


Steve Demjen One Of The Good Guys

BY TIM DOLL

As a child, have you ever wondered what your life would be like when you had grown up? Have you ever dreamed of being something and as the years pass by have it become a reality?

No doubt, Steve Demjen was no different than any other child when he dreamt about what the future held for him. Demjen was one of the lucky ones. He grew up with horses almost before he could walk. From an early age he was blessed to have horses all around him while his mother, Jean, worked at Colonial Stables, thus giving Demjen the opportunity to have horses literally at his fingertips. Demjen was no different than any other all-American boy. He loved sports, still does; he excelled in them, being quite the athlete in his earlier years.

However, horses would not take the backseat to sports. He managed to have both be a vital part of his life, then and obviously now. There is one story people like to tell about Demjen, and this also involved the Colonial Stables manager at the time, Chuck Hutchinson. According to Demjen, Hutchinson played a big role in Demjen's life. He was more than just a friend; he was a person Demjen would always rely on. They have a bond, exceptionally strong, that



Steve Demjen and Stacey Bare, a great couple both in and out of the show ring.



Cherry Spritzer took Demjen to the winner's circle numerous times.



An early champion, Hurricane Lane needed no introduction to the blue ribbon.

always keeps them connected through thick and thin.

As Demjen grew up, he had such an appetite for horse shows. One might call it an obsession. Demjen didn't care if he had to ride a horse five miles each way, he was bound and determined he was going to a horse show. No matter what show he was at, he would pick up a prize list to see when the next horse show was. At some point he had so many show bills or prize lists, he would hide them, and via Hutchinson his mother would find them.

"It really wasn't that big of a deal. I would always hide some of them where I knew Hutchinson and Mom wouldn't find them. I was one step ahead of them," Demjen said.

Demjen would ride anything he could to these horse shows. If anyone deserved high marks for determination and drive, Demjen was ahead of the class.

While he grew up, his late mother would encourage him to ride. According to Demjen, "My mom would allow me to ride most anything in the barn. I rode some good ones and I rode some bad ones. I pretty much learned the basics from her, and the rest she allowed me to learn on my own through trial and error, but she never allowed me to hurt a horse or be hard on a horse in anyway. I like to think I learned a great deal from Mom. She was my stepping stone and a damn good one at that."

When Demjen hit the ripe old age of 16, he had pretty much decided that training horses was to be his life's profession. When Demjen sprouted his wings, he headed to Don Reinhart for his first job in Grove City, Ohio. The farm was owned at that time by Fred Reiser and his family, who also had horses with Reinhart.

Demjen had a thirst for learning. He was willing to keep an open mind and an open ear, learning what he could from a gentleman who had a wealth of talent. Working for several years under Reinhart's guidance, Demjen continued to learn and work some nice horses. It is not known if Demjen's love for a five-gaited horse came from Reinhart, but you can be assured, Demjen is a big, big, fan of them as well.

After his tenure at Reinhart's, Demjen was offered his first head training position at the Carl Steins Stables in Indiana. This was Demjen's first real test. It was a different sort of responsibility he faced, and face it head on he did. The one thing most people know about Demjen is that he is not afraid of a challenge.

"A challenge is what keeps me thinking. Keeps my mind busy; training horses is good brain food. The Steins were nice people. At that time they had some pretty nice horses and as I trained, they seemed to learn what I was asking and I learned as well," Demjen said.

During Demjen's time in Green Fork, Ind., there were 85 horses at the farm and the Steins had a breeding program as well. The farm stood a son of Vanity's Sensation named Vanity's Royal Confusion. One of the horses who gained world accolades was Melody's Winged Sensation. The Steins had a successful program and Walter Murphy and son Bobby enjoyed great success with horses from their program, as did Demjen.

