



## *The 2007 Skunk River Driving Trial is History!*

Joe Boeser and his navigator, Scott Johnson, wowed the hazard observers with their tie-dyed T-shirts, designed to match their dapple gray Percheron-Haflinger cross horse, Elmer.  
Photo by Derith Vogt, used with her permission.

*By Mary Winter,  
Three G Farms Equine Center*

When Jim Block from Minong, Wisconsin, left Interstate 35 and saw the white-barrel-and-pipe-structure obstacle on the way to the 2007 Skunk River Driving Trial, at Ames, Iowa, he turned to his wife, Nancy, and said, "We may as well go home now. We'll never get through that hazard!" Fortunately, Jim, driving his three Morgans as a unicorn, did not *have* to go through The Hayfield obstacle. It was the VSE-only obstacle, one of the two new obstacles featured at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual SRDT. The new hazards, constructed by hardworking members of the Best of Iowa in Traces Society (BITS), sponsors of the event, were just one of the changes that greeted competitors.

Another change was the adoption of a two-day format rather than a one-day event, a change prompted by a large increase in the number of entries in 2006, an increase sustained in 2007. Thirty-two competitors from six states began arriving and settling in on Thursday, June 21<sup>st</sup>. They were treated to a welcoming pizza party Friday evening, drove dressage and cones on Saturday, the 6-kilometer marathon on Sunday, and were on their way home by 3:00 in the afternoon.

The event began with a bang. Literally. Competitors were greeted by a violent thunderstorm Friday afternoon, the leading edge of the weather system that prompted Judge Mickie Bowen's plane to be diverted to Cedar Rapids. (Actually, she called and announced that she had been diverted to *Grand* Rapids. When you are from the East Coast, it seems that one "Rapids" is as good as another!) Matt Neubauer, waiting to pick her up at the Des Moines airport, spent the better part of two hours in one of the men's rooms at the airport, the designated safe place during a tornado. He said it was interesting... everybody in his crowded shelter was male; he suspected that the occupants of the women's rooms were all female (although he did not know for sure!) There was good reason for airport management personnel to direct folks to shelter: a tornado destroyed homes in Norwalk, less than five miles from the airport. Mickie's plane finally landed, and she and Matt made it to Three G Farms around 8 PM. Fortunately, Technical Delegate Linda Viani, from Charles City, could *drive* to Three G Farms, the venue for the event.

Training-level single ponies was the largest class, with twelve entries. Winning first place in that class, and the overall training level championship, was Christie Loiacono, Boone, IA, driving her Welsh pony, SL Rey. Christie and Rey had the best training-level dressage score, 47.25, and completed both cones and the marathon with no penalties. Tied for second in training-level ponies, with an overall score of 56.25,

were Pat Ketterer, Lincoln, NE, driving her new Morgan, Drowsy Mountain Trace, and Jo Arrowsmith, Boone, IA, driving her Shetland cross, Jane. The second-place ribbon went to Pat, based on her lower dressage score. Christie also won the ribbon for best training level cones, awarded to the competitor going double-clear with the fastest time.

Close on Christie's heels for the training level championship (only .75 separated their two scores!) was her husband, Randy Farwell, who drove Big Al to first place in the Very Small Equine class. Like Christie, Randy and Big Al held their dressage score (48) through cones and the marathon. Randy also won the award for the highest placing among first-time competitors. Coming in second in the VSE class was Gail Thomas, Oskaloosa, KS, driving Southern Sam.

Joe Boeser, Young America, MN, driving Elmer, a dapple gray Percheron-Haflinger cross, took home the first-place ribbon in the training-level single horse class. Joe and his navigator wowed the hazard observers on Sunday with their marathon attire, gray tee-shirts tie-dyed to match Elmer. Second place in training-level horses went to Debra Moser, Garber, IA, driving her palomino Morgan, Ken, in their first-ever Driving Trial.

Jim Block's unicorn of three Morgans, Nikki, July, and Jodee, won first place among training multiples. As could be expected, they were one of the favorites among dressage and cones spectators and hazard observers. Another crowd favorite was Julie Dahlberg, Solon Springs, Wisconsin, driving Bess and Rowdy, Morgan crosses, as a tandem in preliminary multiples. That a unicorn or a tandem can negotiate tight turns always seems like an act of faith!

Julie and the tandem had the best dressage score of the prelim multiples, a very respectable 48.29. Their competitor in that class, Linda Sadler, Fithian, IL and Erin Freese, Monticello, MN, caught them in cones and the marathon, however. Linda, driving her Morgan pair, Barnum and Bailey, finished in first place in that class, and Erin, driving her Welsh ponies, Youngs Black Eagle Feather and Crazy Quilt Hocus Pocus, finished second.

The best dressage score of the day (37.2) was earned by Paul Degen, Mason City, IA, driving Tilly, a Fjord mare, in the preliminary single pony class. Paul took home his second chair as the overall prelim champion. It matches the one he won at the 2006 event. Barbara Kirby, Overland Park, Kansas, with Nova, her Welsh cross mare, had the best prelim cones run of the day.

Barbara Simmons, Bellevue, NE, with



The unicorn hitch (one leader, two wheelers), consisting of three Morgans, July, Nikki, and Jodee, is driven by Jim Block. His groom is Matt Neubauer. Photo by Derith Vogt, used with her permission.



Ace, owned and driven by Barbara Simmons, in his dressage test. Photo by Derith Vogt, used with her permission.

her young Morgan, Ace, placed first in the preliminary single horse class. She also won the ribbon for best prelim marathon, with 42.49 penalties in that competition, and took home the High Point Morgan award, donated by the American Morgan Horse Association. Grace Ostien, Elk River, driving Dancer, her Quarter horse mare, took second among prelim horses.

The new hazards made the course more interesting, even for repeat competitors, and the two-day format made it easier to manage for the organizers. Friday's rain left one part of the marathon course soft and muddy, but still negotiable. And after Friday, the weather could not have been better: partly cloudy, highs in the mid 80s, not the high 90s originally predicted for Sunday. As Mark Dahlberg said, "I'm glad the weather people in Iowa can be just as mistaken as those in northern Wisconsin!"

All in all, another great event!

PHOTOS: Barbara Kirby and Nova in their dressage test.

Photo by Derith Vogt, used with her permission.

