

# Skunk River Driving Trial

by Mary Winter, 3G Farms

The title of the country-western song, "If the Good Lords Willin' and the Creeks Don't Rise," kept running through my head as we focused on getting the arena and the courses at Three G Farms Equine Center ready for the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Skunk River Driving Trial. The event, sponsored by Best of Iowa in Traces Society (BITS), was scheduled for June 28-29, 2008, just two weeks after pictures of the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City floods were all over the national media, and Wisconsin flooding prompted the postponement of a major pleasure show, the Columbus Carriage Classic. And we were planning an event named after a river.

Competitors began calling and emailing: "Is the event a go?" The answer was always "Yes!" Our buildings and most of the courses are high, well above the flood stage of the Skunk River. The only change we made to the marathon course was to abandon one obstacle that could not be reached safely, and build a substitute obstacle in the hayfield. And, of course, the warning in the American Driving Society *Omnibus*, "Possible water crossing depending on spring rainfall," proved to be only too true! The little creek at the bottom of the hill on the marathon was full for the first time in six years!

The weather for the event even cooperated. Sort of. We got 800 bales of hay off the hayfield (the only place we have to park 30+ vehicles and horse trailers) the weekend before the event, about three weeks later than usual. The last rack of hay was still in the indoor arena when competitors began arriving, and it stayed there for the weekend, adding a certain ambience to the area where competitors met and had breakfast, lunch and dinner. It rained almost all day on Thursday, which kept us inside. But the rain softened the ground so that course builders Earl, Ron, Tad, and Brian Morris, Gene Rhinehart, Matt and Jada Neubauer, and Randy Farwell, along with Technical Delegate Keith Yutzky, were able to erect the final course

markers easily. Friday it was hot and humid, so the cool, very windy Saturday was a *big* surprise. Especially to Judge Mike McLennan, a Texas native. His scribe made at least two trips to the house for blankets to keep him warm while judging dressage! Sunday was a perfect day for the marathon: slightly overcast and cool. All in all, given the wet Iowa spring, we were *very* lucky.

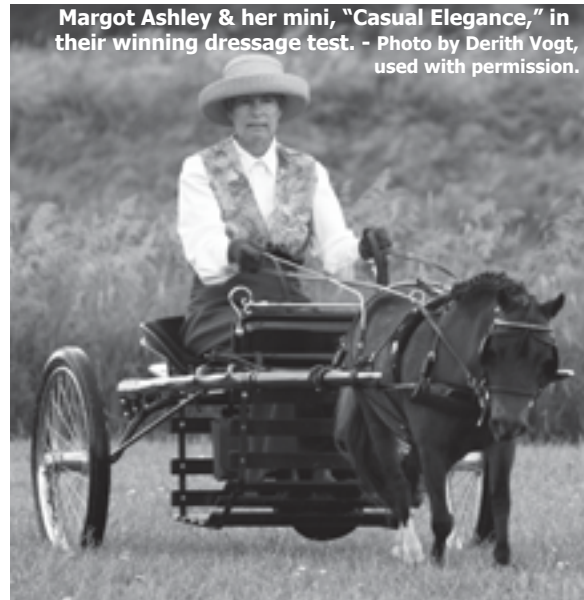
I was headed to the dressage arena early Saturday to deliver a message to the judge. As I waited to speak with him, I got to watch the first dressage test, that of Margot Ashley, Hartland, WI, and her 30" mini, *Casual Elegance* (photo at left). The test I saw took my breath away... and the judge agreed, awarding Margot and her

mini the best dressage score of the day, a dazzling 38.86. Margot and her mini went on to win their class, the Training Level Dressage ribbon, and the Overall Training Level Championship. Linda Syverson-Kerr, Holmen, WI, driving Kathy Johnson's Fjord stallion, WW Reidar, won the Training Cones Championship.

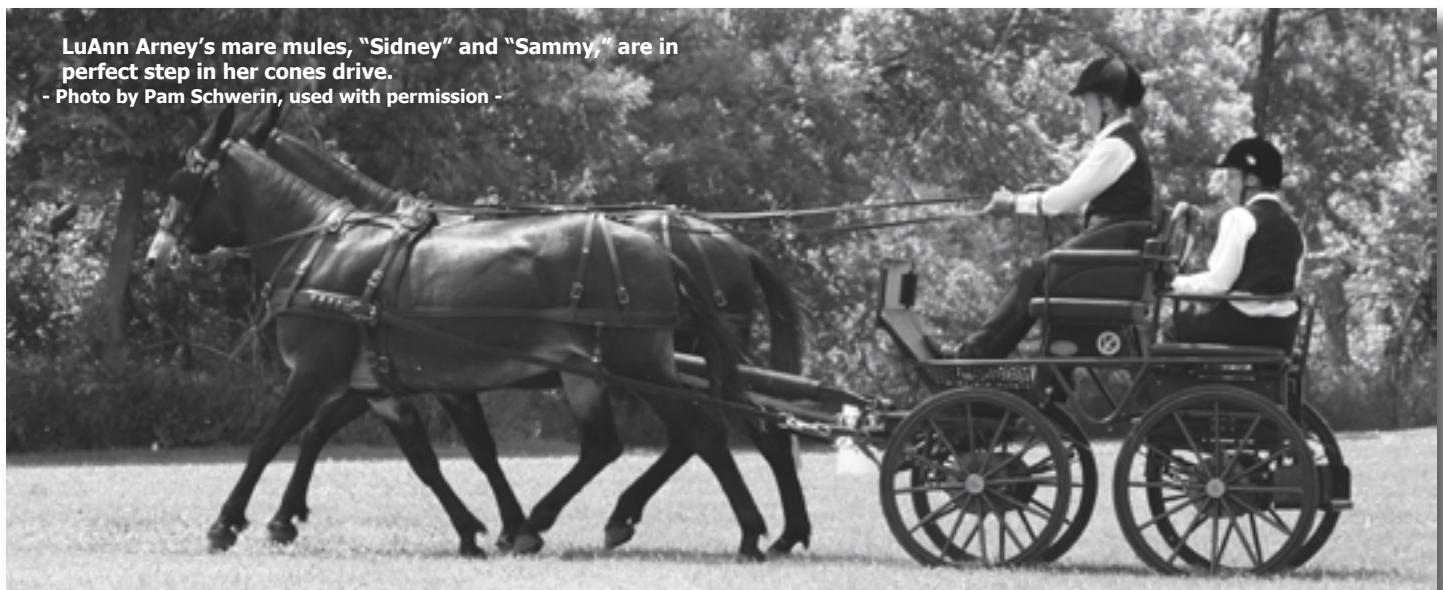
Mark and Julie Dahlberg, Solon Springs, WI, each took home a pair of etched glasses, provided by Patrick and Susan Hulls, of Horsegift.com, for the individual class champions. Julie won her set in the Training Single Pony class, driving 5-year-old Jesse James, owned by their son, Luke. Mark's performance in the Preliminary Multiples class, driving Bess and Rowdy in tandem, earned him first place in that class. He made a technical cones course look easy!

