

Remembering CH My Front Page Lady

THE LADY OF LADIES

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

"She was so consistent. The epitome of a ladies horse," said Rob Byers who trained the recently deceased CH My Front Page Lady to a record six World's Champion of Champions Ladies Three-Gaited titles and seven UPHA Ladies Three-Gaited Horse Of The Year honors. "Look in the rule book. She was pretty. She was so expressive; she had a nice eye and ear. She was never very strong off her hocks but she was very correct and she had a beautiful canter. She was everything you wanted in a ladies horse."

"Page" as the great mare was known, rewrote the record book for the ladies walk-trot division and maybe even more spectacular than her record was the fact that you never got tired of seeing her. It did, however, take her a little while to totally blossom. She wasn't one of these big, strapping two and three-year-old sensations that we sometimes see but then they disappear. Her quality and expression were apparent from an early age; it just took a while for her to physically develop.

Originally registered as Wildbriar's Front Page Lady, My Front Page Lady was a daughter of Mountjoy's Big Hit and Mac's Firefly Lady. Mountjoy's Big Hit was a son of the world's champion producing Stonewall's Main Event out of a Broadland's Kilarney daughter. My Front Page Lady's dam was a daughter of Hide-A-Way's Firefly Supreme. Page was bred, raised and started by Ed Sanford. Her debut was a win in the UPHA Park Pleasure Classic at Rock Creek in 1993, which caught the attention of many, as she was so elegant.

"We bought her dam as a two-year-old and worked and showed her on the county fair circuit," said Front Page Lady's breeder and first trainer Ed Sanford. "We sold that mare and then later I bought her back as a broodmare. Page was her first baby. Out standing in the field she was okay. We said, 'we'll work her and see what we have.' I don't have an indoor arena or anything but I broke her myself. From day one that mare was a good thinker.

"Then winning at Rock Creek was unreal for me. I had showed her at Shelbyville and was second and Jimmy Robertson told me I needed to take her to Rock Creek for the UPHA Park Pleasure Classic. I work at a factory all day long and then work horses at night. When we won Rock Creek I had to be at work at 6:00 the next morning. I don't think I went to bed that night.

"I feel really lucky to raise one foal a year and have one turn out like her. There's no feeling like it and no words to describe it. To breed American Saddlebreds and have that happen, it doesn't get any better. And the Dixes were the greatest people in the world. Every time that mare won at Louisville they sent me a picture. They put my name on her ads as the breeder. I think that is a great story for the American Saddlebred. Anybody can breed and raise a good one."

Ray Yoder was one trainer who had been intrigued by the long-necked three-year-old trained by a factory



Strikingly beautiful, CH My Front Page Lady was the epitome of a ladies walk-trot horse, winning the World's Champion Of Champions title in 1995, '96, '98, '99, 2000 and 2001.

worker. He went to Albert and Edna Dix whose daughter Amy was riding with him and said he found a young mare he really liked.

"We bought her as a show pleasure prospect," remembered Amy (Dix) Rock. "I rode her in Ed's [Sanford] back yard along a fence. She was game but very safe, very sensible.

"I was 23, had been riding about 10 years. I started in Academy and showed at the county fair level, but nothing big up to that point. I had her at Ray's for a year and we trimmed her. She was my first go at Louisville. She was four and we were out of the ribbons but I'll never forget it."

The next spring the Dix family made a move to Premier Stables with Rob and Sarah Byers.

“When we first got her in, I thought she would make a nice 10 & under horse. She was very pretty, went about level, but was really nothing special,” stated Rob Byers when thinking about My Front Page Lady moving to Premier Stables as a five-year-old. “Mr. Dix called me and wanted to move to us. I said, well maybe you can work it out with your trainer and this will blow over. He said he didn’t think that was possible and they had a three-gaited mare and a gray pleasure horse they wanted us to work.

“I remembered her being weak behind but very beautiful when Ed Sanford won with her at Rock Creek as a three-year-old. When we got these horses in I actually liked the gray pleasure horse better. He turned out not to be a nice horse.”

A few more months of conditioning and getting to know her, and the team was off to Lexington Junior League for their first show together. It turned out to be a show that totally altered the course of this mare’s career forever.

“We got up on the track for their first class at Lexington and it was the year that the amateur road pony class before us took forever. There were wrecks and thrown shoes and time outs. We thought it would never end. So we warmed up a little and then just stood and waited. They called the class and I got them in the ring and headed over to my spot on the rail and I’m looking around to see who’s good. I’m not really seeing anything and then I spot this horse coming down the track at me looking really good and I think, ‘who is that? Damn, that’s mine!’ John Owens tapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘When did you get this one?’ I turned around and looked at him and said, ‘I have no idea.’”

