



## Mules and Donkeys Break Tradition at the 2015 Western Dressage World Show

In the past few years, mule and donkey enthusiasts have been working hard to break the stereotypes associated with their longeared mounts. Last year, Heart B Dyna was the first mule ever to compete at the US Dressage Finals. This year, Clyde's Gallant Fox became the first ever donkey to compete at the Western Dressage Association of America World Show! Not only did he compete, this mammoth jack took home a Reserve World Championship title and showed the world that donkeys are capable of much more than anyone imagined.

The Western Dressage Association of America (WDAA) was established to combine the Western traditions of the horse and rider with Classical Dressage. Light hands, subtle cues and a true partnership between horse and rider are all objectives that the WDAA works to promote in the Western horseman. Through a series of tests comprised of maneuvers that build on each other and culminate in advanced western exercises, the WDAA builds a foundation of training from which an equine can use to compete in nearly any event.

The 2015 WDAA World Championship Show was held on November 6-8 at the Built Ford Tough Arena in Tulsa, Okla. The show boasted unprecedented class sizes, high test scores and an amazing display of versatility of breeds. Equestrians from more than 30 states and Canada traveled to Tulsa to put their mounts to the test. Among them were three mules and one donkey hoping to prove that they had what it takes to compete alongside their horse counterparts.

"We wanted something that would challenge him," said Tabitha Holland, trainer of Clyde's Gallant Fox, better known as 'Ted.'

**Clyde's Gallant Fox, owned by DWAIN and SAMANTHA FRANCIS, Richards, Mo., trained and presented by TABITHA HOLLAND, Signature Equine, Morris, Okla.**

*photo by Jeff Kirkbride Photography*

**MV Ben's Dixie Dell, owned by DAVE and DEBBIE WALKINSHAW, Griswold, Iowa, presented by TESSA WALKINSHAW**

*photo by Horse Association of America, Inc.*



At only eight years old, he has won nearly every title offered to mules and donkeys. He is a five-time NASMA Year End High Point Champion, a multiple World Champion at Bishop Mule Days and holds Superior titles in eight different events. We wanted people outside of the mule and donkey world to see what he could do." Holland was uncertain how he would place at the show but knew he would give a performance that would make our industry proud.

"I emailed his owners, Dwain and Samantha Francis of Richards, Mo., and told them about the show," said Tabitha. "They immediately jumped at the opportunity. I am so fortunate to have such supportive clients. They have always believed in Ted just as much as I have and are constantly looking for new ways to showcase his abilities."

The first day of competition included Suitability, Hack and Equitation on the Rail. Four highly regarded judges including Debbie Riehl-Rodriguez, Sue Malone-Casey, Robin Brueckmann and Barbara Ebner pinned the champions.

The first class for Clyde's Gallant Fox was equitation. Equitation required competitors to complete rail work both directions as a group and then perform a specific pattern individually. "I anticipated that this would be our best shot at a title," stated Tabitha. "He is very good at transitions and precise pattern work. We had a really nice go on the rail. It was both humbling and exciting listening to the crowd cheer for us as we completed our pattern."

When the placings were announced. They were called backwards from tenth. "I kept thinking, 'OK, top ten sounds good. Top five is better,'" remembered Tabitha. Finally only two competitors remained and Clyde's Gallant Fox was called out as Reserve World Champion! "It was a really awesome moment. I couldn't have asked for any more," said Tabitha.

The mules also put in a good showing right off the bat with Tessa Walkinshaw from Griswold, Iowa, and her molly, MV Ben's Dixie Dell, garnering a fourth place finish in youth equitation. "I really had fun competing against all of the different breeds of horses and seeing how we measured up," said Tessa.

The rest of the weekend included patterned tests. By the second day, Clyde's Gallant Fox was some-

**Pistols And Posies, owned by DWAIN and SAMANTHA FRANCIS, trained and presented by TABITHA HOLLAND**

**Do A Little Sidekick owned and presented by MARIE LLOYD, Shelbyville, Tenn.**

*photos by Horse Association of America, Inc.*





what of a celebrity. Tabitha laughed, "We had to allow extra time to get back and forth to the arena from the stalls because everyone would stop us to take our photo. Ted absolutely loves attention and was hamming it up!"

Tabitha also completed two Basic Level tests on a three-year-old molly also owned by the Francis', Pistols And Posies, who is sired by Clyde's Gallant Fox. Pistols And Posies didn't place but delivered some beautiful tests and was a great mule ambassador.

Tessa Walkinshaw went on to earn two more sixth place ribbons as well as two seventh places in the youth division to finish out her show.

Marie Lloyd from Shelbyville, Tennessee and her mule Do A Little Sidekick were awarded a ninth place finish in Level One, Test Two in the Amateur division. Lloyd has competed at the WDAA World show in the past and has also earned some Reserve Championship titles.

Overall, with one Reserve World Championship and multiple Top Ten finishes, mules and donkeys made a lasting impression on the WDAA World Show. "There is no limit to what these talented animals can do," said Tabitha. "We are very grateful to the welcoming atmosphere created by the WDAA and the extremely competitive platform they have shaped to allow us to showcase our equines to the world!"



Clyde's Gallant Fox and Tabitha Holland

photo by Horse Association of America, Inc.

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