

People's Choice Lionel Ferreira and Marc Of Charm Trainer and Horse of the Year



Known affectionately as 'The People's Horse', Marc Of Charm's fans rose to their feet to applaud his victory.

By Jenny Grey

Winning the 2015 Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion title with Marc Of Charm in this mighty stallion's final performance was Lionel Ferreira's proudest moment and the fulfillment of a dream in a long and distinguished career. On Saturday night at Louisville last year, Marc topped the field in a spectacular, six horse workout with his fans chanting 'Go Lionel!' each time they made a big pass. There wasn't a horse to challenge him that night as he literally 'went for broke'. They waited a long time for this victory but when it came, the crowd went wild.

A gifted trainer who recognizes raw, young talent others may overlook, Lionel Ferreira's Monnington Farm show string enjoyed a phenomenal season. In recognition of Lionel's outstanding achievements, he has earned your vote as the People's Choice Trainer of the Year. Marc Of Charm, the horse he has believed in and nurtured since 2008, joins Lionel in the limelight as the 2015 People's Choice Horse of the Year.

Lionel's parents bought his first Saddlebred in his native South Africa when he was eight years old. Becoming immersed in the breed and attending local shows, he was influenced by Harold Poil and Bill Rowan, the top trainers of the day. Arriving in the USA to further his education at age 18, Lionel first worked for Joe Becker, then for George Knight, gaining a deeper understanding of how to develop



Taking pass after brilliant pass, Marc Of Charm and Lionel Ferreira were unbeatable on Saturday night at Louisville, earning a wonderful, final victory pass on the green shavings in the last performance of Marc's show career.



Lionel Ferreira shared a moment of celebration with Carolyn Koch, who never once doubted her wonderful stallion, Marc Of Charm, would be the Open Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion.

and finish a show horse as well as the organization and hard work required to run a successful training operation.

What might have been a disaster changed the course of Lionel's life in a positive direction. While working in the USA he suffered a broken back, forcing him to go back to South Africa for surgery and recuperation. While there, he met the Bulmer family and his future wife, Georgia. Georgia and her mother, Angela Conner-Bulmer, founder of the Morgan breed in England, were in South Africa to compete on the World Cup team. Their growing interest in Saddlebreds led to a meeting with Lionel, who was subsequently recommended by Stacey Hennessy as a good fit to train their horses at Monnington. He accepted the job and now 16 years later, is part of the family.

While becoming an integral part of the British Morgan community, Lionel maintained his passion for Saddlebreds. Sharing his enthusiasm, John Bulmer joined Lionel on a buying trip to South Africa where they purchased Monnington's first Saddlebred, Vida's Eraser, in 2000. In the ensuing years, they continued the practice of buying horses from South Africa, finishing them in England, then bringing them to the USA to show and sell.

Carolyn Koch, owner of Riverdreams LLC, is a breeder of champion Pugs. Knowing nothing about horses on the day she went to a horse farm to breed a Pug, she somehow returned home with a Saddlebred. "You can't have just one!" she declared. "I sold that one and got three more." During a later trip to the Lexington Junior League show, she came across a two-month old weanling named Marc Of Charm (Santana's Charm x Pretty Ribbons). "I didn't know much but there was something about him," she remembered. "I never do this but I wanted him so I bought him right away."

After a successful debut at Lexington Junior League in two-year old fine harness, Marc was let down for the winter. Lionel, who was stabling the Monnington horses at the same barn during his annual trip to the USA, recognized something very special about this colt. He suggested to Carolyn that he take him back to England for training and return the next summer to show. She agreed, embarking on a new journey with the trainer who would propel her horse of a lifetime to the top of the charts.

Lionel's instincts about Marc Of Charm proved correct. Marc won the Three-Year Old Five-Gaited Stallion/Gelding Section I World's Championship in 2009 and the Junior Five-Gaited Stallion/Gelding Section I World's Championship and the Junior Five-Gaited World's Championship in 2010.

During these two excitement-packed years, Lionel and Georgia, now his wife, believed they needed to make a permanent move to the USA in order to give Marc the best possible chance of success. Importing just a handful of Saddlebreds and Morgans, they were taking a huge risk when they moved to the old Crabtree Farm in Simpsonville, KY, but with hard work and belief in themselves, Monnington Farm USA quickly grew into a 50 horse operation.

2011 brought a Reserve World's Championship title for Marc in the five-gaited division as well as great success for Monnington Farm with a cadre of talented young performers including HS Baby Steps, the 2011 Two-Year-Old Fine Harness Mare World's Champion. The momentum continued in 2012 when Baby Steps became the ASR National Futurity Three-Year-Old Fine Harness World's Champion; HS Decorum won the ASR Four-Year-Old Three-Gaited Sweepstakes and the Junior Three-Gaited World's Champion of Champions and Marc Of Charm was still in rare form as the Five-Gaited Stallion World's Champion.

Unbeaten prior to Louisville in 2013, Marc and Lionel took reserve the Five-Gaited Stallion World's Championship. Even better on Saturday night, Lionel believed he had a real shot at the big title. It was not to be, however. Admitting he was terribly disappointed, Lionel was discouraged while the grand championship remained elusive. Lionel and Georgia love this horse with a passion shared by Carolyn and Gary Koch. They wanted the grand championship for Marc Of Charm as much as they wanted it for themselves, believing in him completely. In 2014 Marc and Lionel improved their position, winning another world's championship in the Five-Gaited Stallion Stake but were fifth on Saturday night.

