



≈ CARRIAGE/CDE ≈

WEST COAST TRIPLE CROWN

A MORGAN WINS IN SINGLES PRELIMINARY COMPETITION

By Liz Goldmann

A Morgan colt and a talented horsewoman were born oceans apart but combined their talents on the West Coast of America in a thrilling victory over astounding odds. Stefanie Putnam was born in England with the horse gene as much a part of her DNA as her hazel eyes and light brown hair. Her mother was an avid rider and ponied her tiny daughter around on a Shetland named Trixie. When the family moved to Lafayette, California, young Stefanie continued to ride hunters and jumpers, studying with several trainers and dreaming of riding in the Olympics. She pursued a master's degree so she could "get a good job to support my horse habit." A few months into her studies she sustained an injury that caused her to become quadriplegic. During three months of rehabilitation in Denver at Craig Hospital she could not hold her head up without fainting, but could feel "the pilot light still burning" for horses. Somehow, some way, she had to get back to the barn.

In a spinal cord injury group she met Abigail Stockinger who mentioned she'd heard of people in wheelchairs who drove horses. Stefanie had never heard of competitive carriage driving but was intrigued. Through the incredible support of many individuals Stefanie discovered the sport of combined driving and flourished as a carriage driver. She ultimately was drawn to Leslie Berndt of Whispering Oaks Performance Horses in Newcastle, California, in 2011, and a beautiful black Morgan who was training there. Leslie is a skilled trainer and top international competitor and treated Stefanie on an equal footing with her other students. On her very first visit Leslie let her drive this remarkable Morgan named Bethesda's After Dark (a.k.a. Shadow) who had earned three Advanced National Championships on the East Coast and represented the U. S. twice internationally. He was competed by Scott Monroe, a talented advanced level driver. Stefanie had never met a Morgan, but the moment she looked into Shadow's deep,

ABOVE: Stefanie Putnam & Bethesda's After Dark tackle a water obstacle (Photo © Carol Mingst).



Collecting their loot from a winning combined driving event (Photo © Carol Mingst).

knowing eyes, she felt what she calls “soulship.”

On the cusp of more top competitions including the imminent international championships in Portugal, Scott somehow knew his beloved horse had found a very special place in this world with Stefanie and a second career potentially leading back to international competition, but this time in the para-equestrian events. He states, “Stef is an amazing driver, so rather than pursuing a possible medal I am hoping that she will be the one bringing home the gold at the Paralympics.”

With adaptations such as a molded carriage seat and cushion made by Aspen Seating in Denver, Colorado, Stefanie is fully supported in the carriage. She says when she’s driving any medical issues disappear from her mind and she recalls her classical training that helped her in jumping and polo—“back straight, head up, eyes forward, look where you’re going.” Despite no function in her hands she says she feels as if her fingers are curving around the reins as she cues her horse with the lines attached to cuffs on her wrists. The little girl with a deep understanding of horses was in the driver’s seat!

Stefanie began competing in Combined Driving Events (CDEs) which include a driven dressage test, a marathon over miles of countryside with complicated obstacles to negotiate at speed, and a cones course where speed, accuracy, and obedience are paramount. CDEs are tremendous tests of horsemanship for anyone, and Stefanie was rising to the challenges and loving every moment of, as she says, “the all encompassing feeling of a horse.”

Stef and Shadow rapidly became a respected team. In the United

States all drivers compete equally whether amateur or professional, male or female, young or old, including all breeds of horses, and Stefanie met many other drivers just as determined as she was. The summer of 2015 saw the premier of the West Coast Triple Crown consisting of scores from the Sargent’s CDE, the Summer Festival at Clay Station, and Shady Oaks near Lodi, California, being totaled to declare a champion. One of her toughest competitors was Drew Callahan, a professional trainer from Phoenix, Arizona, driving the American Dutch Harness Horse Chestnut Hills Diamond (a.k.a. Ully), co-owned with Bridget Phillips. As the season progressed both drivers knew they were in a close race with fractions of points separating their results.

The final event was the cones course at Shady Oaks driven on The Field of Screams, and when the scores were tallied Stefanie and Shadow were the winners by a mere 12/100th point out of hundreds! What a thrill for this steadfast team!

Once home from the exciting win, Stefanie got to looking through all her score sheets from the summer’s events. She did the math again and again and discovered it was actually Drew and Ully who had the better score by the tiny fraction and not her! She called the officials involved and explained what she had found, but when notified of the error Drew insisted that Stefanie deserved the award. After much consideration with both competitors saying the other deserved the win the officials convened and decided there should be dual recipients in this amazing situation, and issued this statement: “Wow! The premier West Coast Triple Crown of Combined Driving is complete and the cliff hanger was the battle

TOUCH OF RUM

(CN THE COMMANDING TOUCH
X RUMBROOK IMMORTAL ALLURE)



Moments in Time Photography

**USDF 2015 All-Breeds
Award Champion
3rd Level**

TRAINED & RIDDEN BY: Renee Surprenant
Millstream Farm • Ashford, CT

OWNERS: Ann Schmidt DVM and Richard DeWolf
Briarhill Morgans • Dudley, MA

BREEDERS: Carolyn & Frank Gibbard
Tarantella Morgan Farm • Epping, NH

CDE/CARRIAGE ≈ West Coast Triple Crown



Stefanie Putnam up close and with her four legged friends

(Photos © Marijanne Nichols, Windmill Photography & Tom Muehleisen).

for Preliminary Horse. As organizers, we have unanimously concluded that there should be dual recipients. The sportsmanship displayed by all has been an inspiration for everyone involved in the sport of combined driving, so a huge congratulations to Stefanie Putnam and Drew Callahan, dual recipients of the Triple Crown!”

