

UC Ringmaster Inducted Into Connecticut Morgan Hall Of Fame

The Connecticut Morgan Hall of Fame welcomed its 24th member on Friday, June 11, 2010 during the 50th anniversary of the Connecticut Morgan Horse Show. The grand Morgan stallion UC Ringmaster joined the elite group in a ceremony held during Friday evening's championship session.

At 32 years of age, Ringmaster enjoyed hearing his many fans cheer him on as he returned to center stage in the Eastern States Exposition coliseum.

The following speech was read during the induction ceremony;

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. The story of UC Ringmaster begins in 1977 when Professor Dr. Al Cowan, head of the Department of Animal Science and Professor Nathan Hale wanted to introduce some new blood into the University of Connecticut Morgan herd. They contacted John Lydon who owned Waseeka's Showtime, thought by many to be the most beautiful Morgan stallion that ever lived. UConn's best two mares, UC Lyric and UC Fascination, were bred to him, and UC Lyric gave birth to the future champion in 1978.

On the morning Ringmaster was born, Bruce Walters, the horse barn manager at the time, called Dr. Cowan and said, "You need to come see this colt. He is the most beautiful foal I have ever seen!" Cowan named the foal UC Ringmaster, as he and his colleagues were sure the horse would dominate the show ring.

Back in 1978, economic times were quite different than today. A gallon of gas cost sixty-three cents, the average household income was \$17,000, and on top of the charts was a movie called "Saturday Night Fever".

Ringmaster remained at UConn for four years and he flourished. A student named Patti Dewitt trained and showed him, winning many ribbons at the smaller shows. But Ringmaster needed to move on to the big time if he were to reach his full potential. When Dr. Cowan called the Orcutt's at Juniper Hill Farm, they discussed what Ringmaster's purchase would mean. Lyman Orcutt, a prominent Morgan breeder, trainer and judge, had judged Ringmaster as a three-year-old, and the horse had taken his eye then. Cheryl thought he was a great horse as well, but for one thing. He was red! Little did they both know that he would come to be written about many times by equine journalists as "The Great Red Horse". And so, UC Ringmaster came to make his new home in Peterborough, NH with Cheryl and Lyman Orcutt.

Under the Juniper Hill Farm banner Ringmaster was shown by Lyman and Cheryl at many of the regional Morgan shows and won countless championships in hand, in harness and under saddle. Dozens of trips down victory lane were made right here in this very coliseum.

His road to becoming a world champion took him to Newtown, Connecticut and the farm of Richard and Andrea Haas. Lesley Parker, a prominent Morgan trainer, managed the facility where Ringmaster was sent to stand at stud. One day when Cheryl was visiting the farm, she asked Les if he would long line the horse. As Les and Ringmaster came around the corner up the straightaway, Cheryl finally saw the greatness in the horse that she always knew was there. She saw an instant chemistry between man and horse. And so, there they were – a great man and a great horse, each waiting to fulfill each other's destiny. The rest is history.

Together they earned wins from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and New England which paved the way to Ringmaster's first world championship and made him the one to beat. But if you were going to beat him, you'd better have a horse that could road trot in form with speed and brilliance but stay on its feet, canter like an equitation horse, and then give it all in the workout. Because that is what Ringmaster would do, and sometimes the judges called for workouts just for the sheer pleasure of watching this horse perform and allowing the spectators to raise the roof with excitement and cheers. As the crowd roared, Ringmaster would seem to grow before your very eyes, and as Les asked, he would give even more just when you thought he couldn't have any more to give.



UC Ringmaster was inducted into the Connecticut Morgan Hall Of Fame. Joining for the presentation were John Bennett, Dr. James Dinger, Bernard Parker, Cheryl Orcutt, and Bill Parker. (photo by Howard Schatzberg)

At 13 years of age, UC Ringmaster was crowned the English Pleasure World Champion in 1991. After a year's sabbatical from the show ring, he again reclaimed his crown in 1993 in Oklahoma City at age 15. When the cards were turned in, and they were ready to award the championship, Bill Carrington asked the crowd to announce the winning number, and as everyone screamed Ringmaster's number in unison, the other competitors tipped their hats to the team who had once again been the most unlikely candidate for this tremendous honor. In his last victory pass in the show ring, as the crowd went wild, Ringmaster trotted toward the Oklahoma out-gate as Lesley held the reins in his teeth and his hands out sideways.

Ringmaster set a new standard for the Morgan English pleasure horse, and many called him the pleasure horse not just of the decade, but indeed the century. When Ringmaster was competing, there was hardly standing room, and suddenly the English Pleasure Championship was the class that everyone came to watch.

In addition Ringmaster also distinguished himself as a progenitor of other champions. He was the sire of UConn's first embryo transfer horse UC Wilde Mark and the first to be registered with AMHA. Joining us tonight is Dr. James Dinger, reproductive physiologist and Professor of Animal Science at the University of Connecticut, whose early work in embryo transfer made research history. Ringmaster's foals have become world champions as well, including: World Champion Gelding UC Top Brass, Working Hunter World Champion UC Merlin, Working Hunter Reserve World Champion UC Serendipity, and World Champion Equitation mount UC Town Crier.

In March 2001, as the Juniper Hill Farm operation was winding down, Cheryl reluctantly parted with her best friend Ringmaster and allowed him to go back to UConn to spend his retirement from show life. At age 32, he is a little gray, but once roused from a quiet sleep in his well-appointed stall, it is clear that you are in the presence of greatness, and he is still a champion in every sense of the word.

It is fitting that this great honor should be bestowed in this arena where many victories were his, and this final performance is shared with the program that brought him into being. It is with honor that UC Ringmaster joins the Connecticut Morgan Horse Association Hall of Fame. And now, let's all watch as Ringmaster takes one more turn around the ring.