



The grand lady of Oak Hill Farm pictured with two of her history makers. Glimcrack (l) was the 1989 Three-Galld World's Grand Champion and Man On The Town was the 1989 Five-Galld World's Grand Champion. Man was never defeated under saddle, winning the Three-Year-Old World's Championship, the Junior World's Championship and two Five-Galld World's Grand Championships.



Fulfilling one of her lifelong dreams, Ms. Davis rode Glimcrack to the Three-Galld World's Grand Championship. That was her last show ring ride.

Jean McLean Davis



The great CH Hometown Hero was the Three-Galld World's Grand Champion in 1981 and '82, the Reserve World's Grand Champion in '83 and '84 with Tom Moore and then the World's Champion Of Champions Amateur Three-Galld horse with Ms. Davis in 1985.

THE LOSS OF A LEGEND

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

If you ask, "What is a Gimcrack?"...you're definitely a newcomer to the Saddlebred world and missed an era of the industry in which Jean McLean Davis showed, bred, raised and produced some of the greatest show stars we've ever known. The longevity and success of the recently deceased Ms. Davis put her in a league with Sallie Wheeler, Isabel Robson and Betty Weldon, some of the greatest ladies this business has ever known. What separated Ms. Davis from this group of renowned icons is the fact that she had hands on involvement in every aspect of her Harrodsburg, Ky., Oak Hill Farm.

"She was at the barn nearly every morning before me," said George Knight who trained at Oak Hill Farm for 12 years, beginning in 1980. "If it were a rare morning that I beat her, the next day she would be there at least 30 minutes before I got there. She didn't want to miss a thing.

"She loved it so much, her whole life was American Saddlebreds and she was very good at it. She knew what she wanted and she usually got it, including a farm in Kentucky where she could raise horses that met her standard. She had definite ideas about what a Saddlebred should be."

A native of Portsmouth, Va., Jean McLean's first introduction to the horse world was through her family's pleasure riding horses. In an earlier Saddle Horse Report interview Ms. Davis recalled that humble beginning.

"I had a spotted pony that my parents would lead me around on. Then we got some pleasure horses and God they were awful," said Ms. Davis. "My father bought a farm and the family would just ride. None of us knew what we were doing, but we had a good time."

Davis started showing her pony at the age of 10. She won her first blue ribbon

Multi-titled world's champion Edith Fable was one of many great walk-trot horses owned and shown by Jean McLean (Davis) over the decades.



on Billy Boy and the desire to compete never subsided. The McLean family would go to shows with friends and learned by watching. They bought a pair of walk-trot ponies (King Bee and Two-Step) in 1939 and trained them at home.

"When we finally went to some bigger shows (Devon) and saw nicer horses, my father said, 'If we are going to do this, we are going to have horses like that,'" said Ms. Davis in that earlier article.

True to his word, George McLean purchased the three-gaited mare Mighty Fine from Earl Teater at the 1941 Kentucky State Fair and that fall Jean McLean won the amateur under 15.2 stake at the National Horse Show in New York. The McLean family made another strong commitment to the industry when they purchased Oakhill Chief and Edith Fable from Lee Roby following their victories at the 1943 Lexington Junior League Horse Show and put them in training with Earl Teater. That year at the Kentucky State Fair, Teater and Oakhill Chief won the Five-Gaited Gelding Stake and the World's Grand Championship and he rode Edith Fable to the Junior Three-Gaited World's Championship. Jean also won her first personal world's championship aboard Nightmare in the Juvenile Five-Gaited Stake that year. In a few short years the McLean family had gone from a self-trained spotted pony named Billy Boy to three world's champions under the direction of Earl Teater.

George McLean was known to do things first class and that carried over to his daughter and the horse business. The trainers they were associated with over the years included Lee Roby, Earl Teater, Gude Watkins, Jimmy Thompson, Pete DeAtley, Marty Mueller, Sam Stafford, Tom Moore, George Knight, Dana DeVoss and John Conatser, among others.

Decade after decade, the world class horses continued to flow. In the '50s there were stars like Feudist Knight, Sashay and the Encore. The '60s saw the Tempest, Fair Warning, The Replica and Love Note. Then in 1964 she purchased 126 acres in Harrodsburg, Ky., and named the farm after her former World's Grand Champion, Oakhill Chief.

The '70s brought about three of the top gaited horses of all time - Big Time, Yorktown and Rob Shriver - as well as the Three-Gaited World's Grand Champion Oak Hill's Dear One and world's champions Cedar Creek Farewell, Chantilly Rose, Roses Are Red and Sweet Someone. With Tom Moore as her trainer they showed Big Time for six years undefeated. He was the Three-Year-Old Five-Gaited World's Champion in 1969, the Junior World's Champion in '70 and the Ladies World's Champion in 1971, '72 and '73.

