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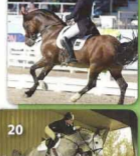
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**On the Cover**  
Shakespeare of Rolling Stone Farm in Pennsylvania, winner of the 70-Day Stallion Test.  
*Photo © Susan J. Sobole*

4 March/April 2010



# CARDI

## The Little Horse That Could

A 14.3-hand sport horse stallion from rural Oregon demonstrates that good dressage horses sometimes come in small—and very determined—packages.

*By Pat Payne*

**Cindy Miller knows** the value of trusting her instincts. Back in 2001, Cindy, of Winterlake Welsh Cob Farm in Pleasant Hill, Oregon, saw a newborn colt and knew she was seeing a horse she was meant to own. Nine years and many wins in the dressage arena later, her immediate and intuitive response to a little Welsh Cob named North Forks Cardi has been more than justified.

Last year, Cardi showed impressive results in his second year at Prix St. Georges and his first at Intermediare I. This 14.3 hand stallion's 2009 accomplishments included winning the FEI Freestyle Championships at both Dressage at Devonwood (Oregon) and the Oregon Dressage Society Championship Show. He also won his I-1 classes at shows around the Northwest. Ultimately, Cindy's sights were set on competing him across the country at the prestigious annual event, Dressage at Devon in Pennsylvania. Could Cardi do it?

**FINDING CARDI**

Since she had previously purchased youngsters from breeder Carol Holcombe, a longtime friend and colleague, Carol would let her know when there were babies she really needed to see. That year, Carol called with some urgency, saying there were foals Cindy really needed to see.

"I saw Cardi for the first time when he was two weeks old. I saw him trot and I said 'I want that one!' I kept reminding Carol that I wanted him. I saw his sparkle even

at that age," Cindy recounts. "I just fell in love. And I've stayed in love!"

Despite his occasional antics and sense of fun, Cindy says Cardi as a youngster was pleasant to handle and respectful. "It was just easy to be around him," she explains. As a yearling, Cardi had his show ring debut in an in-hand class. As is typical for his age, he was going through an awkward time unfortunately—what Cindy calls his "linguini phase"—so he pulled respectably, but didn't win any championships. Still, her high hopes for his future were undiminished and she planned to use him as a driving horse. She also planned to stand him as a stallion and he started breeding live cover at age two. Since she knew he would need something to help him maintain his focus in and out of the breeding shed, she decided it was time to start Cardi under saddle.

Cindy decided it was also time for Cardi to be inspected for breed approval. She approached Washington-based dressage trainer Jessica Wisdom after seeing her handling horses at a Dutch Warmblood inspection and asked her to handle Cardi's inspection. Initially unsure, Jessica agreed to present Cardi at his American Sport Pony Registration (ASPR) inspection and arrived the day beforehand at the inspection site.

"And there was Cardi," Jessica recounts with a laugh, "with a long mane and undipped. We set up a little beauty parlor, got him ready and presented him the next day!" The inspection was a success: Cardi emerged with an ASPR First Premium Approval and commendations for

his jumping ability. Cindy liked how Jessica handled Cardi at the inspection and asked her to begin working with him under saddle. Jessica started him in January of his three-year-old year. This is, she feels, the optimum starting time for young horses, especially stallions. For youngsters, she tries to keep the pressure that can come with specialization off. "For the first few months, all they have to do is go, stop, turn—and not buck you off," she says with a laugh. "It's too soon to ask for anything else."

After working with him for a few months, however, Jessica recommended that Cindy consider more formal dressage training for Cardi. "I thought he was really special and could compete with the big horses in dressage," she explains. Cindy agreed and ultimately presented an unexpected opportunity to Jessica: she offered partnership in Cardi in return for Jessica's time and training skills. Jessica swiftly agreed and their three-way partnership became official.

"It was an easy decision for me to make. This is a soul mate partnership—he's my best friend," Jessica says with a laugh. "How could I let that go? We joke that I went to Europe three times looking for my next dressage competitive horse and finally found a pony here in Oregon."

**COMPETITIVELY SPEAKING**

At age three, Cardi entered the competitive dressage ring for the first time, winning his Training Level class. In fact, he was USDF Region 6 Open and Regional Training Level Champion that year, with a score of 72.5%.

From there, Cardi continued to move up the levels, winning all in both. As a four year old, he competed successfully in the way First Level dressage and sanctioned Welsh shows, mostly in English Pleasure. At five, he was the USDF Region 6 Second Level Champion with a score of 69% and Northwest Reserve Champion with a score of 70%. As a six year old, he was Third Level Champion at Donida (in Auburn, Washington), scoring 71.6%. At



Cardi at the center during Dressage at Devon. *Photo © Terri Miller.*

seven, he made the move to Prix St. Georges, taking the championships at both the USDF Letter Perfect and Champagne Classic Shows.

Last year, Cindy and Jessica moved Cardi up to Intermediare I, while continuing to compete him at PSG. In April, Jessica took him to the Golden State Dressage Festival in Rancho Murieta, California, where they won the PGG class with a score of 66.1% and placed third in their I-1 debut. "It was amazing to see him win against all those big, imported horses!" Cindy exclaims.

As the year continued and the wins kept stacking up, Cindy and Jessica made a major decision: they would take their little horse across the country to compete in Pennsylvania at one of the country's most prestigious dressage events. But things didn't go quite as they planned.

