

# CH Our Charming Lady: Three-Gaited World's Grand Champion

BY ANN BULLARD

Once, twice, three times the lady. That paraphrase of the Lionel Richey song describes the reigning World's Grand Champion Three-Gaited star CH Our Charming Lady. She and trainer Mary Orr have challenged the best of the best at Louisville for three consecutive years. They first stayed in the ladies division, winning the 15.2 and under and world's champion of champions titles. In 2008, they won the Ladies Three-Gaited 15.2 & Over qualifier and returned to wear the yellow roses emblematic of the world's grand champion on Saturday night.

This year, Mary and Evan Orr and owners Jack and Donna Finch elected to keep Grace (as she is known at home) in the open division. On Aug. 26, they stepped up to win the 15.2 and over world's title. Saturday night Mary Orr presented the Finches with their second set of yellow roses.

One can't help but wonder if Bridget Parker, who managed LCC Enterprises's breeding program, imagined what the bay filly might become when they named her. The beautifully-correct mare, by Santana's Charm and out of the black fine harness world's champion My Bugatti Royale, has 'charmed' owners and trainers since she was foaled at the Versailles, Ky., farm. Certainly Parker saw her potential as did Mike Roberts, who purchased her as a two-year-old. Roberts brought her to Missouri where he and Kent Swalla began shaping her career. Swalla teamed her to her first blue ribbon in the Three-Year-Old Three-Gaited class at St. Louis in 2004.

Donna Finch had no thoughts of owning a world's grand champion Saddlebred when she retired from her position as a pharmaceutical executive. She had ridden hunters years before and, with time on her hands, sought a new activity. That came in the form of riding lessons with Mary Orr. Donna bought a saddle followed by her first Saddlebred, CH Riva Diva. Less than a year later, Jack and Donna Finch told their trainers they were ready for the next step. That entailed a flight to snowy Versailles, Ky., where Mary and Jackie Tanner presented Our Charming Lady to the Finches. It didn't take long for the mare to arrive in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Much has changed in the past three years. The Orrs opened their High Caliber Stables shortly after Louisville 2008.

"I told everyone when we started this it would be a year of firsts," Mary said with her customary giggle. "It has been a whirlwind. Grace's wins have been the best surprise anyone could ask for in the first year of business.

"She is surer of herself – a lot more," Mary said, explaining that at eight years old

Grace is growing up. "Before I felt like there were times she would need me. Now if I need her she knows her job. She knows when it's business. I like being on a horse that's always ready to roll."

"She always has been an elegant mare," Donna said. "Now that she's bodied out, she is power and elegance."

At Clemson and Asheville Grace remained in the ladies division, winning the qualifier and championship. Original plans were to stay in that division at Lexington. After winning the Ladies Three-Gaited 15.2 & Over title, those plans changed; the team elected to vie for grand championship honors. The results were Our Charming Lady's 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> consecutive wins with Mary in the irons. Louisville loomed ahead.

"This year, the first class at Louisville probably was the hardest we've ever done. We went back and forth with Jack and Donna after we decided to take her back in the stake at Lexington," Mary said. "I kept thinking, 'What are you afraid of?' She had always been a lady's horse showing in an open class. She



Mary Orr and CH Our Charming Lady have thrilled audiences across the country while they claimed their second world grand championship.



Mary gives owners Donna and Jack Finch a lot of the credit for Our Charming Lady's success through their support and encouragement.

already had won a world's grand championship. I said let's go for it in the open from the start; it took away my safety net. I felt a lot more pressure."

"That decision wasn't made until Monday evening," Donna added. "Mary said she would like to do that. We said, 'Let's do it. Go for it; let's see how she holds up.' We knew we would take her in the open on Saturday night if things went well in the qualifier."

The Ladies Three-Gaited 15.2 & Over class opened Wednesday night's competition. As they looked around Stouffer Walk at horses warming up, those who hadn't heard of the decision realized Grace must be going in the open. Six classes later, she and Mary added one of their most important wins to their resumes.

As for back-to-back world's grand championships, Mary initially thought, "My God, don't even dream of it! After the first class, I was ready to roll. Saturday night was just fun," she said. "I don't know what I would do without Evan; I was so nervous. He told me, 'If you can't handle it, I'm sure someone else would like to.'

"I just wanted to represent her; she's done so much for me," Mary continued. "And when you have customers like Jack and Donna who give you nothing but support, are always positive, you want to do your best. And we did it!"

Donna spoke for herself and her husband. "We just couldn't be happier. This was the best. I believe Mary is the key to Grace; she continues to grow at every show. We've watched Evan and Mary becoming very self-confident, believing in themselves the way their customers do."

What's ahead? After the few remaining shows, Grace's team hopes to pursue the second phase of their dream, perpetuating her bloodlines.

"Our best chance of having another great horse is one of her babies," Donna said. "We'll give her time off after the Royal, pull her shoes, let her go out in the bull ring and be a horse for a while. Since we've had her, she's never been out of training. Grace deserves that; we'll see how she responds."

If all goes well, Grace will go to Missouri where Dr. Jim Foss will pull some embryos. From there, "She will tell us," Mary said.

Grace has a large fan club. Youngsters keep up with her on Facebook. Mary and Donna get countless emails and cards from the mare's admirers of all ages.

To best describe how fans, her owners and trainers feel about Grace, go back to the Lionel Richey song. "You're once, twice, three times a lady and (we) love you."