The late Hall of Fame legend, Tom Moore, said this about Big Time in a 1998 interview. "I've never had a horse with as much attitude, show ring presence and ability as Big Time had."

During that same time period Moore showed the great stallion CH Yorktown 26 times and never met defeat. They were the Five-Gaited Stallion World's Champions and Five-Gaited World's Grand Champions in 1970, '71 and '72. The



Two-Step was a three-gaited pony purchased by George McLean for his daughter Jean to show in 1939.

son of the great CH Wing Commander was the first stallion to win the world's grand championship since his famous sire had done so in 1953.

Following his show ring career, Yorktown and Oakhill Farm became synonymous with producing an incredible list of show and breeding stars. He sired World's Grand Champion Man Of The Town, World's Grand Champion Hometown Hero, and world's champions Town Dance, Lex Town, Rose Of York, Lady Of York, Dearest One, The Only Game In Town, Ivory Coast Gold Town, Boom Town, Duke Of York, and many, many others. His famous sons who went on to be great sires included New Yorker, Jamestown, and The Talk Of The Town as well as successful sires, Oak Hill's Dear Sir, Local Hero and Fountain Of Youth.

The third part of the famous trio of Oak Hill gaited horses from the '70s was Rob Shriver, a full brother to World's Grand Champion CH Will Shriver. Rob was shown by Ms. Davis' daughter Jamie to Juvenile Five-Gaited World's Champion Of Champions titles in 1972, '73 and '75. In '73, after having already won both juvenile classes with Jamie, Tom Moore showed Rob Shriver back in the big stake and was Reserve World's Grand Champion.

"I knew Jean Davis for over 40 years," said Tolley Graves who was married to Tom Moore when he trained a bevy of stars for Ms. Davis. "She was a remarkable person - a genteel southern lady who loved a good horse, enjoyed reading about



Moonlit Hour was a top gaited mare for the McLean family. In addition to Jean showing her, Lee Roby won the Five-Gaited Mare World's Championship in 1945 and '46.



This historical picture is of Jean McLean leading World's Grand Champion Oak Hill Chief onto the van on the way to his retirement ceremony. The great gelding was the namesake for her eventual farm in Harrodsburg, Ky., Oak Hill Farm. Oak Hill Chief was one of (3) Five-Gaited World's Grand Champions owned by Ms. Davis over the years. The other two were CH Yorktown and CH Man On The Town.

American and British history, treated herself to an occasional trip overseas and rescued hundreds of Dalmatian dogs. We used to kid her that she liked all her animals to be spotted, a reference to World's Grand Champion Oak Hill Chief and CH The Replica.

"Most days, Jean would arrive at the barn before Tom [Moore] did and sometimes even before the help got there to feed. Horses were her life, literally. "She knew each horse's breeding, which bridle it wore, their idiosyncrasies and could recite their show record backwards and forwards. She loved her horses and always put their welfare first. Jean never minded waiting for a horse to get ready to show. Time was not a factor to her. She was perfectly content to wait until they were five or six-years-old if that was how long it took. That particular trait kept Tom busy looking for game people to break those green three and four-year-olds to ride!

"I was so fortunate to be around some of her great world's champions during the 1970s, horses such as World's Grand Champion CH Yorktown, World's Grand Champion Oak Hill's Dear One, World's Grand Champion CH Home Town Hero, World's Champion CH Empire's Big Time (shown as Big Time), Reserve World's Grand Champion CH Rob Shriver, World's Champion CH Chantilly Rose (BHF), Reserve World's Champion CH My Starlight Hour and many more. Most of those horses are buried on her farm, each site marked by a headstone. Jean was a very private person and always a lady of principle. She was loyal to her horses, to her employees and to her friends. I was privileged to share many wonderful times with her and proud to have called her a friend. The Saddlebred industry has lost one of its greatest-ever owner-exhibitors.

In 1980, George Knight took over the training duties at Oak Hill Farm and continued to keep the farm in the winner's circle at the nation's biggest shows. During that time period there were champions like CH Reedann's Nighty Nite (shown as Nighty Nite) and Gimcrack, two of only a small handful of horses purchased during his 12 years at the helm. The other champions were home bred and raised and they included Town Dance, Uptown Girl, The Homecoming Hero, The Only Game In Town, The Talk Of The Town, Time After Time, James Rivers, Oak Hill's Southern Rose, Oh Dear, Dear Amelia, The Homecoming Queen, Local Hero and the Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion Man On Town, a third generation Five-Gaited World's Grand Champion.

