



Swimming With The Big Fish

Little horse, big success.

By Bernadette and Jack Stang

Gladheart Linhawk (Funquest Diviner x Rogue's Midnight Melody) was the first foal with our Gladheart Farm prefix and from the beginning was special. Although on the small side at 13.3 hands, L.C. had the presence and gaits of a much bigger horse. His trot had the loft and reach often associated with dressage, but more importantly he had an expressive, balanced canter and amazing reach from behind. When you watched him move, he gave the impression that doing the "hard" stuff in dressage would be easy.

We had initially worked with several trainers and clinicians, but eventually joined up with USDF Silver Medalist Kimberlee Barker. When L.C.'s counter-canter had been confirmed, Kim felt it was the right time to introduce flying changes of lead. With this in mind, L.C. was left with Kim for two weeks for training and evaluation; we wanted to know if she thought L.C. had upper-level potential. Apparently she thought he did, because for the last four years (except for a few brief periods) L.C. has been with Kim. In fact, L.C. is more often as not referred to as "Kim's horse" (most of the time people assume she owns him), and it is hard to imagine him with anyone else.

Kim and L.C.'s first show season was memorable, particularly a first level test ridden under "I" level judge, J. Ashton Moore in their second show. At the conclusion of the test, as Kim walked L.C. past the judge's stand, Moore stood up behind the table, looked L.C. over more closely, and asked Kim, "What is it?" Her reply was classic: "He's a Morgan; a little Morgan!" A half-hour later, Kim found out that her "little Morgan" had won the class with a score of 71.053 percent! By the end of the season, they were the USDF/Adequan® All-Breeds First Level Open Reserve Champions, and in the top third of all horses ranked at First Level by the USDF.

The 2011 season was also memorable, but for different reasons. To add to the hit-and-miss show schedule due to the EHV-1 outbreak in Utah, L.C. battled hives from January until March, which were followed by a skin infection due to the steroids used to treat his reaction. For several months, we essentially owned a bald dressage horse. Fortunately, he grew back his coat, and they rallied to finish the year with a reserve championship at Third Level Open

for the 2011 Spokane Sport Horse Show Series, Third Level Open USDF/Adequan® All-Breeds Championship and more impressively were in the top 15 percent of all horses ranked by the USDF at Third Level regardless of breed—with a median of over 66 percent for the season. Although the 2012 season isn't over yet, L.C. and Kim were Fourth Level Open Champions at the Spokane Sport Horse Casual Qualifier Series, as well as showing for the first time at FEI; breaking 60 percent under two different judges in their debut at Prix St. George.



Gladheart Linhawk and Kimberlee Barker
(Photo © Carolyn Bunch Photography).

L.C. has been a wonderful ambassador for promoting Morgans and dressage in our region. He and Kim have been demonstration rides for the dressage presentations in two Northwest Horse Fair and Expositions, including most recently under featured clinician Olympian Jan Ebling. They were also the Third Level Test Three demonstration pair for the Oregon Dressage Society's "Introduction to the 2011 Tests," and took part in the "L" Judges Training Program with international dressage judge Axel Steiner at Second Level. L.C. and Kim have also ridden under such noted dressage clinicians as Lendon Gray, Lilo Fore and Alfredo Hernandez, always being the smallest horse and usually the only Morgan in the clinic.

We remember reading a comment by a noted Morgan breeder who stated that for Morgans to be competitive in dressage they needed to be "at least 16 hands." However, dressage today is not a sport that is about size or breed; it is about the training and talent of the horse and rider. In five years and under more than thirty different rated judges, we have never felt we were unfairly judged due to the size of our horse. It is interesting to note

that, according to the Morgan Dressage Association database, more than half of the Morgans who have competed through Grand Prix have been 15.2 hands or less, and approximately a third of them were under 15 hands. A horse's potential for dressage depends on many factors, but size is obviously of little importance. As most Morgans range between 14.1 and 15.2 hands, there are potentially many talented, athletic Morgans who are being overlooked because of this misguided notion that you need a "big" horse to be competitive in dressage. ■