Amy and Page lit up the Red Mile, winning the ladies over 2 and Ladies Three-Gaited Grand Championship. Louisville would be their next show and once again they won the qualifier and championship, beating the likes of Tra La La, Harlem’s Gem, Caraway, Rejoice, Digni-Phi, Mayme Phelps and Empress In Black to wear the roses. There would be two more horse shows that year for Amy and Page. They swept both the Kentucky Fall Classic and the American Royal, making for a Triple Crown season.

Starting with that 1995 season under the direction of Rob and Sarah Byers, My Front Page Lady went to the ring 60 times, winning 54, placing reserve five times and placing fourth once. That lone white ribbon was in the ladies over 2 class at Louisville in 1999, but they came back to win the championship. Their final two career classes came at Rock Creek 2002, the only show they attended that year.

“This was all a dream come true,” exclaimed Rock “You couldn’t have wished for more. We had a lot of interest and offers on her but she was the only horse we ever owned that wasn’t for sale. We had been searching for a while and she was the first opportunity to have something at that level and we didn’t want to start over. We were so fortunate to have early success and accomplish what we did so we said, ‘let’s just enjoy this!’

“Our first show at Lexington was such a shock. It’s the first time I ever saw my Dad cry. There are so many great memories. Winning in Madison Square Garden is something you tell your grandkids about. Then the morning lessons and that part of the process is something I’ll never forget. Rob and Sarah were incredible. I learned so much about her; about how to ride her and compete. They pushed me to become a better rider.

“She loved to show. That was her everything. She wanted nothing to do with human beings but the minute she hit the ring it was, ‘I know my job!’ Later in life she got sweeter.”



Five times Amy (Dix) Rock and the great mare wore the roses of the Ladies Three-Gaited World's Champion Of Champions.



Sarah Byers was honored to catch ride a few times at Louisville, adding one World's Champion of Champions title to the mare's great record.



Everything about her said elegance.

There was another aspect to this story and that is Amy the spectator. Her schedule and some health issues didn't always allow her to be at some of the major shows or up for showing twice in the same week. For those handful of times, Sarah Byers had the privilege of showing Page. She got to win the ladies championship at the American Royal a few times and the ladies championship at the World's Championship Horse Show. So what was it like for Amy to play the spectator role?

"Nerve wrecking. We both had such a great respect for the mare that we didn't want to mess it up for her and what she had accomplished. It was just as much pressure watching as it was riding. Sarah and I had no expectations for ourselves. The only hard part about showing that mare was, not wanting to let her down. She gave you a lot of confidence. That was the most secure seat I've ever shown. You could steer her and put her in the best possible spot. She was so handy."

"I never thought I would have the opportunity to show a Louisville contender or for my family to be able to see me show a horse of this caliber," said Sarah. "In fact, the only riding suit I've ever had custom made was for this mare for my 40th birthday. To this day it's the only suit I've had custom made."

"Probably what was the highlight for me was when Amy asked me to also ride Page in her retirement. That was something that wasn't expected and it made me feel really good that they thought I was a part of this mare's career. It was a great feeling."

It was mentioned earlier that My Front Page Lady was not for sale, at any price. Donna Moore was one of those who wanted the mare badly. She was flabbergasted the Dix family wouldn't sell, but she would make one more attempt along the rail during the mare's final class.

"It was our last class together at Rock Creek and as I lined up I looked up and there was Donna Moore. She yelled, 'Amy, you ready to sell that ole mare yet?' I said, 'no ma'am, I'm going to try and raise some nice babies. She had a big smirk on her face and said, 'Good for you!' I didn't even know Donna Moore knew my name."

From a champion of the show ring to a world's champion producer, good things followed Page throughout her career. She was bred to three different stallions (CH Top Spool, Belle Reve's Renaissance Man, Santana's Charm) and had four foals, three of which were world's or reserve world's champions. Take It From The Top, Turning The Page and Off The Record have all made their breeder, trainers and owners proud. Off The Record and Take It From The Top are still winning. In fact, Take It From The Top was last year's Five-Gaited Pleasure National Champion.

"Page made me interested in breeding," said Amy. "I studied and asked questions about bloodlines and characteristics. It's a whole new world."

Amy also credits Page with being three different horses. "She was a great show mare, a grand broodmare and a wonderful backyard companion. She taught me so much at each stage of my life. I had never kept a horse at home but as my good friend Avis said, Mike and I bought Page a farm and in fall of 2011 we brought her home. I didn't know how to keep a horse at home but we learned together. I'll always cherish going to the barn in the evenings and seeing her."

What a great life she led and in return CH My Front Page Lady gave so much to all those around her, at every stage of her life.



Take It From The Top was My Front Page Lady's first foal and first world's champion.