

# The 2005 Year In Review Is Dedicated to **CH Blackberry Delight**

by Bob Funkhouser

All the great ones from the sports and entertainment worlds have it. Horsemen know it when they see it, but they don't know exactly what it is. It comes from inside. Not visible to the naked eye, this much desired intangible is usually credited to heart and desire. Michael Jordan, Mick Jagger, Mohammed Ali, Larry Bird, Bart Starr, they all had peers with much more natural talent, but they all overachieved with an intense passion to rise to the occasion and deliver, especially when it counted most.

Such is the case with this year's honoree, CH Blackberry Delight. Talk to anyone who has ever been close to him and they will tell you he has more heart and willingness to please than any three horses. Making a strong case for one of the greatest all-around American Saddlebred show horses to ever live, the son of Blackberry Winter (Oman's Desdemona Denmark x Social Hour by Stonewall Supreme) and Memorable Molly (by Hide-A-Way's Wild Country) has already won 13 world's championships in five different divisions. It would be safe to say that no horse with this many world and national championships, outside of an equitation horse, has had this many different riders and drivers.

"He's a magnificent animal. He was a star every time you touched him," said his breeder and first trainer Jim Aikman.

Aikman prepared Blackberry Delight for the weanling in hand division. He was born just a little too late to take to Louisville. He made his show ring debut not long after at the All-American Classic.

"Blackberry Delight was nice enough to take to Louisville but he was born late and his hair was still a little long so we took another filly and she won the Weanling Breeder's Stake World's Championship.



*CH Blackberry Delight exemplifies everything that sets the American Saddlebred apart from any other breed. He is pictured here taking Rachel Machamer to the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 13 & Under World's Champion Of Champions title in 2005.*



*Erica Nelson and "Jim" won their first blanket of Louisville roses in the adult pleasure division.*



*Nelson enjoyed two World's Champion Of Champions performances with Jim. Her second came in the ladies three-gaited division.*

would call beautiful. His performance training began with Kerger and he came out as a junior harness horse with not much fanfare. He was fourth in the Junior Fine Harness Stallion/Gelding Stake at Louisville with My Special Dream, Unforgiven and Kalarama's Spanish Dancer in front of him. Kerger brought him back to take fifth in the junior championship.

It was about that time that Lisa Strickland had moved her operation into Kerger's facility. Although she had seen him jog the gelding a few times she hadn't really paid that much attention to him.

"We had been there a while. I saw him in harness a couple times and didn't think much about it," said Strickland. "He didn't ride him much. But then the first time I saw David [Kerger] ride him in a curb bit, he took my breath away. There had been a few top trainers in to look at him and they all had some doubts and questions, but when I saw him that day in the curb bit I had to have him.

"I got the Piemonte family to buy him and I took him to River Ridge for the first time. He was a little tentative, but we won. 'Jim' has a lot of personality, but he was really a big baby back then. He really relied on you being there for him. He gets attached to a person once he knows he can count on you. That's when he turned the corner for me. We had a bond that gave him a lot of confidence."

He went through that year winning at Indy, Lexington, and the Kentucky Fall Classic in addition to claiming his first two world titles, the 1998 World's Champion Three-Gaited Park Stallion/Gelding and the World's Grand Champion Three-Gaited Park. Midwest was the only place he got beat that year.

In 1999, Blackberry Delight scored park wins with Strickland at Milwaukee, Indy, and Midwest before moving to the pleasure driving division with Alex Piemonte at the Illinois State Fair. At Louisville Tommy Pettry catch drove Jim to the Junior Exhibitor Show Pleasure Driving World's Championship qualifying him for Piemonte who came in to win the World's Champion of Champions title. The next year it was Kelly Oselka qualifying him to another Louisville blue before Piemonte won her second consecutive Junior Exhibitor Show Pleasure Driving World's Champion Of Champions roses. A few weeks later Sandra Dyer would take Jim to the ASHA Show Pleasure Driving National Championship at the All-American Classic. This was another

catch drive for the Piemonte's Rotunda Stables. Blackberry Delight would finish the year with Strickland winning the Three-Gaited Park Championship and qualifier at the American Royal.

Already establishing a reputation as a super horse, Jim would spend 2001 showing in three different divisions. Piemonte started the year winning in show pleasure driving, including the junior exhibitor class and Show Pleasure Driving Grand Championship at Lexington Junior League, defeating junior exhibitors and adults alike. Switching gears, Strickland was back in the saddle for the Three-Gaited Park Stallion/Gelding Reserve World's Championship, his first Louisville defeat in a four year span. They would finish the year with a few performances in the ladies fine harness division.