One horse Demjen mentions, and a favorite of his

was Stonewall's Ideal. Liking this youngster a great deal, Demjen took him to the popular Berea horse show where they won the Junior Five-Gaited class. The late Dale Milligan was judging and after the show came to Demjen, purchased the horse for the John Wrathers, changed the horse's name and did extremely well. With little help at the farm, still managing to keep things running smoothly, Demjen chanced to meet what would become a lasting friendship still today with Jim Taylor of Memory Lane Farm, along with wife Jenny. Taylor at that time also had a training job in Indiana. His move to Ohio would come a bit later, as did Demjen's.

It was a meeting of not only horse trainers, but golf buddies as well. Still today, they hit the green every chance they get. It is not exactly clear if they are as successful at golf as they are with horse training.

During Demjen's tenure at the Steins, such horses came under his guidance as Mr. Melody Man, Melody's Miss America and Stonewall's Ideal, to name a few.

Demjen and Carl Steins parted ways after Demjen returned from a Tattersalls Sale.

"I always knew that if anything ever happened, I could count on the Reisers to help me out," said Demjen. "I told Reiser

(Fred) I needed a place to call home until I figured out what to do. I had two horses to bring with me, and I also needed a place to live and it was a perfect fit as the barn had an apartment as well.

"I tried my best to keep a positive attitude, because I know there were people in far worse shape than I was at the time, and the Reisers were like family to me; they really were."

Shortly after Demjen had arrived at the Grove City, Ohio stable, he received a call from a gentleman who went by the name of William K. Davis, a name



Demjen is shown here with Desert Fox doing what they do best.



Lisa May made a well-earned victory pass on Dollar For Dollar. She has been a longtime supporter of Demjen.



Under Demjen's guidance Art Work was not only a world's champion, but a successful broodmare of several world's champions as well.



Demjen pays attention to the details. He is shown here with Caramac's Norma Rae and Stacey Bare after their blue ribbon ride.

that was familiar to the horse people throughout the Tri-State area. Davis told Demjen that he wanted to send him a horse named Tallwood Ten. That, in reality, was when Steve Demjen Stables came to be; his first job on his own with his name on the stable banner. Demjen, for the first time, was his own boss. Demjen was fortunate to have some horses for the Reisers; Bev, their daughter, did quite well. Later on, the kids and grandkids would ride.

It wasn't long until Demjen had received another call from a most unlikely person, Carl Steins. "I remember it like it was yesterday. I had 24 stalls and Steins sent me 10 horses; it was the 10 I was working

and getting ready for River Ridge in Columbus, Ohio before I got my walking papers. I couldn't believe it, but I was most grateful. I guess I really owe Carl and Eileen Steins a big thank you. Theirs was the first check I would get every month. If this had not happened, who knows where I would be at this point. I guess you might say they gave me the shove I needed, not realizing it at the time, but I do now. It's funny how things happen." Demjen said.

One thing about Demjen is his air of confidence; never having a defeatist attitude. Like many trainers, the horse business is not always roses, sometimes you are dealt lemons. That mixture has caused no doubt

more than one trainer to take a serious look about where they are headed and how to get there. Demjen believes you have to look ahead and do it by taking one day at a time.

One of those lemons was when Demjen was injured several years ago. He was showing a horse in Kentucky that had a tendency to stay close to the rail. There was a gate ajar and Demjen got his foot caught in the gate and consequently tore a numerous amount of tendons and ligaments. For many years, he has suffered with an enormous amount of pain, evident by his limp.

Demjen continued taking himself and his riders to the show ring. Two surgeries followed with little suc-



Demjen and Lisa May with another blue ribbon.



Miss Olivia O'Claire tied a top notch Reserve Three-Year-Old Three-Gaited at Lexington.



World's Champion Curtis Lowe is one of Demjen's shining stars. The future is bright for both of them. They are shown here making a victory pass at Louisville in 2007.

cess, however, he was still able to ride, drive, and most importantly, hang that stable banner at a horse show.

One of the earlier horses Demjen had in training was a Night Prowler son named Northern Symbol, owned by Charlene Rowe. Rowe was relatively new to the horse business and Demjen marched this black fine harness star to many tricolors from Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and other competitive shows at various points in the U.S.

