well", said Nikki. "Although she had never ridden a park horse before, she has a quiet demeanor about her riding and a really good seat. Skeeter is the type of horse that you don't fuss with a lot and Debbie is really good about that... Because her riding style is really quiet, we worked on being bold!" Debbie, who trusted Nikki's judgement, purchased him without even trying him out.

"In my third year of showing, being paired up with a horse like As Predicted is a dream come true," Debbie averred. "Never in my wildest



It was a dream come true for Deborah Hamilton as her number was called as the Amateur Masters Park Saddle World Champion with As Predicted GCH. Trainer Nikki Rae Woodworth shared in the magical moment.

In just her third year of showing and first year in park saddle, Deborah Hamilton said by winning the Amateur Masters Park Saddle World Championship she is indeed "living the dream".



dreams as a young girl would I have thought that I would be riding a world champion Morgan horse. But here I am as a 'Master', living that dream!"

In 2015, Debbie and Skeeter were undefeated all year in championship classes, but as Nikki reported, it was not necessarily easy. He is the type of horse that needs to know his rider is the boss but at the same time the rider needs to stroke his ego. "The first show we went to he wanted to be really hot. I worked him twice a day that week and when it was time for his first class, he was settled in. At home, he is jogged pretty much every day with the exception of those days Debbie comes to ride him. At a horse show he can never be worked enough!" Nikki emphasized. "I think one of his best qualities is that he gets bigger as the class goes on. There is definitely another gear that kicks in when you reverse and trot! I also think it helps when a horse likes its job. He is big and powerful but also happy to have an amateur on him. His attitude is also an advantage; he wants to be noticed."

"He's a ham!" Nikki added. "He is all personality. He definitely knows he's special and commands the attention. The very first time I met him I was taking him off the trailer and he bit me. I knew we would quickly form a bond. He is all about work and very energetic but when he's done and on the crossties, you can put a puppy on him (and I have!)" Debbie claims to connect with Skeeter through banana treats that he loves. "I love his personality and sense of humor ... If only he could talk!"

Even though the 2015 show season had gone very well, Debbie had no expectations of winning a championship at the Morgan Grand National saying, "I'm still stunned by how well we did!" In only her second time riding in Oklahoma City, she and Skeeter won the Amateur Masters Park Saddle Grand National Championship unanimously and followed up with Debbie's first Oklahoma tricolor pass as the Amateur Masters Park Saddle World Champions. Remembering that occasion as if it were yesterday she said "Oh my gosh; it was all Skeeter! I was just along for the ride. We had come a long, long way." Debbie is not giving herself enough credit. To be able to ride a park horse with Skeeter's power and win against the kind of talent we saw in Oklahoma last year, she should be extraordinarily proud of her achievements.

Nikki's plan is always to take one class at a time. They did not even discuss taking him back in the open championship until the day after Debbie's big win. "I know the motor he has and he would be enough horse to show back but I wanted all the focus to be on Debbie's classes", said Nikki. "When she asked me on Friday if I'd like to show him back in the open, it felt like Christmas came early."

In a wonderful finale to their 2015 Grand National show, As Predicted GCH and Nikki Rae Woodworth were named the Open Park Saddle World Champions with a unanimous vote of the judges. Remembering this great experience Nikki said, "Oh man; it's really indescribable. I grew up watching that class and have been fortunate

to show in it in the last couple of years. To be able to win that class with a horse as special as Skeeter meant even more to me. When Skeeter's name was announced as the unanimous world champion I think we both wanted to leap in the air up to the presentation area. On the way back to the barn, I was first greeted by Mike Goebig (who I consider to be the king of park saddle). He's always encouraged me to go back in the open stake and he was the first to congratulate me."

In talking about Skeeter's victory, Mike Goebig said, "You have to look back to New England. He gave notice that night he was ready for the world championship. He filled up the ring...He's balanced, he goes high; he has a great headset. It's the whole package." The package, of course, includes Nikki. "He's blossomed with Nikki", Mike told us. "Showmanship is a big thing for sure. She gets around the ring like she means it and acts like she's the one to beat. She's kept him on top no matter what the division or who is riding."

Peggy Alderman, also a Skeeter admirer, had an opportunity to ride him on the way to the Super Convention this year. "What a blast!" she enthused. "I have loved him for years and he just keeps getting better. He was as good a horse at OKC last year as he has been at any point in his career. He owns the ring when he enters with that big front of his and he just keeps getting stronger throughout the class. That's what champions do!" Coincidentally, Peggy received the news that Graycliff Tony Hawk won the People's Choice Reserve Horse of the Year while she was at lunch with Maggie and Nikki saying, "Nik and I got all puffed up about our 'boys!'"

Debbie, who had been keeping her fingers crossed, was so thrilled by Skeeter and Nikki's win, she could barely take it all in. She had found her dream horse who leapt to the top of the charts in 2015 to take the biggest prize of all. Nikki made her way back to the aisle to meet Debbie, picking up a celebration drink for herself at the bar being set up for the after-hours party, then continued back to the barn to give Skeeter his favorite treat of bananas (peels and all). "I want to thank Debbie for believing in me when I paired her up with Skeeter", Nikki said with gratitude. "She bought him without ever riding him and went on my word. I knew they would be a great fit but I'm even happier she believed in herself enough to do it."

This is a remarkable story about an amazing horse with a big heart and an awesome talent. An outstanding performer from the time he began showing in 2010, everything came together in a wonderful conclusion to the 2015 show season. Stepping seamlessly from the Amateur Masters Park Saddle World Championship with Debbie Hamilton, who has only three years of ring experience, to winning a thrilling Open Park Saddle World Championship with his outstanding trainer, Nikki Rae Woodworth, As Predicted GCH has proved himself to be one of the most talented and versatile park horses of his generation. For an outstanding 2015 show season he has earned your well-deserved votes as the People's Choice Horse of the Year.