Two drivers from neighboring Boone, IA, were class winners. Jo Schumacher drove Toby to first place in the Training Single Horse class, and Christie Loiacono won Preliminary Single Pony driving SL Rey. The 2008 SRDT was Christie's first time competing at the prelim level. Not only did she win her class, she took home the ribbons for Prelim Dressage and Prelim Cones Championships. The Prelim Marathon Championship was won by Gene Rhinehart, Ferguson, IA, driving Celtic, his Friesian-Appaloosa cross.

The Skunk River Driving Trial officially became the Skunk



Margot Ashley & her mini, "Casual Elegance," in their winning dressage test. - Photo by Derith Vogt, used with permission.



LuAnn Arney's mare mules, "Sidney" and "Sammy," are in perfect step in her cones drive.

- Photo by Pam Schwerin, used with permission -



**A first for the Skunk River, Linsay Hamill's four-in-hand, in their dressage test. Grooms are Nicole Hamill and Jim Ralston. ' - Photo by Derith Vogt, used with permission -**

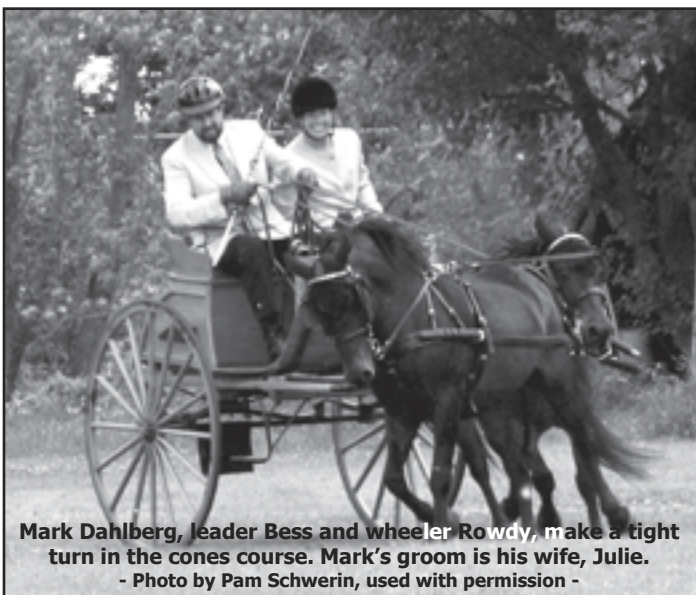
River *International* Driving Trial with three entries from Manitoba. Fred Gutoski, driving his mare, Tango, won the Preliminary Single Horse class, and the Overall Preliminary Championship. One of the other Manitoba entries was Lindsay Hamill, who brought his black Morgans and Morgan/Percheron crosses, Apollo, Zeus, Nero, and Thor, for the first-ever four-in-hand at the SRDT. Needless to say, there was a *big* crowd of onlookers when Lindsay and the four drove their dressage test and cones!

Having a four-in-hand compete, along with two tandems, the second one driven by Jim Block, Minong, WI, meant that we needed to provide a dressage arena that was 40 x 100 meters, 20 meters longer than the standard 80-meter arena. Our arena is marked by a grass "fringe," a strip of tall grass with the 8 dressage markers on barrels in the grass. To turn the 80-meter arena into a 100-meter

arena, we moved the markers at H, M, F, and K, set A and C back 10 meters, and then *mowed* the fringe at either end of the 80-meter arena to turn it into a 100 meter arena. Of course, that can only be done once a year!

Also a first for the Skunk River was a pair of mules, Sammy and Sidney, driven by LuAnn Arney, Dorchester, IA. That turnout won the Training Level Multiples class. And Carole Wallace, Centralia, MO, in her first visit to the SRDT, took home the blue for Preliminary Pairs, driving her ponies Dolman and Dillan.

With 35 competitors and 45 horses, the 2008 Skunk River Driving Trial was the largest yet. And the most fun, according to competitors, volunteers, and even the hardworking home teams of BITS members and Three G folks who made it happen.



**Mark Dahlberg, leader Bess and wheeler Rowdy, make a tight turn in the cones course. Mark's groom is his wife, Julie. - Photo by Pam Schwerin, used with permission -**



**Linda Syverson-Kerr and WW Reidar in their winning cones drive. - Photo by Pam Schwerin, used with permission -**