

# Fourth Annual Skunk River Horse Driving Trial

By Mary Winter

All photos by David and Carla Young

By noon on Saturday, June 24, the alfalfa field (aka parking lot) at Three G Farms, Ames, Iowa, looked like a small village, with more than 20 horse trailers surrounded by the sorts of things horse people surround their trailers with at horse events: tables, chairs, tents, carriages. They were assembled for the Fourth Annual Skunk River Horse Driving Trial, held June 25, 2006. The event, sponsored by the Best of Iowa in Traces Society (BITS), drew more than 60 people from 8 states.

After fewer than 20 entries each of the previous years, 32 entries were a welcome surprise (and problem) for a one-day event. Doing the math (8-minute dressage tests x 32 participants is more than 4 hours without a break of any kind) would mean starting at sunup on Sunday to complete the tests so the marathon could begin at 1:00 P.M. With the approval of Presiding Judge Anne Councill, Stewartstown, Pennsylvania, and Technical Delegate Linda Viani, Charles City, Iowa, competitors were sent an e-mail two weeks before the event asking for volunteers to drive their dressage test on Saturday. And, typical of the spirit of the weekend, 16 competitors offered to go Saturday. The first 12 volunteers were scheduled between 4 and 6 PM, after the course walk and before the Iowa chop dinner. The rest of the dressage tests began at 8:00 on Sunday, followed by cones, which were finished by 11:30. The marathon began at 1:00, over a 5.5 km marathon course, designed by Earl and Brian Morris, that went up, down, and around wooded hills and fields and included five hazards.

For the first time ever, there were pairs, and not just one pair, but three pairs. Mark Dahlberg, Solon Springs, WI, drove Rowdy and Bess, 13- and 14-year-old bay Morgan crosses in tandem in preliminary. Erin Freese, Monticello, MN, drove her pair of Welsh ponies, Doncardeb Flashdance Ted, a 17-year-old chestnut stallion, and Youngs Black Eagle Feather, an 8-year-old black gelding, in training level. Also competing with a training level pair was Jim Block, Minong, WI, with July and Nikki, 7- and 11-year-old chestnut Morgans. Erin was the winner of the class, but Jim received the award from the American Morgan Horse Association for high point (or, in our case, low point) Morgan.

Three ponies competed at the preliminary level: Paul Degen, Mason City, IA, with his 8-year-old Fjord mare, Tilly, Barbara Kirby, Overland Park, KS, with Nova, a 6-year-old bay Welsh cross, and Joe



Erin Freese, Monticello, MN, won the training level pairs with Buddy and Ted, her Welsh ponies. Erin's husband, Rick, is navigating.



Paul Degen, Mason City, IA, and Tilly, his 8-year-old mare, on their way to the dressage arena. Paul and Tilly won the awards for best prelim dressage, cones, and marathon, and, of course, the prelim championship award.



Grace Ostien, Elk River, MN, and Dancer, her 17-year-old quarterhorse mare, here shown on the cones course, won first place in the preliminary single horse division. Grace Ostien, Elk River, MN, and Dancer, her 17-year-old quarterhorse mare, here shown on the cones course, won first place in the preliminary single horse division.



Gene Rhinehart, Ferguson, IA, drove Celtic, a 4-year-old Friesian cross, to first place in the large training-level single horse competition. Gene's son, Heath, is navigating.



Michael Scott, St. Louis Park, MN, driving WW the first hazard, with Kathy Johnson, Reidar's overall training-level championship.

Boeser, Young America, MN, driving Lady, a 10-year-old Haflinger. Paul and Tilly posted a 44.33 dressage score, taking home the prize, donated by Robin Groves, Brownsville, VT, for best preliminary-level dressage. Paul and Tilly also won the overall prelim championship, a folding chair with the BITS logo, "Skunk River Horse Driving Trial 2006," and "Preliminary Champion" embroidered on the back.

Two horses competed in prelim: Grace Ostien, Elk River, MN, and her 17-year-old black Quarterhorse mare, Dancer, and Mary Loy Brown, Liberty, MO, driving Excalibur's Second Chance, her 7-year-old bay Morgan gelding. When it was all over, less than 1.5 points separated Grace and Mary Loy, with Grace taking home the first-place ribbon.

If the number of people competing at training level is any indication, it will not be long before there will be larger preliminary





Reidar, a 4-year-old Fjord stallion, approaches owner, navigating. Michael and Reidar won the

classes. Eleven horses competed at training level and nine ponies were entered at training level. Among training level horses, Paul Kern, Stillwater, MN, drove Wilko, a 7-year-old Friesian gelding, who received a dressage score of 49.75. Paul was awarded a book, also donated by Robin Groves, and a \$25 gas certificate, donated by Paul Degen and Sally Overturf, Mason City, IA, for the best training-level dressage score.

Anita Schlosser, Ames, Iowa, driving Baykill Regent, a 15-year-old bay Morgan gelding, turned in the only double-clear cones run among the training-level horses, which put her in first place after dressage and cones. Right on her heels was Gene Rhinehart, Ferguson, IA, driving his 4-year-old Friesian cross, Celtic. Anita's 2.6 points in marathon time penalties were just enough to give the first-place ribbon to Gene and Celtic, with Anita and Regé winning second.

The quest for first place in the training-level ponies was equally tight. Brian Morris, Gilbert, IA, driving Christie Loiacono's 7-year-old chestnut Welsh gelding, SL Rey, turned in the best dressage score, a 54.52. Close behind was Michael Scott, St. Louis Park, MN, driving Kathy and Randy Johnson's 4-year-old Fjord stallion, WW Reidar, with a score of 55.88. The cones course decided first place for training level single ponies: Michael and Reidar were double clear; Brian and Rey knocked one ball down. Michael and Reidar held their dressage test through the marathon, winning the blue for training level single pony and the overall training level championship, a blue folding chair like the prelim prize.

Three training-level VSE drivers participated: Margot Ashley, Hartland, WI, driving BMAS McEve, a 13-year-old chestnut mare, Nancy Brandtjen, Oconomowoc, WI, driving Silver Palma, an 8-year-old pinto mare, and Gail Thomas, Oskaloosa, KS, driving Southern Sam, a 15-year-old black gelding. The VSEs drove their dressage test in the 40 x 80 meter arena, but had a shortened marathon course, 3+ km with three hazards. Margot and McEve took home the blue ribbon in the class. She also was awarded a coffee mug, donated by Katy and Gene Rhinehart, for the best score among all competitors in the dressage and cones combined.

By 10:00 A.M. Monday the 'village' was totally dismantled and participants were on their way home. There was almost universal agreement: the 2006 Skunk River HDT was the best yet!



By the time Margot Ashley, Hartland, WI, and her mini, McEve, got to the first hazard, it was spitting rain. Margot and McEve won the VSE competition and first prize for the best finish by a first-timer.

