

Rescue Horse Wins Silver Medal at World Championships –

Chester Weber's Jamaica – A Real Life Rags-To-Riches “Black Beauty” Story

Ocala, FL - If horses could talk, humans would certainly hear some amazing tales. The stories told by Jamaica, the 17-year-old combined driving horse that helped his owner Chester Weber win a silver medal at the FEI World Championships in The Netherlands, would be some of the most inspiring.

At first glance, the high-spirited champion combined driving horse bears little resemblance to the carriage horse in the childhood story Black Beauty. That's until you learn that the gelding was rescued from a slaughterhouse dealer and trained to become a tourist carriage horse.

Jamaica's humble beginnings as a carriage horse were cut short, however, because he wouldn't stand still. His antsy attitude didn't bode well for carting tourists from one location to the next. Just like Black Beauty, he was re-sold to a new owner as a driving horse.

Weber purchased Jamaica in Belgium in 2001, and the rest, as they say, is history. With his fabulous body type and superb movement, the horse that was headed for slaughter found himself headed to world-class competition instead, giving Jamaica a true rags-to-riches story.

Under the care and training of Weber, Jamaica's resume includes a stunning list of international and national wins. As a part of Weber's four-in-hand driving team, Jamaica has competed in two World Equestrian Games and four World Championships. His World Championship record is an impressive two firsts, one second and a third. On U.S. soil, Jamaica has been the team MVP for six consecutive National Championship wins. He is now poised to be the lead horse when Weber and his team try for a record breaking seventh National Championship in 2009.

While Jamaica's story is heartwarming, it is also the story of a horse who is a true competitor. “I have never had a horse with more spirit,” Weber said, adding that his training technique with the gelding involves “asking” him and not “forcing” him to work. “I like to think that working with Jamaica is like doing business with organized crime -- you need patience and understanding with this horse because if you aren't flexible it won't go your way.”

Jamaica's quirks extend beyond his training and into his daily life. “He is grumpy in his stall towards people and horses that he doesn't know. He likes to be stroked and not patted,” Weber said. “He is the kind of horse who will work with certain people but doesn't see any reason to be nice to some.”

Yet underneath that rough exterior lies the heart of a champion. “To this day Jamaica still bucks when he is excited in the lead and he is still the most forward horse at the end of every cross country marathon,” Weber said, adding that Jamaica also fulfills a dual role as wheel and lead horse in his four-in-hand combined driving team. “Only the great ones can do that. Jamaica can do any job, anywhere, any day.”

Combined driving is a fast and furious sport that requires a lot out of a horse, and despite Jamaica's age Weber doesn't see the horse slowing down anytime soon. Weber hopes that Jamaica will be on his team when the World Equestrian Games are held in Kentucky in 2010. “Jamaica loves to work,” Weber said. “He is better at shows than he is at home, but regardless, he shows up to work.”

When the day does come that Jamaica needs to retire, his Black Beauty story will have a fairy-tale ending. Jamaica will retire to Weber's Live Oak farm in Ocala to live out his days romping through the fields, with no thoughts of the slaughterhouse that was once his dismal future. "Without a doubt Jamaica will live with me," Weber said, adding with a laugh, "No one else would put up with him."

Photo: Jamaica is living a rags-to-riches story as part of Chester Weber's Four-In-Hand Combined Driving team. (Photo courtesy of My Elisabeth Weber)

