

Temple Takes A Challenge To Win At Garden State CDE

By: Nancy Degutis
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Shelly Temple, of Powhatan, Va., never expected to win the advanced single pony division at the Garden State CDE, May 3-6 in Allentown, N.J. After losing her former driving pony to colic surgery, she vowed not to replace him.

Temple's coach, Lisa Singer, tried to talk her student into getting another horse. "But I was so disheartened, and I hate the whole process of looking at horses," said Temple, 50. "I told Lisa, 'If you get one, I will get one.' "

Singer took the challenge and bought LR Ami Ben Gali. Temple chose LR Ami B-Line, or "Cooper," a 4-year-old, at his breeder's Wyoming ranch. "He carried nice old bloodlines of the western Morgan and some old government bloodlines that produce sport horses," said Temple.

The dare paid off when Temple won the advanced single pony division with Cooper, and Singer drove LR Ami Ben Gali as part of her winning advanced pair horse team at Garden State.

Cooper was ranch-broke when Temple got him. "You could sit on him, and he vaguely steered," said Temple.

She took her time with Cooper's education, riding him at first and then hitching him. She started him at the preliminary single horse level because she thought for a long time that he was a horse.

"He moves like a horse and looks like a horse," said Temple, who is the third generation to work in her family's trucking business. But when she decided to move Cooper up to advanced level, she discovered he was actually just 14.2 hands.

Temple teaches and trains at her Catalyst Driving Center and holds an r-rated judge's license. Next year she hopes to get her R-rated certification.

It's Monroe Again

Scott Monroe earned the George Hoffman perpetual trophy, given in honor of the late World Single Horse Championship veteran, for the second consecutive year.

"Whenever I think of New Jersey I think of George, who did so much for driving here," said Monroe.

Now, figuratively speaking, "He is coming home with us, back to the spot on our dining room table where he was after we won advanced single horse last year," continued Monroe as he clutched the large silver bowl that was given to him after his win in the advanced single horse division.

Monroe's partner in victory both years is Bethesda After Dark, or "Shadow," a 15.11/2-hand, 13-year-old, black Morgan who turned in a double-clear round in cones to get the blue ribbon. Monroe got Shadow when the Wyoming-bred was 3.

"He has Flyhawk [bloodlines] in his background," said Monroe, who runs his own tree arborist business on estates around his Sharon, Conn., home. That lineage gives him "grit and a character that deters some people from buying a horse like that," he continued. "But he loves his job, and I will do it with him as long as he loves it."

The two faced less pressure this year versus last year, when the Garden State CDE was a selection trial for the World Single Horse Championships.

"But we still worked so hard to get to first," said Monroe, a two-time World Championship veteran who was 12th individually and the highest placed U.S. driver in the 2004 World Championships (Sweden). He also was on the U.S. team when they went to the World Championships last year in Italy, but a rollover on course cost him a top placing.

This year, Monroe had enough time to relax and do his job as one of the selectors at Garden State, which was designated as a selection trial for the pony and pair horse World Championships later this year.

Smoke Is On Fire

At 12.3 hands, Smoke was the smallest in his intermediate single pony division, but that didn't keep the Modern Shetland and owner Sherri Dolan from winning.

His short stature helped them on the marathon. "He could go places [in the hazards] the larger ponies couldn't," said Dolan.

A product manager for a German firm, Dolan arranged her work schedule to compete in the south as preparation for spring shows. The two won the dressage and marathon at Live Oak (Fla.), were second in dressage and won the marathon at the Sunshine State (Fla.) CDE and were third overall at the Black Prong (Fla.) show.

"He has a nice extended trot so we make all the times," said Dolan, 44, of Milford, N.J. "And my groom, Amy Bauman, helps me a lot too. She was the one who broke Smoke. I also learned a lot at those shows and put it all together this weekend."

She keeps Smoke at her home with the help of her husband, Lou Corbo. She also gets help in training from four-in-hand driver Jimmy Fairclough and Lisa Singer. The Connecticut-bred Smoke is the grandson of breed Hall of Fame Shetland stallion, Town And Country's Tom Cat, and is out of an 11.3-hand Hackney pony-Shetland mare.

Kim Stover of Smyrna, Del., still remembers the jokes from people at the barn where her Standardbred-Hackney gelding used to live. "Every other horse in the barn was 17 hands tall, so they called him 'Tony the Pony,'" she said of her Tony, a bright bay, 15.2-hand horse, now 7, who won the intermediate single horse division.

Tony came out of a Mennonite horse auction in Ontario, Canada, but Stover first saw him on a video as a 3-year-old. "I knew he was classy," said Stover, 37.

He had been broken to drive by the Amish as a 2-year-old and came with some bad habits. He was dubbed "The Grinch" and got a hat with the name stitched on it.

"But now he thinks, when he goes to a show, people are there to cheer for him," said Stover.

Born Free

Few spectators would recognize that Reyheart Baxter and BLM Smokin' Joe, who both competed at the Garden State CDE, were one of this country's national treasures, Mustangs who had been running free out West a few years earlier.

They were rounded up by U.S. Bureau of Land Management officers, who cull the herds to keep the numbers of horses down to what the government land can support. "Smokey" was part of a herd that came from the Blue Gap/Windmill Draw, Wyo., area near Rawlins. "Baxter" was also born in Wyoming. They and some of their equine friends were to be shipped to the East Coast, slated for adoption. Smokey went to a center in Virginia while Baxter was to be sold at a northern New Jersey fairground.

That's when Mary Jo Graber, of Palmyra, Va., found herself drawn to Smokey. She was taking a wild burro she had adopted earlier to the center to display him to prospective owners at the auction.

"I didn't specifically want a Mustang, but when I looked over at the corral where the Mustangs were, he was leaning against the fence, looking for people to come pet him or feed him," said Graber, 55, a former eventer. That look and his complacency won her over. "So you could say this was an impulse buy."

Susan Gregorio already had a 4-year-old Mustang filly at her farm in Branchville, N.J., and was looking to adopt another when she found Baxter. She decided she wanted to get one that "would grow into a 16- or 17-hand horse," she recalled. Gregorio, an emergency room nurse, settled for a yearling; nobody bid on him, and he became hers for \$125.

The women, whose geldings are both a shade of gray, met each other at Garden State. Both horses are easy keepers, needing just a handful of grain along with hay. Neither needed shoes because their feet were so tough. And both proved easy to break. Graber sent Smokey to professional trainer Tom Simmons of North Carolina while Gregorio had longtime driving professional Amy Bauman give Baxter the basics.

Smokey debuted in harness at the 2006 Garden State CDE, where he was third at training level and went on to a fifth in preliminary at the Southern Pines (N.C.) CDE. In this year's preliminary single pony division at Garden State, the two got their first chance to experience crossing a bridge and water in obstacles, something she did not have an opportunity to do at home.

"I took the longer, slower routes [in the hazards]," Graber said, and the twosome ended up 11th overall.

Baxter, at 14.3 hands, went up against much larger animals in the training level single horse class. He was third at Garden State after taking a third place in training at the Lord Sterling (N.J.) show.

Both women and Mustangs are slated to meet again at the Elk Creek (Md.) CDE.

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