"I just can't say enough good about her," said Knight. "I remember when I went to Oak Hill to meet with Jean about the job, she was driving me around Harrodsburg and I wasn't too impressed about the small town as I had come from Cleveland. I wasn't sure I could do this but she was such a remarkable lady and I was just going through a divorce and decided I was ready for a change.

"I'll never forget during that visit she told me the one thing she still wanted to do was win the walk-trot stake at Louisville herself. She ended up doing just that but I wasn't sure it was going to happen. Her mother had died the night before the championship with Gimcrack and I wasn't sure she was going to show. I hadn't heard anything from her all day long but that night she showed up dressed to show. I had had Gimcrack kind of cranked up expecting that I would show him, but she rose to the occasion and won it.

"It was funny, Jean rarely rode at home. She had an old horse named Henry that she would ride every day all over the farm; she would even sit on him in the middle of the arena and watch me work horses. Every now and then I'd ask her if she wanted to step up on one and if it were doing really well she'd say okay. If one wasn't doing particularly well she would say, 'If this horse isn't working well for you, why would it be good for me?' She would say, 'you can show that one'.

"Once we had a walk-trot mare that wasn't the best thinker but one day she was doing great and I asked Jean if she wanted to ride and she said sure and had a great ride. The next time I worked that mare I again asked her if she wanted ride and she said, 'No, I know she'll never again be like she was last time.' The thing I loved about Jean was that she had definite ideas about amateur horses and open horses. She showed The Talk Of The Town one time at Lexington and it didn't go particularly well. He wasn't good at all. She asked me what happened and I told her that I had to take a lot out of him for her to be able to ride him. She never rode him again. She said, 'If I can't rise to their level, I will not have you bring them down to mine.' I respected her a lot for that."

During the 1990's, Oak Hill Farm was lower key about going to the horse shows. Ms. Davis herself showed for the last time in 1989, winning the Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship with Gimcrack. She was the second woman and the second amateur to win that World's Grand Championship.

"I was getting older and it wasn't fair to the horses if I couldn't give it my best," said Ms. Davis in that 1998 Saddle Horse Report interview.

There were a few different trainers during the final stretch of the Oak Hill Farm era, with Dana DeVoss spending the most time there, breaking and working the young stock, while a few of the aged horses were sent out to various trainers, namely George Knight.

Former son-in-law Casey Crabtree was also instrumental to Ms. Davis and Oak Hill Farm during that era as an assistant trainer and friend. "She was a grand lady, true to her horses and the people who worked for her. They were her life," said Crabtree. "We're going to miss what she did for this industry and she did it for a very long time. I don't know what's going to happen with the farm. It's such a historical part of this industry."

Ms. Davis left a lasting impact on the American Saddlebred breed and those who were closest to her. She was a true gem and we've all benefited from her time here and her philosophies.

"There were so many good stories and good times with Jean," said Kim Skipton, George Knight's partner and great friend to Ms. Davis. "She had very definite ideas about the breed and the way things should be done. She hated low-backed horses. She was very old school about a lot of things. She never understood the pleasure horse movement. If she raised one and sold it, she was glad it went to a good home, but didn't have a desire to have a pleasure horse in her show string. Not until she saw there was some money to be won with Park Pleasure horses in the Futurities or Sweepstakes did she consider a pleasure horse being shown under her ownership.



Jean McLean always had the full support of her family, Mr. and Ms. George McLean. A highly successful businessman, Mr. McLean believed in doing things one way and that was first class.

"She loved her animals and had a field full of retired geldings that she gave the greatest of care. She also believed in breeding her show mares, breeding the best. As an exhibitor she was very tough on herself. It didn't matter if she came out with the blue, she would ask, 'What could I have done better? How do we improve?' I was fortunate to catch ride for her a lot and she was very critical, very tough but she was the same way on herself. If you came out of the ring and she didn't say anything, you knew you had a really bad ride. Thankfully, she was very lady-like, even when she was mad."

Morgan trainer Glenn Bouvier was another person who spent a lot of time with Ms. Davis, especially at the World's Championship Horse Show where the two would sit together and watch classes.

"I was very honored to call her a friend and to have shared her experiences and company," said Bouvier. "What an experience it was to watch classes with her and listen to her comments about horses and trainers. She would tell me about her past trainers, explaining each of their differences and their methods. She talked a lot about Lee Roby and how simplistic he was, not a lot of gadgets. She knew her horses and her trainers."

"One of the great things I always admired about her was how she took care of her former show horses. She didn't use a horse up and then dispose of it. She had fields full of retirees that led great lives after their show days."



One of Ms. Davis' favorite gaited horses of all time, Big Time, won three Ladies Five-Gaited World's Championships.