**DRESSAGE AT DEVON**

The entire year was, Cindy says, "a pinch-me experience, simply a magic carpet ride!" Dressage at Devon, held in September, was when the magic carpet threatened to come crashing down. Jessica and a groom made the 3,081-mile trip with three horses, using their own trailer and doing their own driving. On the first day, they had a tire blow out, which took hours to get repaired. When they finally arrived in Pennsylvania, they stayed with a friend for two nights before moving to the showgrounds. During those two days, Cardi somehow kicked himself, injuring his hind fetlock.

The next days saw Jessica and her groom icing the injured joint four to five times a day and anxiously consulting the show's veterinarian. Despite their hard work, Jessica was forced to scratch Cardi from his first class at Devon's breed show—Stallions Four and Older Under Saddle. It was heartbreakingly comical, Cindy says, but the only choice she could comfortably make. There was never a question, she continues—the two are very protective of their stallion and Cardi's well-

Cardi performing a half-pass. *Photo by Studio Equus/Amy E Riley.*

being would always come first. So victory was particularly sweet when it came the next day: Cardi won the Stallions Four and Older In Hand with a score of 76.76%. When the breed show ended, Cardi was named Reserve Champion overall, won the "Born in the USA" high-point award for domestic-bred stallions and was the East Coast Series Final Grand Champion Stallion in the Great American/USDF Breeder's Championship Series.

In his classes at the open dressage show, Cardi performed well despite his recent injury—and the fact that he had not been ridden for more than two weeks! He placed in the top 15 in both his I-1 and I-1 Freestyle classes, competing against a list of horses and riders that reads like a "Who's Who" of American competitive dressage. In fact, Cesar Parra won both classes. For Cindy and Jessica, who are competing on what Cindy calls a financial shoestring, keeping such company was a thrill indeed. "We never dreamed," Jessica says, "that he'd make it to Devon!"

"It was just an amazing week for all of us," Cindy recounts. "There were so many drool-worthy animals to see at that show that I hardly knew where to look! And, of course, we were incredibly proud of Cardi. This is a horse that just never says 'no!'"

In that way, Cindy continues, Cardi is a typical Welsh Cob. "Their work ethic is so strong that they will do anything you ask," she explains. "Because they are so willing, the trick is in not asking too much too soon!"

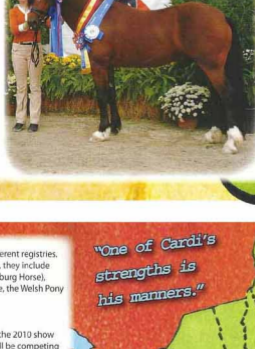
Trainer Jessica and Cardi display his multiple stallion awards. *Photo by Ginger Mack.*

**BIG HEART IN A SMALL PACKAGE**

Cardi's small size has always attracted attention and comments from other competitors, Jessica says. "In the beginning, we got a lot of 'did you put him in a dryer?' jokes. And when he's walking out on the buckle, people don't pay much attention to him," she explains wryly. "But when I put him on the bit and he goes to work, you can see everyone stop and take notice."

"We don't get many comments any more, because more people know him—he's more than proved himself against the big horses," she continues. "You'll never find a horse

that tries as hard as this one. He'll never come out and says he won't try today—he just never does. And everyone who watches him work sees how hard he's willing to try."



Cardi has been approved by a number of different registries. In addition to the American Sport Pony Registry, they include Weser Ems (a pony registry related to the Oldenburg horse), Rheinland Pfalz-Saar International and, of course, the Welsh Pony & Cob Society of America.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

Now Cardi is back in Washington preparing for the 2010 show season. The 14.3 1/2-hand sport horse stallion will be competing at I-1 again this year, consolidating his training and building strength before, hopefully, making another move up the levels to Grand Prix. As part of their partnership agreement, Jessica keeps Cardi at Monaco Stable in Yelm, Washington, near her home.

The pair plan to compete at California's Festival of the Horse CDI in April, then return to Ranch Murieta, the scene of several of their past successes. Later in the year they will show at Washington's Champagne Classic and, hopefully, qualify for the regional championships. Jessica and Cindy are still planning the rest of their 2010 show season.

In addition, Jessica says, she wants to continue to develop the pair's successful musical freestyle. They may even perform a pas-de-deux later this year!

One of Cardi's strengths is his manners, Cindy says, which are so good that Jessica will sometimes use him for lessons. Part of that may come from the many activities he's allowed to take part in, she adds, keeping him from getting bored or ring sour. "I trail rode him when I had him at my farm and Jessica still does," she explains. "We make sure he lives the life of a normal horse, in spite of his competitive and breeding success. I never wanted him to spend his life in a stall!" In addition to his dressage schooling, Jessica trail rides Cardi and jumps him on the cross-country course. She even occasionally uses him to move cattle!

"You never know what can happen in life," Cindy says. "I try to live without too many expectations and that's what makes all this so exciting. We are so humbled, honored and grateful to have this horse in our lives and to feel the respect of our competitors."

When they say "size doesn't matter," it certainly applies to Cardi. His heart is just as big as any 17 hand sport horse stallion out there! And what makes it all worthwhile? Cindy answers without hesitation. "All three of us are having fun!" **W**



Remember Cardi on the beach in California? *Photo © Terri Miller.*

"One of Cardi's strengths is his manners."

"You'll never find a horse that tries as hard as this one."