

Midwest, Meet the American Saddlebred

BY DANIEL RIEFFER



The breed demo included Callaway's Lilly, ridden by owner Mary Waickman.

The American Saddlebred's versatility was proven in yet another way this spring. It's a trade-show horse, too! Over 80,000 people attended the Equine Affaire in Columbus, Ohio, April 12-15. Many in attendance received an education on the American Saddlebred. Ohio's Equine Affaire attracts people from all over the Midwest and beyond. The vast majority of them are not Saddlebred owners and have limited exposure to the breed. Attendees already drawn by a passion for horses presented a favorable setting for Saddlebred promotion.

Trade shows are everywhere throughout the United States, but the American Saddlebred is not represented at them nearly as much as the Association would prefer. Organizing and staffing the effort required to have a noticeable presence at a trade show relies heavily on volunteers. Several Saddlebred enthusiasts stepped up to provide that kind of service for the breed they love at Ohio's Equine Affaire. Efforts like theirs are critical to promoting the breed.

Jeremy Kelley and April Vercoe



Trainer Colleen Martin attended to Ultimate Connection. Owner Mary Ross presented the Park Pleasure Driving horse during the breed demo.

took the lead in organizing an ASHA booth and breed demo for Equine Affaire, communicating to the Association what they felt would make ASHA's booth stand out among the rest. Mission accomplished. According to Jeremy and April, the response to

both the booth and breed demo was "phenomenal."

Jeremy spent nearly all of his time, ten hours a day, manning the Association's booth during the event. He fielded questions, explained away myths about the breed, distributed promo-

Editor's note: The following letter was submitted to the Association regarding Equine Affaire and contains the opinions of Jim & Sue Thomas of Moundsville, West Virginia.

We almost missed you. The Equine Affaire in Columbus is an annual event for us. We always try to make it to as many days as we can, camping on the grounds and going to as many clinics as possible. We own two Saddlebreds that we rescued a few years ago, and we don't know much about them. The chain of ownership on their papers has also been broken. We have one paper, and the other has been lost, but we do know their registry numbers. We would have benefited greatly had someone from ASHA been at Columbus even two years ago. For the last three years, there was no Saddlebred representation at Columbus. That is disappointing.

We always spend a lot of time in the breed pavilion at the Voinavitch center, but we didn't bother this year until the show was nearly over. We were pleasantly surprised to find three friendly, informative people representing ASHA. This did a lot to give us hope and confidence in doing something with the breed.

We own Arabians, Appaloosas and grade Quarter Horses. We picked up our two Saddlebred mares three summers ago and had to build them up; they were very poor and hadn't been worked with for a while. While visiting the West Virginia State Fair three summers ago, we tried to talk to some people about our horses and were not met with very friendly responses. As a matter of fact, just about everyone associated with Saddlebreds we talked to in the last several years were pretty snooty. It was getting to the point where we just wanted to sell the mares and get them out of our hair.

Problem is, we basically live in Quarter Horse country, and nobody around here wants a Saddlebred. We get made fun of for having Arabs. We are members of the ASHA but don't know if we want to bother renewing for another year. The two mares have good bloodlines and would be good breeding stock. We have been taking them on trail rides and they are excellent in the woods. Right now our plans are to show one of them halter in local pleasure shows and at the county fair. We may even ride in the walk-trot, even though we don't really know what we're doing.

Thank you. Thank you for having someone at Columbus! Please bring them back next year. Also, please consider having someone from the breed showcase a Saddlebred in the Fantasia show. I cannot recall any featured Saddlebreds in the three Fantasias I have seen. I believe there was ONE a few years ago pulling a cart or something with a large group of mixed horses pulling carts and wagons. After talking to the ASHA reps you had there, we have been encouraged to do a little more with these girls and aren't so ready to sell them. We are also excited at seeing how well we do at our dinky little local shows as we will be the only Saddlebred on the property.

Also, thank you and thanks to the representatives you had at the breed pavilion. They were so friendly and thankfully NOT snooty. Very down to earth and easy to talk to. We like that very much.

Looking forward to a good year with ASHA!

tional materials and received many compliments and praise for how well the American Saddlebred was represented. He made a commendable effort of taking notes on the types of inquiries he received regarding the breed. The information he gathered has supplied the Association with useful insight into how the Saddlebred is perceived by equestrian enthusiasts with



The breed demo included ten Saddlebreds.

limited knowledge of the breed.

Jeremy's knowledge of the American Saddlebred was invaluable in his role of representing ASHA at its booth at Equine Affaire. He and his wife, Katelyn, are the manager/trainers at Windgate Farms in Delaware, Ohio, owned by Ray and Barbara Blanton. Jeremy has been a professional trainer for 12 years, previously working for Chris and Chad Reiser at Silverstone Farm in Lucasville, Ohio. He is a member of ASHA, United Professional Horsemen's Association (UPHA), U.S. Equestrian Federation (USEF), Tri-State Horse Shows Association and serves on the River Ridge Charity Horse Show Committee.