The next season, Strickland and Blackberry Delight won park titles at both Indy and Lexington, before it was time for Jim to experience another change. Lynda Freseth, who had approached Strickland many times before regarding buying Jim, finally got her wish. He was purchased for the Gaiswinkler family and moved to Hollow Haven Farm.

"I think it was about 2000 and we had a mare named Amberwood's Sky Fox who Molly Schned showed in pleasure driving," explained Freseth. "We had won all year long and we get to Louisville feeling pretty good about ourselves. We make a pass up the chute and turn around to go back down and here comes the longest necked, prettiest thing I've ever laid eyes on. I knew we were sunk.

"Every time I'd see him show after that I'd ask Lisa [Strickland] for a price and every time she'd tell me she didn't think they'd sell him. Finally after a couple of years she came to me with a price. I called the Gaiswinklers and when Erica (Gaiswinkler Nelson) came to pick me up to go look at him I was giddy about the opportunity just to ride him. I said, 'We may not get him bought, but I'm going to get to ride him.'

"We get there and I get up on him and think I'm sittin' in a 747 looking down at



*Alex Piemonte and Blackberry Delight were Junior Exhibitor Show Pleasure Driving World's Champion Of Champions for two consecutive years.*

the runway getting ready to take off. I'd never been on anything like that in my life. We bought him and I got to show him at Louisville. That was a special moment that I'll never forget. Nobody can imagine what it feels like to ride this horse without having done it. It's so unique. He puffs up and makes you feel important."

Freseth debuted on Jim to win another World's Champion Three-Gaited Park Stallion/Gelding title. Back in the championship they were reserve to HMS Royal Winds who had been third in the qualifier.

The next spring Nelson debuted with Jim in the adult show pleasure division and they went through the entire season undefeated until their very last class.

They ripped off a string of victories which included the International Springfest, Milwaukee, Midwest Charity and Blue Ridge Classic before winning the qualifier and World's Champion Of Champions Adult Three-Gaited Show Pleasure tricolor. It was his fourth World's Champion Of Champions title in his third different division. They would go on to win the qualifier at the American Royal before a jig at the walk cost them the National Championship.

Nelson had always wanted a ladies three-gaited horse and after looking at several, Freseth decided she already owned the best one. Freseth and husband Andy took his mane off as they were getting him ready for his class at the Oklahoma

Centennial. It was a sight they'll never forget. This time it was an undefeated season with stops at Oklahoma, Milwaukee, Midwest Charity, Blue Ridge Classic, Louisville, Wisconsin Futurity, Mane Event, and the UPHA/American Royal. Blackberry Delight was now the record holder of 11 world's titles, including five World's Champion Of Champions honors in four different divisions.

It was time for a new chapter in Blackberry Delight's life. The talented, young junior exhibitor Rachel Machamer entered his life and what a story they've made. Last year they ruled the 13 & under division with an undefeated season earning Jim's twelfth and thirteenth world's championships along the way. It was his fifth different division. Of all his accomplishments, this might have been the biggest in Freseth's eyes.

"To take a horse of this magnitude and have the same exceptional performances with a 13 year old kid is amazing," said Freseth. "I think it adds another aspect to his talent. It doesn't matter if it's me, Erica, Lisa or anyone else riding, Jim is going to put it all out there for you. He's game, he likes what he's doing. What an honor it is to be around a horse that tries his best every single day, no matter what division it is. He has so much presence and when he gets into his groove, he doesn't falter."

Falter is not something that has been



*Lisa Strickland captured Jim's first world's championship in the open park section. Lynda Freseth (pictured) also enjoyed a blue ribbon ride on the green shavings.*

a part of Blackberry Delight's vocabulary. As he has bonded with his different trainers, riders and drivers over the years he has taken over show ring after show ring, division after division. He will enter the 14-17 age group with Machamer in 2006 and from there who knows?

If the name CH Blackberry Delight is never heard from an announcer's lips again, he will have already taken his place in history as the American Saddlebred super horse. However, I wouldn't bet on the ink being dry yet in this great campaigner's life story.



*It all started for Blackberry Delight as the Weanling Futurity Champion at the All American Classic, defeating the just crowned world's champion. He was shown by owner/breeder Jim Aikman*