

# Expect the unexpected

Fleetstreet Max and Alisa Bernhard become the first team to win two all-around titles at a single World Show.

By Jessica Hein

They're not strangers to the spotlight. With a total of 15 world championship and five reserve world championship titles under their belt, the Germantown, Wisconsin, superstar team of Alisa Bernhard and her 1997 sorrel overo gelding, Fleetstreet Max, is among the most successful in the Paint Horse industry.

But, their triumphs at this year's World Show were made even sweeter when they became the first horse-and-rider combination to win the all-around horse and the all-around Amateur titles in a single year.

Although she and "Max" are show ring veterans, even Alisa wasn't prepared for this much success. After all, the

trainer who usually helps them prepare for the World Show was unavailable this year.

"Usually, we work with John Briggs before the World Show, but he committed to judging Youth events [at the World Show], so I couldn't use him this year," Alisa said. "He also usually shows Max in the Senior trail and the Senior Western riding."

Since 2002, Alisa and Max have spent many of their summers traveling to shows with Briggs and typically spend an intense two weeks training at his Pilot Point, Texas, barn immediately before the World Show.

Because Briggs wasn't available for the Open Western events, Alisa had to make a decision. Although she had never shown Max in Senior trail or Senior Western riding at the World, she elected to try.

Most of Max's preparation for this year's World Show fell on Alisa's shoulders. She and Max traveled across the country during the spring, using horse shows to help identify areas that needed improvement. Two weeks before the World Show, Alisa brought Max home to Wisconsin and worked with him on her own.

"I'd ride him half-an-hour each day, and if he was good, I was done and I'd leave him alone until the next day," Alisa said. "He was pretty much perfect every single day."

Going into the World Show, Alisa's expectations were lower than in years past. She enlisted the help of trainer David Miller, whom she had met while Miller was working for Briggs in 2003. During the show, Miller schooled Alisa and Max before their classes and sometimes in the early-morning hours.

"There were maybe two nights where David and I got up at three in the morning because that was the only time we could school without a mil-



Winning world titles in four jumping classes gave Alisa Bernhard and Fleetstreet Max vital points toward their all-around wins.



Alisa's Amateur horsemanship win marked her best finish in the event at the World Show.

lion people," Alisa said. "We would go through the patterns at that time."

"Then, when it came time for our class, I really didn't have to practice that much. I felt confident that we could get through it because we had already practiced it."

Alisa and Max were entered in 14 classes—nine Amateur and five Open. Although they weren't specifically trying to win an all-around award, Alisa planned to try her hardest in each class. One goal was to do well in the Open Senior trail class.

"I wanted to do well in the Senior trail because Max had won it last year and I knew that I could go in there and put in a good go," she said. "I was trying to defend the buckle, but I didn't think it would actually happen."

But it did happen, and along with her win in the Amateur horsemanship 19-44 only a few days earlier—a class in which Alisa had never placed above sixth—the stage was set for a memorable World Show.

For Alisa and Max, the stars seemed to align and they continued to win championships day after day. The duo took home seven world championships—Senior trail, Senior working hunter, Amateur hunt-seat equitation 19-44, Amateur horsemanship 19-44, Amateur working hunter, Amateur Western riding and Amateur hunter hack—and two reserve world championships—Senior hunter hack and Amateur trail 19-44.

They also earned two top five finishes, in Amateur Senior hunter under saddle 19-44 and Amateur Senior Western pleasure 19-44, and a top 10 finish in Amateur showmanship at halter 19-44.

Alisa and Max's success gave them 73 points toward the all-around horse title and 198 points toward all-around Amateur. Because they had substantial leads in both categories—they outdistanced their nearest competitors by 37 and 56 points, respectively—Alisa and Max easily won both titles.

Max's consistent performances also earned him the Super Gelding award.

Alisa says she was especially shocked to win the all-around horse award.

"I can't believe this all came together," she said. "We're shaking our heads in disbelief."

"Winning the Open all-around was a goal I had set for him to achieve at some time in his life. I really wanted him to win it because I knew he could, not thinking at all that it could have been done this year."

Having been a team since Max's birth—Max was bred by Alisa's mother, Susan, and Alisa mostly trained the gelding herself—it's safe to say that a bond has formed between horse and rider.

"He's 9 now, and I feel like he's just to the point where he's getting very comfortable in what he's doing and getting very broke," Alisa said. "He totally understands what I want from him."

The gelding's versatility helped Alisa successfully compete in several events, and she thinks the World

Show judges could tell that Max enjoys showing.

"Everything is so easy for him, and he can switch from one class to another with no problem," Alisa said. "When you watch him show, he really does enjoy what he is doing. He's got great expression and his ears are up."

Back in Wisconsin, Max has settled into his pasture for a well-deserved vacation. While Alisa and Max may not attend every show they had planned on this fall, she has no intention of putting him out to pasture for good.

"He's still young, and he's not sour and he's not unsound," Alisa said. "I still enjoy showing him, and he still enjoys being shown."

In the meantime, Alisa plans to begin training some of Max's full- and half-siblings at her farm. With a little luck, she might raise another world champion.

#### A storybook ending

A surprise was also in store for Brighton, Colorado, resident Elizabeth Banister and her horse, The Unexpected. An unsuccessful quest for the High-Point English Performance Horse Award netted them a solid, yet unexpected, finish as the reserve all-around horse.

"At the very end, he fell behind in English and I was not even monitoring the All-Around [Horse award]," said Karen Banister, Elizabeth's

mother. "I didn't get the call until late Friday afternoon, and we were already on the way home to Denver."

The team of Elizabeth and The Unexpected, a 1998 sorrel overo gelding, is a relatively new one. Although "Chester" has been in training with Karen for about one-and-a-half years, Elizabeth only recently purchased him.

When Elizabeth's mount Indivisible was hurt at a show earlier this year, she didn't think she would be able to finish showing in her last Youth year. Then, Chester's owners made him available for Elizabeth to show.

"Jim and Victoria Eggers made it affordable for a graduating senior to have that horse for her last year of Youth," Karen said. "They were neat folks for doing that, and we will forever be grateful for that because it made a neat ending to her last year of Youth."

With only a few months before the World Show, Elizabeth and Karen worked diligently to prepare Chester. At the World Show, he was entered in a variety of Open and Youth events, including driving, over fences and pattern classes. Karen rode and drove the gelding in Open events, and Elizabeth rode him in Youth competition.

Their hard work paid off, although in a different form than they had anticipated. Chester netted a world championship in Youth jumping, in addition to top five finishes in Youth

hunter hack 14-18, Youth working hunter, Senior working hunter and utility pleasure driving. Chester also earned top 10 finishes in jumping, Senior hunter hack and Senior pleasure driving.

Chester and Karen accumulated 36 points on the way to securing the reserve all-around horse title.

Karen says Chester's overall quality makes him stand out to the judges.

"I think they appreciate that he maintained the quality of a specialty horse, yet I think they appreciated that he was able to maintain that quality in a variety of classes," she said.

This was not Chester's first taste of World Show success. The gelding jumped into the limelight at last year's show, claiming the reserve world championship in the green working hunter class.

Although Chester's time with the Banisters has been short, his talents have blossomed. Karen believes the gelding's willingness to try separates him from other horses.

"Even if he doesn't exactly understand the task, he'll keep trying for you," Karen said. "That is going to make him successful."

Elizabeth is attending Baylor University this fall, but Karen hopes she will come home in her spare time and help continue Chester's competitive career. P



A top 10 finish in Senior pleasure driving helped The Unexpected win the reserve all-around horse title.