Several questions Jeremy was charged with answering centered around a myth that Saddlebred trainers sore their horses in order to achieve the high-stepping motion. Jeremy was shocked at the number of people he encountered who believed a Saddlebred's motion is unnatural, "man-made" by inhumane shoeing practices. In each instance that he was presented with this misconception, Jeremy explained that due to the cadence of a Saddlebred's gait, to sore the horse

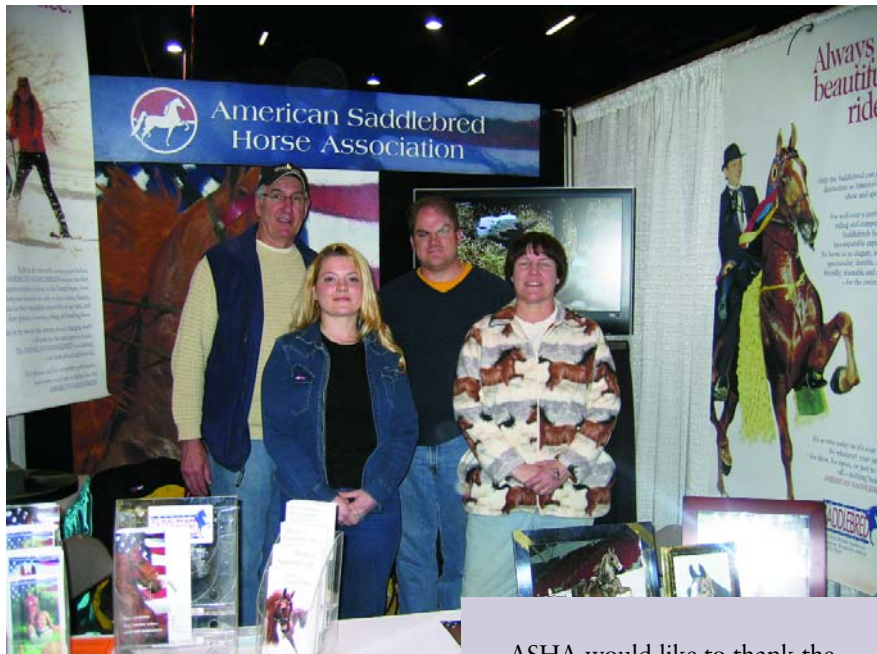
equally on every leg so as not to show any lameness would be impossible. Coincidentally, one of the booth volunteers had a photo of Mitch Clark riding ^{CH}Skywatch, which provided evidence to contradict this misconception as ^{CH}Skywatch was wearing plates, not pads. Jeremy and other volunteers were able to dispel this myth with informed responses, and those who arrived to the booth with negative perceptions, left with a better understanding of how a Saddlebred's motion is natural and becomes more pronounced with proper, humane training. Jeremy said "Next time I'll bring a shoe from one of my three-gaited horses to better educate those who have inaccurate notions about cruel training practices of Saddlebreds."

The Association's "I Can Fly" video was a big hit. Jeremy procured a flat-screen, high definition monitor to display promotional DVDs and videos. The "I Can Fly" DVD shows a foal shortly after birth, learning to stand, then run, followed by images of some of the all-time great American Saddlebreds set to R. Kelly's 1996 inspirational song "I Believe I Can Fly." Jeremy said, "At one point I counted 22 people huddled around the booth watching it. One lady was brought to tears. She told me Saddlebreds are the most beautiful horses she's ever seen, then grabbed a brochure and a membership application and said she planned to join ASHA." Jeremy added that videos of past stake nights at the Kentucky State Fair World's Championship Horse Show also drew large gatherings around the booth's video monitor.

Other promotional items received much attention and positive comments, such as the "For Pleasure" banner featuring a Saddlebred pulling a young lady along behind on skis in the snow. April said, "People absolutely loved that banner. Just seeing a Saddlebred being enjoyed in a way other than being shown really made an impression.

"And the brochures and the ASHA coloring books were popular. We would have 4-H club representatives come by and just eat up all the information available. To have the brochures for them to be able take back and hand out to their kids was a big plus."

April is a trainer at A.R. Stable in



A few of the volunteers at ASHA's Equine Affaire booth, clockwise from top left: Ray Blanton, Jeremy Kelly, Karyl McManes and April Vercoe.

New London, Ohio, which she and Randy Harvey partnered together to open in 2004. Randy has previously worked for such notable trainers as Tom Ferrebee, George Knight and Junior Seay. April has had horses since she was a child and, after working various training jobs, began working for Randy about five years ago. Now, she and Randy operate A.R. Stable specializing in training young prospects. April is an active member of ASHA, UPHA, USEF and is on the newly formed UPHA Chapter 13 Out-Reach and ASHA Advancement Committees.