With just one qualifying show for Marc last year, he won the 2015 Open Five-Gaited Championship at Bonnie Blue. Moving on to Louisville, Marc earned the Five-Gaited Stallion Reserve World's Champion title on Monday leaving the rest of the week for Lionel and the team to ensure he had the best possible chance of success on Saturday night. In the meantime, Monnington Farm was enjoying a highly successful show. Cloverleaf Freedom Writer won the Amateur Three-Gaited Park Stallions and Geldings World's Championship and the Amateur Three-Gaited Park World's Champion of Champions with Alexandra Percoco on board; Riverdreams' Remarkable earned the ASR National Futurity Three-Year-Old Park Pleasure World's Championship with Sarah McKenna;



Lionel Ferreira was interviewed by Peter Doubleday on that magical Saturday night at Louisville last year following a performance he will remember for a lifetime.



Lionel's wife, Georgia Ferreira-Bulmer, who has been with Lionel for the whole journey, is incredibly proud of what Marc and Lionel have achieved.

Vanity Blue won the Junior Five-Gaited Stallion/Gelding Reserve World's Championship and Lullaby Kiss won the Junior Park Pleasure Section II World's Championship, both presented by Lionel Ferreira.

On Saturday evening, Marc Of Charm was fit and ready to give the performance of a lifetime. "I threw caution to the wind, dug in my heels and he responded," Lionel remembered as if it were yesterday. "I have never gone so fast with this horse. I was passing everybody! I had a monster for the workout...we went for broke. The crowd got behind him and wanted him to win. When I came off the rail and cut through the middle the noise was extreme. I knew he had done enough to win. He couldn't have done more and I didn't think there was a horse to challenge him." When six horses, including Marc, were called back to the rail, the crowd went wild. With each brilliant pass, one could clearly hear the crowd cheering 'Go Lionel!' They made even more noise when Marc was declared the Open Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion. Known affectionately as the 'People's Horse', Marc's fans have supported him through his stellar career and were there to witness a stunning performance.

Georgia Bulmer-Ferreira, who has lived this journey with Lionel every step of the way, is incredibly proud of what her husband and Marc achieved last year. "He is such a special horse to us and worth the dream. We made the move to the USA for him; Lionel believed in him and really cared about him. He was amazing!"

Thrilled beyond belief, Carolyn Koch averred "I never once doubted it. He couldn't be denied this year. It was so exciting going out on top but bitter-sweet knowing he wouldn't show again."



Lionel Ferreira recognized Marc of Charm's special qualities when he was a two-year-old. Unbeaten as a three and four-year-old with multiple world titles, this mighty stallion reached the pinnacle of show ring success in 2015. He will retire on Friday night at Louisville this year, taking a final bow before moving onto the next phase of his life, standing at stud at Monnington Farm.

Intensely loyal to and appreciative of Lionel she added, "He's such a gifted trainer. I couldn't be more fortunate."

The party back in the aisle was a spectacular event. With champagne corks popping all around, this great stallion received adulation from his barn family and fans. "He's so personable and he loves people," Carolyn said fondly. "He eats bananas and apples, drinks Gatorade and even champagne! He loves being spoiled. He has an easy temperament; he rests in his stall but lights up like a firecracker when he works. So much power! He's the total package." It was a wonderful, well-deserved end to an outstanding career.

Among the many people Lionel is grateful to for furthering his career, John Bulmer, Georgia's father, has primary responsibility for making his dreams come true by sharing his enthusiasm for Saddlebreds and providing the opportunities for Lionel to showcase his gifts. "Lionel taught me so much about working with show horses," John told us. "He has a special ability to recognize talent, often overlooked by others; and Marc Of Charm was a great example. Lionel and Georgia make the perfect team. I'm so happy they've now got the recognition they deserve!"

Georgia, of course, plays a major role in Lionel's success. Growing up with horses at Monnington and sharing the journey with Lionel from the time he arrived in England, she now manages Monnington USA and works with the amateur riders. Carolyn and Gary Koch, Marc's owners, always believed he could win the big title. Carolyn took the first step when she recognized his star quality as a weanling. Then Lionel took the reins, developing his full potential until he reached the pinnacle of success. Sarah McKenna, Lionel's assistant, completes this powerful team.

Marc Of Charm will retire on Friday night at Louisville this year, taking a final bow before moving on to the next phase of his life, standing at stud at Monnington Farm. Already passing his gifts to a new generation, his get are making their mark in the show ring. Riverdreams' Marc My Words ended the season winning the American Royal Two-Year-Old Three-Gaited class; Riverdreams' Remarkable won the ASR National Futurity Three-Year-Old Park Pleasure World's Championship; Cupid's Marc was crowned the Three-Year-Old Fine Harness Mares World's Champion and Exclamation Mark! won the 2015 Two-Year-Old Five-Gaited World's Championship.

This story is about a gifted trainer who developed Marc Of Charm into a mighty powerhouse, earning your vote as the 2015 People's Choice Horse of the Year. With the crowd on his side, Lionel Ferreira took a final victory pass at Louisville on this great stallion's back. The title may have been elusive but the performance will never be forgotten. It is only fitting that the Horse of the Year was ridden by the 2015 People's Choice Trainer of the Year -- Lionel Ferreira, a man fulfilling his dreams.