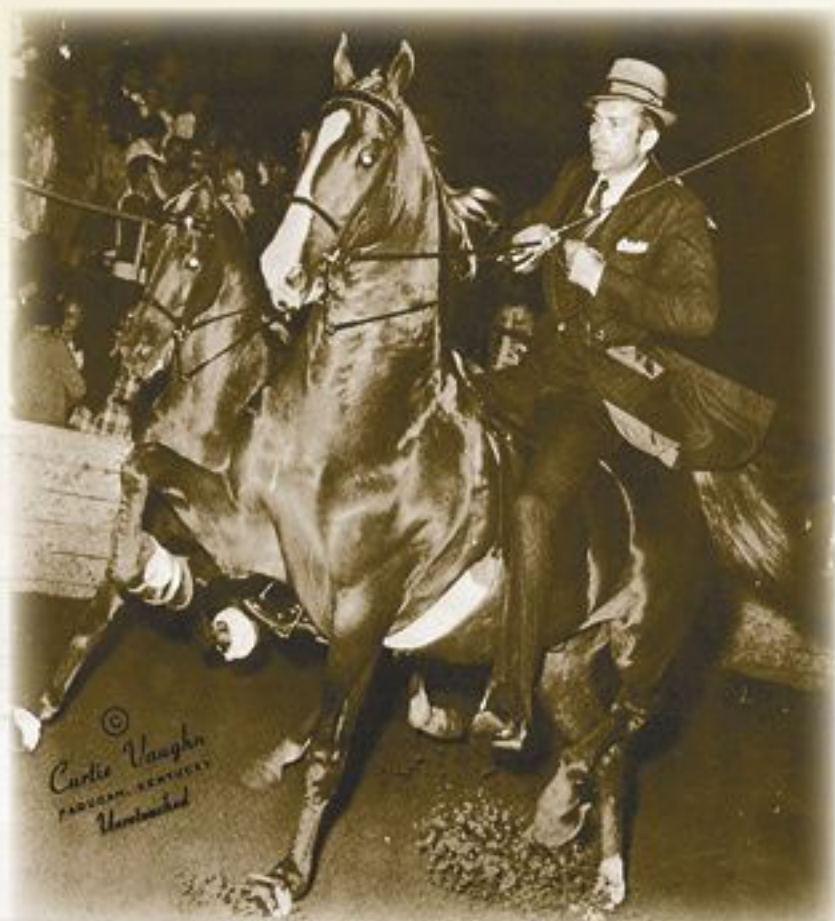
"Today of course, all the top horses are in the amateur, ladies and juvenile divisions. Most people don't want to spend that kind of money for someone else to show. Also, today trainers have to get horses to the ring faster than they should. With all the money top horses are commanding, owners don't want to wait. Back then you let horses mature and develop and didn't push them into the ring."

In that same conversation she was worried about today's acceptance of low-backed horses. In her eyes a low-backed horse had no place in our industry, especially in a breeding program.

The World's Championship Horse Show Hall of Fame, the Audrey Gutridge Award and the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame are just a few of the ways in which Ms. Davis had been honored for her accomplishments. We as an industry could never do enough to honor what she did and what she meant to us. Jean McLean Davis was cut from a different cloth. Her integrity, her knowledge, her hands-on approach and her loyalty were the staples that made her the lady of Oak Hill Farm, a lady who loved and furthered the development of the American Saddlebred at the highest level over an extended period of time unlike anyone we've ever known.



Nightmare was her first world's champion in 1943. That same year, Earl Tealer rode Oakhill Chief to the Five-Gaited World's Grand Championship for the McLean family.



The great CH Yorktown not only won three Five-Gaited World's Grand Championships for trainer Tom Moore and owner Oak Hill Farm, he also became a prolific sire of champions.

How do you sum up the life of arguably the greatest woman to ever be a part of this breed? There were so many things she brought to the table. She didn't just write the checks, she lived and breathed every aspect of her horses from the decisions of who would be bred to whom all the way to what they would do in the show ring. She was a gracious lady and a talented, intelligent horsewoman. She spent every waking moment thinking about and being involved with her horses. As Kim Skipton noted, she would be at the barn before anyone else, they would all break in the middle of the day to go to the house together to have a fabulous lunch and then they would be back in the barn until the end of the day. She didn't miss anything.

In that last interview this writer had the pleasure of conducting with her over a decade ago, she shared her observations of how things have changed over the then 55 plus years she had been a part of the industry.

"The biggest change other than the money (she spent \$5,000 for Oakhill Chief), has been the public training stable," said Ms. Davis in 1998. "Back when we started there really weren't public barns, they were mostly private stables. The best horses then were the open horses and the amateurs got to show the rest of them."