

► A 13.3-Hand Grand Prix Prospect

A few years ago, when Kimberlee Barker had Gladheart Linhawk in training for two weeks, she thought to herself, “He could go to the Grand Prix level.” But that’s not too unusual a notion—unless you take into account that Gladheart Linhawk is a 13.3-hand Morgan.

“He is the most fun horse to ride,” said Barker. “He’s super competitive too. It’s not always his day, but when it is, he’s really good.”

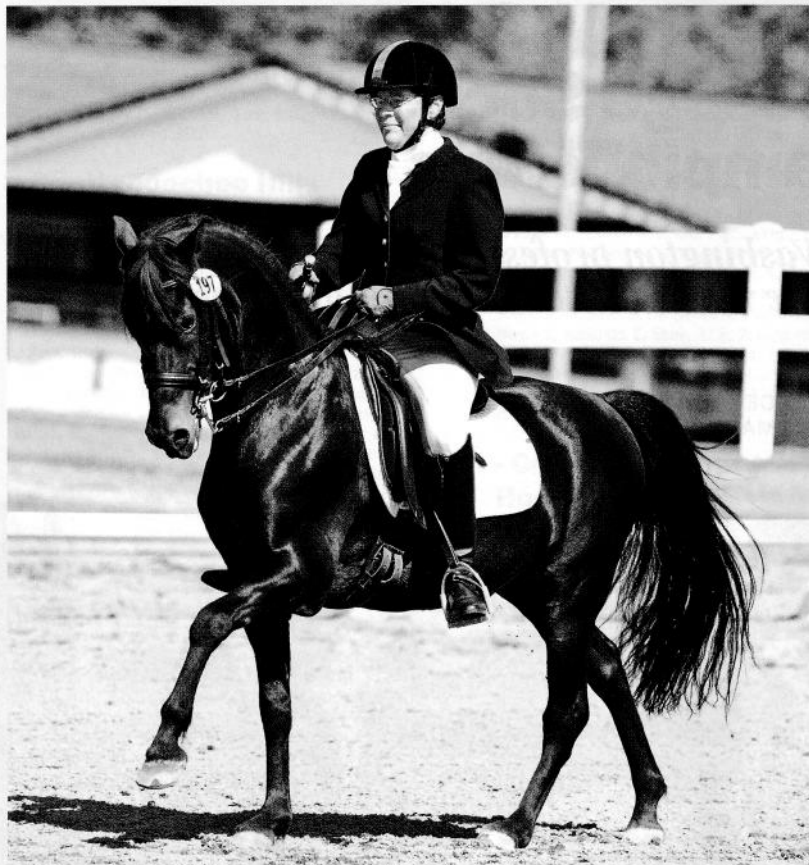
“Linhawk” hasn’t made it to the Grand Prix yet, but he’s on his way. At the Oregon Dressage Society Championships, the gelding picked up the reserve title in the open fourth level championship on a combined score of 64.45 percent behind Mike Osinski aboard Caravaggio (65.87%). The little horse has already made his *début* at the FEI levels, earning scores up to 60.78 percent in the Prix St. Georges.

Barker, a professional who’s based out of Corvallis, Ore., started teaching Bernadette Stang, Linhawk’s owner and breeder, on the horse several years ago.

“He was probably going about first level at the time, and it was his owner’s first time going up the levels too,” said Barker. “I thought he was just adorable. He had this natural passage-y trot, and I was like, ‘OK, let’s save that for later.’ But I really liked him, and I love his owner. She’s just the right size for him, unlike me.

“He started to get kind of naughty though, and they were going on vacation,” Barker continued. “They said, ‘Why don’t you take him and have a discussion with him while we’re gone?’ While I had him for two weeks, I introduced half-pass, flying changes and passage, and I said to this owner, ‘This is a Grand Prix horse.’”

Linhawk, a 15-year-old gelding (Funquest Diviner—Rogue’s Midnight Melody, Flight Commander), went back to his breeder’s farm after his two weeks with Barker. But thanks to a little bit of naughtiness later, he



Kimberlee Barker and Morgan Gladheart Linhawk are steadily working their way up the levels, aiming for a Grand Prix start in 2015.

ended up back in her string. She also has the Stangs’ 8-year-old Morgan stallion, Gladheart Black Harris, under her tutelage. The younger horse is showing second level and schooling third.

“His owner doesn’t like to show—they’re really into the breeding—so a few years ago they said that I could take [Linhawk] to Grand Prix if everything goes according to plan,” said Barker. “They’ve just had such a ball campaigning him.”

The gelding is schooling most of the Grand Prix work now.

“He’s started his one-tempis, and he’s pretty competitive in his pirouettes,” Barker said. “He gets pretty frazzled when you introduce new things, but when he gets it, he loves to perform. He rides like a sports car. If all goes well, he’ll do Grand Prix in the

next two years.”

Barker admitted her height—she’s 5’6”—isn’t ideal for the diminutive horse, but the pair still makes it work.

“Fortunately for me and him, I’m short-legged and long-waisted. But he’s so tiny, just staying in the middle of him is quite a project,” she said.

For Barker, riding a Morgan also comes with additional perks.

“I never got into this because of Morgans; that wasn’t my thing at all,” she said. “I have a Holsteiner and a Hanoverian, but I’ve had more success with the pony in terms of getting scores for my judging program and year-end awards than I have with my big, fancy horses. I’m a small trainer in a small town with a nice clientele, but in Oregon I’m fairly well known because of this tiny horse. He’s just really, really fun.”