Drew has stated, “Stefanie is an outstanding driver. I am honored to call her a fellow member of our sport. She works hard and deserved this win. She is a joy of

an individual and extremely talented in this sport. I hope to compete with her like this for many years to come.”

And Stefanie returned the favor, saying, “I could not be more moved, honored, and proud to share this amazing award. This truly speaks to the unbelievable integrity and spirit of community and support that exists here on the West Coast. You have each been an incredible inspiration and ongoing, steadfast source of encouragement and sustenance to me and my very soul. I am truly blessed.”

Stefanie told this reporter that when she fell in love with Shadow she knew she would always have Morgans in her life. At Shady Oaks Shadow also won the U. S. National Preliminary Championship as well as sharing the Triple Crown honors. This remarkable horse and driver now indeed have a tangible possibility of being selected to represent the United States in 2016 for the FEI Para-Equestrian World Driving Championships!

We are surely blessed, as is Stefanie, that a Morgan chose her. ■



Gary Gang with WVS Dolly's Speed King & WVS Bells Speed Kong RAF

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WEST COAST TRIPLE CROWN AND MORGANS WIN THE PRELIMINARY PAIRS

Our agile and game Morgans are well known and respected competitors in Combined Driving Events around the world. Arizona Combined Driving Events (CDE) trainer, Gary Gang, recently drove Leslie Kennard's Morgan pair, WVS Dolly's Speed King (DM Regency's Windwalker x Dolly Ray) and WVS Bells Speed Kong RAF, to win both the California "Triple Crown" and the North American Championship for Preliminary Horse Pairs. Theirs is a good story of love, dedication, and promotion of the Morgan horse in open competition.

By Lindsay Naas

Lifetime AMHA member and Morgan breeder, Leslie Kennard, from Lindsay, California, has been involved with Morgans and competitive driving for more than 15 years. She started her journey at California Morgan shows with her first Morgan, WWF Hot Time, and branched out to breeding Morgans using her wonderful stallion, Cedar Ridge Victory, purchased from Robert Morgan, Jr. in San Jose, California.

Leslie was drawn to competitive driving because the sport combines three events in one competition— driven dressage, marathon, and the cones test. She thought this was not just fun for her and the horses, but also really showcased what Morgans could do. Leslie was living in Arizona when she first got involved with combined driving, and went to an event and met combined driving trainer, Gary Gang, who also was the Western region representative for Kutzmann Carriages. Impressed with the quality of Kutzmann Carriages, Leslie purchased her first marathon vehicle and away she went! She developed a pair from her own stock and worked with Gary to get them up to speed. Gary and Leslie worked well together, became fast friends, and continue to work together.

Leslie then moved to California and saw a black Morgan pair owned by the late John Morgan of Morgan Carriage Works in Oak View, California. John and his son Pat had purchased the pair at the Tulare Horse Auction a few years earlier and was using them lightly for an occasional wedding or special event. Leslie remarked, "They had come out to a couple of the CDE's and I was always impressed with how well mannered the horses were, so I offered to buy them. John was happy to see them go to a good driving home where they would have a job."

Leslie sent the pair home with Gary as they needed some reminders as to why they need to bend in the corners and on circles!

Then Leslie and Gary started competing them, and as Leslie was still driving some of her other horses, Gary continued as driver for the pair.

"The Boys" are now 10- and 11-year-old geldings, originally from Iowa where they were bred and started by well known Amish breeder, Amos Yoder, Jr. The 11-year-old is WVS Dolly's Speed King, and the 10-year-old was supposed to be registered as WVS Bells Speed Kong but the DNA test kit was never sent in. Leslie says she, "always chuckles at the King and Kong names that Yoder picked for the pair." They are now known as "King" and "John" (not Kong). Both boys are by the same sire, DM Regency's Windwalker, from breeding lines in Montana, Iowa, Alberta, and Pennsylvania.

This summer, two championship competitions were held in California. Three terrific venues sponsored a "Triple Crown" involving CDE competitions at Clay Station Horse Park, Sargent Equestrian Center, and the Grupes' beautiful Shady Oaks Farm - all located in or near Lodi, California. The second Championship was the North American Championship sponsored by the American Driving Society for Preliminary Level competitors held at Shady Oaks. This was the first time an American Driving Society Championship had been held on the West Coast so it drew a great number and quality of drivers from places as far away as Canada and Montana.

Gary Gang traveled with "the boys" from Arizona to Lodi, California to win both the Triple Crown and the North American Championship for Preliminary Horse Pairs. Leslie's husband, Ramon, was the "gator"—the person on the back of the carriage who navigates for the driver, helping to stay on course during the marathon and not miss any mandatory gates! With this pair of powerful Morgans who really enjoy getting down and dirty in the marathon, both skill and strength are required of the navigator. At one point while Gary was turning at the bottom of a hill, in water no less, one side of the carriage left the ground riding in the air a good 15 inches. Ramon is credited for keeping that carriage balanced and averting a roll over!

Gary credits "the boys" with being quick and handy. That's saying a lot for Gary's skills to plan out his approach and guide this 15+ hand pair at top speeds safely through the marathon and cones phases of this competition. You can see from the sparkle in his eyes as he talks about King and John, Gary loves this sport and is proud to have brought along this talented pair to win the Triple Crown and North American Championship. ■