



Awarded the UPHA Lifetime Commitment Award at the Convention back in January, Rick Daigle continues the family tradition aboard Amateur Park Reserve Grand Champion Undulata's Secret Rendezvous.



Melaine Hartt has returned to the show ring after a 30-year absence, winning the Adult Country Pleasure Championship with Happy Chandler.



Devon Garone congratulated Melanie on her return ride.

RIDING BECAME A *Family Affair Again*

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

Showing horses is a family activity for many and for the Rick Daigle family of Ft. Kent, Maine, it is happening all over. Rick and Carolyn Daigle's Valley Show Horses has been a way of life for decades – at least for Rick. His children dabbled in it early on as did his wife a while back, but for the last several years he's been solo.....that is until daughter Melanie found her way back to the barn.

"I remember riding in front of my dad before I could even walk," said Melanie. "I loved the horses but wasn't into showing like dad was. I enjoyed being in the barn and taking care of horses. When they would go to shows I would stay home to take care of the horses there. Thirty-five years ago I showed my last horse, an Arabian here at W. Springfield.

"I got away from it, it wasn't fun anymore. I was more about hopping on a horse and going trail riding. Competing wasn't my thing."

Life happened and Melanie moved away, got married, and started a career.

"About 15 years ago I moved back but wasn't healthy," explained Melanie. "I loved being around the horses again but I wasn't thinking about showing or anything. Then I started getting my health back and I asked myself, 'Now, what do I do?' It was also about the time that things started opening back up from the Covid pandemic. Dad said to me, 'I need to do something healthy too,' and we started going to the Garones to ride. I was having so much fun going with dad and started riding a few lesson horses.

"When we were in Kansas City at the Royal I said, 'I'd like to show again,' Dad told me to watch and see what type of horse I liked. I saw a horse named Happy Chandler that I really liked but knew I wasn't ready for something like that and dad wasn't on board with him

either. So, I just kept going to the barn and practicing when we got home."

In the meantime, the Garones kept looking for horses but Happy Chandler was the horse they kept thinking about and knew he was the one for Melanie. They made arrangements to get him to Fairfield South and one day when Melanie was there taking lessons she got off what she thought was her last horse and had started to put her sneakers on when Gary said, "Wait, we've got one more for you to ride today."

They made up some fake name and put Melanie on him. Immediately Rick was asking, "Who is this horse?"

"I got on and had a great ride. I immediately fell in love with him and we agreed to buy him," said Melanie. "That's when Gary said, 'By the way, this is Happy Chandler.'

"Happy Chandler sold himself within the first trip around our arena," Gary added.

The new team made their debut at the UPHA 14 Spring Premiere where they were reserve in the first class and then came back to win the championship.

"The first class was an out of body experience," said Melanie. "I had to remind myself that I had to stay on so don't get too out of body. How cool it felt to see his neck in front of me with his mane flying and ears forward!

"I'm still pinching myself. I still have so much to learn but he's right there with me. This is so much different than when I was 12. This is exciting, challenging, and empowering.

Besides the thrill of showing an American Saddlebred, Melanie has also found an even deeper relationship with her dad.

"This has been cool for our relationship," she said. "It's an 8-hour trip one way to Fairfield South so we get to talk about a lot of things: horses, riding, life, business,

family. He's one of my best friends. Horses have become a family affair again!"

"Rick has been anxious for more family participation in his showing," added Gary. "Melanie got in a position to where she was feeling good and it became serious with the horses again. Marsha [Garone] got real involved with this and she made it happen to get Chandler here. She and Carolyn and the whole family are great friends. When we told Rick who the horse was he said, 'Are you trying to trap me into buying this horse?' I responded, 'Is there any reason not to buy this horse?' He said, 'No reason at all.'"

And then there is Mr. D's version of how this happened. A version he's very happy with.

"I stepped off of horses for over a year because of Covid. I hadn't traveled to New Hampshire to see my horses," said Rick. "I had just been sitting on my duff packing on the pounds and I finally said, 'enough is enough.' A year ago in March I made my first trip there in a while and they put me on three horses. I about died!

"Next time Melanie mentioned maybe she would go with me. So, she came along and we put her on a few lesson horses and it evolved. We looked at a few horses at Kansas City and Kyle [Gagnon] looked at another one in Florida but nothing was working. Later they bring this horse out at home and Kyle warmed it up and it looked great and then Melanie rode it and it looked great with her. I didn't know who it was or how much, but I knew I had just bought him. Marsha started crying.

"We also purchased an RV and now I bring home with me. Melanie is showing and my wife Carolyn will go to the shows because she can go back to the RV at any time and not have to stay at the show for all hours. She is starting to buy in to all of this again.

"It's been a great experience."