

THE YEAR IN WALKING HORSES IS DEDICATED TO

MR. *Heisman*

BY SADIE FOWLER

An extremely popular horse among spectators as well as judges, Mr. Heisman has indeed demonstrated longevity over the years as he's succeeded in the show ring with multiple riders. Mr. Heisman is deserving of the many accolades he's received; and this year he has one more to add to his collection as he is the 2018 Year In Walking Horses Performance Horse of the Year.

Mr. Heisman, currently owned by Robin and Bruce MacDonald, is a 12-year-old stallion who has been trained by Brandye Mills for the majority of his long career. By JFK and out of Pushover The



The
Celebration
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MR. HEISMAN

Clouds (by Eb's Cloud Nine), Mr. Heisman has an outstanding show record spanning the past decade that includes 52 wins, eight Celebration blue ribbons and a world grand championship, which came in 2012 when he and Mills claimed victory in the 15.2 and under division.

"He's just a great horse," Mills said. "He is what he is. As long as you let him be him things will always be great with him. If he has a bad day it's usually our fault, not his."

Mr. Heisman was started by Hugh Taylor as a two-year-old in Alabama. In the spring of his three-year-old year, Bob Kilgore scooped him up and success followed as Mr. Heisman began experiencing show ring success in the open division.

That year, in 2010, he kicked off the season with a win at the Trainers' Show and did well all year, wrapping up the season with victory at the Celebration with a preliminary win in the three-year-old stallion division for his new owners Sadie and Randall Baskin, who bought him just before the Celebration that year.

The Baskins kept him for several years until the MacDonalds purchased him in July of 2017. The MacDonalds were actually shocked to have had the opportunity to purchase this fine horse. They'd been watching him for years, and actually had heard about him when he was a coming two-year-old but didn't get to the barn in time to look at him and seal the deal.

Friends with the MacDonalds, when the time came to where the Baskins could no longer enjoy him as much, they were content with giving him a new home with the MacDonalds, who were thrilled to have the opportunity to purchase him.

Other than a short stint with trainer Tim Smith during his four-year-old year, Mr. Heisman has been with Mills for the duration of his career, which has included some highs and lows, like anything else, but mostly moments to celebrate.

"Every trainer has a 'horse of a lifetime' and I think Mr. Heisman is that horse for Brandye," Robin said. "They can read each other's minds. It's more like a soulmate relationship than a horse and trainer relationship. The horse dearly loves Brandye and Brandye dearly loves the horse. I joke by saying I can only hope he'll love me like that one day."

Looking back over Mr. Heisman's career, where he's shown in multiple divisions with multiple riders, the 2011 season found him as a four-year-old with Smith, collecting wins in the open division at Columbia,



Robin MacDonald is the current owner of Mr. Heisman and they've enjoyed several victory passes together since 2017, including two blues at the Celebration.



Toward the end of his three-year-old year, Bob Kilgore sold Mr. Heisman to Randall Baskin.

MR. HEISMAN



In 2012, Mr. Heisman earned his sole world grand championship, with Brandye Mills, in the 15.2 and under division.

Mississippi Charity and Belfast before a disappointing fifth place finish at the Celebration. He finished out the season with Mills and captured wins at the Alabama Jubilee and the Delta Fall Classic.

In 2012, he kicked off the show season as an aged horse with a win at the Alabama WHLA/Parkside Booster Club show and also won at the Spring Fun Show and Woodbury, where he was back competing in the 15.2 and under division. That year, he finished reserve in his preliminary at the Celebration before making a comeback performance no one will forget as he and Mills wore the roses out of the ring as the 15.2 & Under World Grand Champions, the sole world grand championship of his career.

He's often a fan favorite; his followers describe him as being a great horse that stands out and commands one's attention.

"He's that rare kind that when he enters the ring you can't miss him," said Celebration CEO Mike Inman, who is also good friends with the MacDonalds. "He's extremely talented and you can't help but notice him. He wears the bridle well and goes a lot bigger than he actually is."

