

# BLF 1st Choice Takes The Cake As The Judges' 1st Choice!

by Leeann Mione



Stillwater Valley Farm trainer Brian Yount (l) headed BLF 1st Choice for Burt Keefer's unanimous winning drive in the Three-Year-Old Hackney Pony class. Burt's wife Linda, her college roommate and longtime friend Dana Jo Denney and Denney's son Tarot joined them for the picture. The Denney's made the trip from Michigan to watch the pony show.



Burt Keefer is the only person who has trained and shown the beautiful bay three-year-old that he and Linda bred. The pony's dam MH Takes The Cake won the 2005 AHHS Limited Breeders Futurity Hackney Pony class with Burt Keefer showing for then-owners and breeders Leonard and Sarah Jane Servinski of Maple Hill Farm.

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - When Burt Keefer was 10 years old he received his first Shetland Pony and it would begin a lifetime of involvement with champion ponies. He and his brother Dennis had Hackney ponies at their Lapeer, Mich., Keefer Pony Farm including a mare named Commander's Royal Harmony that they co-owned. She was sired by the Canadian Stallion Jill's Magic Prince (known by many simply as Wing Commander).

Before 19-year-old Burt and his wife-to-be Linda (who shared his passion for the ponies) were married in 1973 they had already decided that their farm's name would be Burlindy Farm in Pigeon, Mich.

Dennis Keefer gave his share of Commander's Royal Harmony to Burt and Linda as a wedding gift and they raised 12 babies out of her. When she died, Burt and Linda kept their Burlindy Farm as a training operation and showed ponies owned by other people but didn't own any themselves for many years.

In 2005, Burt showed MH Takes The Cake at All American Horse Classic and won the AHHS Limited Breeders Weanling Stake for then owners and breeders

Leonard and Sarah Jane Servinski of Maple Hill Farm. At the end of the show, the Servinski's sold the weanling filly to Lee and Beverly Dunn of Dun-Haven Farm.

In 2011, Burt and Linda Keefer bought her from the Dunns so they could raise one more baby. Burt was retired and thought she had the potential to give them a great one. She was bred in 2012 to The Chosen One, a stallion owned by Vern and Lynn Houston. The Chosen One is sired by Truly Unique and has bloodlines that go back to many great ponies including Cassilis Troubador, Dun-Haven Sweet Success and Reedann's Souvenir just to name a few.

That resulting foal, born in March of 2013, was BLF 1st Choice. Burt and Linda knew he was a superstar from the beginning, and from his first step he was raised, trained and shown by Burt exclusively.

In August 2016, they made the trip to Illinois State Fair to show and 1st Choice won the Mid-West Futurity Three-Year-Old Hackney Pony class. That win made them even more confident in their decision to show him at Louisville and had earned the pony plenty of attention including that of Toni Nastali, whose repu-

tation as an owner and exhibitor of champion ponies is well-known. She purchased the three-year-old after the fair.

Wednesday morning in Freedom Hall, 1st Choice gave a fantastic performance and true to his name was called out as the 1st choice of judges James Nichols, Nelson Green and Melissa Moore. The beautiful bay cobtail trimmed in chrome and unanimous world's champion has a new home at Majestic Oaks in Shelbyville, Ky.

Burt and Linda Keefer meanwhile are ready to empty their barn and head south to escape the Michigan winter. Burt hopes to be able to stay connected and busy in the industry as a USEF judge since he has his card for Saddlebred, Hackney, saddle seat equitation and road horse divisions.

Keefer Pony Farm and Burlindy Farm have both been associated with champion Hackneys and to close it out in 2016 with a pony named 1st choice being the unanimous 1st choice and world's champion can't get much better.