At that period in Demjen's life, he had such stars as Cherry Spritzer and Art Work, who he trimmed as a three-year old and was third in a hard fought class at Louisville. This mare has now become a truly remarkable broodmare and her get are winning at tough shows across the nation.

"I have always been blessed to have had some wonderful customers and longtime friends who have stayed with me through the good times and the rough times. I think when you have customers who you can count on and who count on you, it becomes a fruitful relationship for both of us. That's a good thing! You don't always have customers that agree with the way their horse looks, or where its headed. I try my best to give all my customers the attention they deserve, but the one thing is for sure, I don't play favorites. I don't think that is healthy," said Demjen.

Demjen will be the first to admit that it was hard leaving the Reisers, but due to their kindness, he called Grove City, Ohio home for 18 years. With most things, good things come to an end and it was time to move on. With the barn closing, Demjen was offered a deal he couldn't refuse. As mentioned earlier, Jim and Jenny Taylor had stayed close with Demjen. Jim had left his position in Indiana and offered to build for Demjen a nice addition onto their barn. For Demjen, it was a dream come true, and one which could not be a better fit. Demjen's new home would now be Medina, Ohio.

Looking back to the Grove City, Ohio chapter of his life, not only did the Steins, William K. Davis, Roy Pavey and the Reisers help guide Demjen to the place

he is now, with the help of horses such as Mister Tu, Tallwood Ten, Highland Adventurer, Desert Fox, Summer Lights, Best Expression and Hurricane Lane, they also helped guide his career.

Longtime friend and significant other, Stacey Bare, has also played a significant role in Demjen's recent successes with such stars as Caramac's Norma Rae, a multi-titled three-gaited mare and their new star, Miso Pretty, in park pleasure. Another loyal and devoted friend is Lisa May, who has trusted in Demjen's care a top list of horses in various divisions such as 2008 World Champion Curtis Lowe and

Dollar For Dollar. Jackie Hawke and her champion, Harlem's Gifted Treasure, are others with a list too numerous to mention.

Demjen is in a comfortable place right now. There is a certain amount of horses he would like to work, a comfortable number would be 15, and one day that will come.

When asked what he thought about what our horse shows and the industry need to do to stay strong, he said, "Many of our shows have become such a marathon. I realize for many it is a matter of economics. I'd love to see some of our shows add another day, again, economics, but for us as owners, trainers and exhibitors, it can get pretty hectic. And for some, the fun is

gone out of the show. Yes, we are fortunate for the shows to give us exhibitors' parties, and some even have fun events, other than equine, for the general spectator as well as ourselves. Costume classes are fun to watch; some of our Ohio shows have them, and dog costume contests. Back in the days of the popular Portsmouth Charity Horse Show there were no day classes; that was so welcomed.

"I really feel we are not doing enough promotion of the right kind. We want the general public to come see our horses. Pass out information to the public as they enter our grandstands. Tell them what Saddlebreds are, what they do, some history, also our harness/hackney and road ponies, road horses, Friesians, Morgans. Encourage them to come back to your stalls after the show. Our announcers can do a great deal to get the public educated."

Demjen's journey is far from over. In many ways each day is a new journey, and one he takes in stride. If there is one thing his fellow horsemen say about him, it is his willingness to help whenever needed. If you need him, give him a call, he'll be there. Devoted, dedicated, hard driven, generous and perhaps his biggest plus, always willing to help another horsemen.

This past November, just after the American Royal in Kansas City, Mo., Demjen underwent extensive surgery to help alleviate most of the problem with his leg. It turned out to be very successful. Anxious to get back to work, perhaps a little quicker than the doctor would have liked, he was working horses, and the best part was he was free of pain.

With a renewed look at life, with Stacey by his side as well as his customers, and his many friends, life is good. If you are fortunate enough to be a friend of his, you are one lucky person. He is a horseman's best friend.



Chuck Hutchinson and Jim Taylor are still a big part of Demjen's life.