Knowing the type of crowd that would be in attendance at Equine Affaire, April envisioned the breed demonstration to be something that would show the range of possibilities achievable aboard a Saddlebred. April expected to see a lot of amateur owners/trainers in the crowd. Her goal was to reveal the Saddlebred as a breed appropriate for the novice but also display that high level of performance associated with a Saddlebred. April has seen the amateur owner/trainer as well as the casual horse owner be intimidated by the champion-caliber Saddlebred and wanted to avoid that kind of reaction at Equine Affaire. However, she didn't want to deprive them of witnessing the peak performance obtainable

ASHA would like to thank the many volunteers who represented the American Saddlebred and the Association so well by promoting both at Equine Affaire Ohio.

- Brita Barlow
- Fay Baynton
- Ray Blanton
- Leslie Burlingame
- Julie Cain
- Gloria Edwards
- Jeremy Kelley
- Wendy Lewis
- Colleen Martin
- Karyl McManes
- Ann Moro-Gioffre
- Kathy Moses
- Leslie Reynolds
- Lynn Shaw
- Mary Waickman
- April Vercoe

with a Saddlebred either. By striking a balance between both, the result was an attractive breed demo for all, which drew a growing crowd during the demo and afterwards at the booth.

Ten different Saddlebreds were on display, which were brought to Equine Affaire by several volunteers specifically for the purpose of the demo. They covered the gamut: hunter, jumper, western and country pleasure, park pleasure, three-gaited, five-gaited, a lesson horse, an in-hand horse and even a pleasure driving horse.

A dressage demo had preceded the Saddlebred demo. The crowd had dis-



ASHA's For Pleasure banner drew a lot of eyes and compliments.

persed, and only a few people were left as the first Saddlebred entered the ring. But as the demo continued, a few more folks gathered around. Then a few more. April said, "Before you knew it, we had become a huge attraction. It was amazing to see the people stop and just become enthralled with our demo, star struck. The horses did a lot of speaking for themselves. We didn't have to do a lot of work."

An American Quarter Horse Association booth volunteer made a point of bringing to Jeremy's attention that she noticed the Saddlebred breed demo drew more people to the stands than many of the other breed demos and commented on how impressed she was with it. ASHA volunteer Brita Barlow, who made the trip to Columbus from her home in Jamestown, New York, said the crowd assembled for the Saddlebred demo resembled that of a horse-show crowd, complete with applause. She described the demo as an inviting introduction to the Saddlebred for those with little previous exposure to the breed. She found that many people she spoke with have horses casually, not for show, mainly for recreation as "backyard horses."

"Some folks are just looking for an easy-gaited horse with no interest in the show ring, but that's how some people get started," Brita said. "Eventually, they might wind up showing.



Over 20 people huddled around the booth at one point to watch ASHA's "I Can Fly" video.

The breed demo served to welcome rather than alienate the ones that are put off by 'show horses' initially. My grandma got started that way. She bought a Saddlebred in 1945 with no intention of showing, but she aspired to reach a higher level. She passed that passion on to my mother, and she passed it on to me."

April agreed and added, "The myth is out there that this breed is too much, 'I can't handle a horse like that.' But a lot of people that come to Equine Affaire want that experience of doing it themselves," she said. "That's what appeals to them. They want that bonding experience that comes with training. Our demo did a lot to promote the breed as also for the amateur owner/trainer."

In addition to volunteers, such as several amateur owners/trainers, the

breed demo was also made possible by A.R. Stable, Lost Fortune Stable, Virtual Saddlebreds, Waickman Training Stable and Windgate Farms. Their participation meant incurring out-of-pocket expenses to give back to the breed, contributing to and ensuring the success of the American Saddlebred breed demonstration at Equine Affaire.

Jeremy heard a few testimonials from Saddlebred owners who raved about the breed's versatility. One woman told of the two Saddlebreds she adopted and utilizes for trail riding around her farm. After visiting the booth, she felt compelled to join ASHA. A husband and wife felt the same way after stopping by the booth. They've also adopted a pair of

Saddlebreds and are using them for carriage driving. They, too, left with a membership form and the intention of joining ASHA.

The most frequent comments Jeremy reported hearing were related to how thrilled people were to see the American Saddlebred's presence at Equine Affaire and how professional the breed was represented by the ASHA booth. Brita noted that many people came searching out Saddlebred representation.

"Equine Affaire is one of those regional trade shows that draw people from all over. I saw four different groups from my hometown (Jamestown, NY)," Brita said. "But many folks feel unique because they have the only Saddlebred in town, and they are looking for other individuals in similar situations. It's important to them to see Saddlebreds represented in a sea of other breeds at events like Equine Affaire."

Nearly all of the Association's brochures were handed out and all of the *American Saddlebred* magazines were gobbled up.

The Association is fortunate to have members willing to give of their time and money to promote the breed and is grateful for the efforts of the volunteers at Equine Affaire. **as**