After winning the world grand championship in 2012, the next season proved to be another fabulous year for Mr. Heisman and Mills as they were undefeated all season in the same division with the exception of the Celebration, where he earned a second and a third-place finish in his two performances.

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In 2017, Bruce and Robin MacDonald purchased Mr. Heisman and have continued to experience success with him under the guidance trainer Brandye Mills.



MR. HEISMAN

The following year, in 2014, Mr. Heisman once again remained undefeated all season with the exception of the Celebration, although that year he did win his preliminary class and finished third in the world grand championship.

In 2015, Mr. Heisman switched divisions, moving into open specialty, but remained a consistent top ribbon winner. He earned several blues that season, including one at the Celebration. The following year he was back in the 15.2 and under division and won all year long, including twice at the Celebration, in preliminary classes — once with Brandye Mills and once with Kelly Mills in an auxiliary class.

The winning trends continued in 2017 and by the latter part of the season, Mr. Heisman made a debut ride with new owner Robin MacDonald at Belfast, where they walked away as champions in the 15.2 & Under Amateur Specialty. The past two years, in both 2017 and 2018, this dynamic duo won their preliminary round at the Celebration in the elite amateur ladies stallions class and closed out the show both years as the reserve world grand champions.

Besides the Celebration, 2018 also featured other great moments for Robin and Mr. Heisman; they wrapped up the season with wins at the Tunica Fall Classic.

A gray roan with lots of color, he's one of the most popular horses around and combined with a set of very popular owners, even at 12, there doesn't seem to be any end in sight for this great horse.

The MacDonalds have bred Mr. Heisman to one of their own mares, but that is the only time he's been bred, which is another rare and interesting fact about this legendary stallion.

"I would be amazed if they weren't asked constantly," Inman said. "He doesn't have any colts and that is uncommon for a horse that is that good. I bet the MacDonalds are asked often, but breeding takes a lot of time and I'm sure they want to keep him in the show ring."

Robin agreed with Inman's assessment and said they had refrained from breeding him at first because she wanted to get used to showing him. Now, they are excited with the prospect of future offspring by Mr. Heisman.

"We are trying to get some babies now, so our fingers are crossed," Robin said. "He has a girlfriend at the barn, and it's amazing, he's very kind to her. He's a gentleman for sure."

World class talent with no retirement in sight, Mr. Heisman has been going strong in the show ring for the better part of a decade.

"He doesn't even seem all horse," Robin said. "He has humanism in him. The way he looks at you, listens to you. He's just a very different horse. He's very kind, loves people, and when you go in the show ring, he doesn't need you. It's just like Brandye said. If he has a bad day it's one of our faults, not his."

"I remember the first time I showed him Brandye telling me, 'Don't talk to him,' just let him do his thing. Well, I like to talk to my horses and encourage them so that was a challenge for me but I listened to Brandye and, sure enough, he did his thing."

Robin and Bruce feel extremely lucky to be a part of Mr. Heisman's legacy.

"He's just been a blast to ride and I love him to pieces," Robin said. "I never thought I'd have another one this special ... You know I had 'Homer,' whose real name is John F. K's Pusher. He was very special too, but he was quirky; a real bad boy. 'Mr. H' is just as special to me, but he's incredibly kind ... Another interesting thing to me is that we learned Mr. Heisman is bred like Homer, so that was a neat surprise to us."

Looking ahead, Robin has definitive goals for herself and the talented Mr. H. Though they've won their qualifying classes at the Celebration twice, they've fallen short both years as they walked away with the reserve world grand championship. Make no mistake, Robin hopes to win the roses one day with her prized champion.

"That would be a dream come true," she said. "He's won a lot of ribbons but only won one world grand championship. I really hope I can win one with him one day."

Summarizing his talent, Inman said he wouldn't be surprised at all if his friend did wear the roses out of the ring one day aboard Mr. Heisman.

"He's good up front, he's good behind, he wears the bridle well, he's pretty," Inman said. "You can't fault his shake, his headset, his color ... He's got it all."

As a result of his longevity, popularity and incredible talent throughout the years, as well as many more reasons, this Year In Walking Horses is being dedicated to Mr. Heisman.



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