

Cover Story

Afires Vision

by Mary Kirkman

“There hasn’t been a challenge we’ve put in front of him that he hasn’t met,” marvels Bob Battaglia about the mega-talented Afires Vision, who stands at Battaglia Farms. Windwalker Enterprises’ 10-year-old stallion has methodically knocked down top titles in the English show ring over the past three years, and is now putting sons and daughters in competition that are picking up the habit. At the 2009 Scottsdale show, Second Sight (featured on the cover) drew a standing ovation when he trotted away with the Half-Arabian English Pleasure Championship.

Much was expected of Afires Vision when he was purchased by Karen and Olivia Stull in late 2005 and put in training at Battaglia Farms—but even his owners and trainer didn’t expect how fully the stallion would deliver. He opened 2006 with a Scottsdale reserve championship in English pleasure before switching to the park division, where in two seasons he notched a Scottsdale championship, a Youth national championship, and two top tens in U.S. Nationals open competition. In 2008, he put pleasure driving on his resume with Scottsdale and Canadian national championships, then added a reserve at U.S. Nationals. At the same time, he was the Canadian National Reserve Champion in English Pleasure and top ten in the division’s AAOTR 40 and Over division. Rounding off a blockbuster year, he won the U.S. National Championship in Informal Combination and the reserve championship in pleasure driving.

That is eight national titles in three divisions in three years. At the same time, he was serving as a solidly-booked breeding stallion—and making friends with his engaging, agreeable attitude.

“Vision’s got a big heart,” says owner Karen Stull. “He’ll do whatever you ask him to do.” Even so, she shakes her head at the magnitude of the stallion’s accomplishments. “We knew he was good; we didn’t really know he was as good as he’s turned out to be.”

“He’s been a national champion in open, amateur and juvenile,” Russ Vento reflects. “That is not just talent; that has to go back to his pedigree and willingness to train.”

The stallion’s pedigree is a long-recognized blueprint of ability in the English division and longevity in the show ring. A son of Afire Bey V, Afires Vision is out of Matoskette, a daughter of three-time U.S. National Champion park horse Zodiac Matador. But Matoskette brings more to the table than just Matador: her tail female line includes Mi Toska, who was a Canadian National Champion Mare and U.S. National Champion in Pleasure Driving, as well as top ten in U.S. English Pleasure and mare halter. The combination of Afire Bey V and Matoskette offers three crosses to *Bask, as well as such proven names as Huckleberry Bey, Toi, and for extreme beauty, the Negatiw line through *Naborr.

Most important, Vento emphasizes, has been the attitude and trainability exhibited generation after generation. “In any stallion’s career, trainability is critical,” he says. “Afires Vision is structurally built for English and park, and that seems to be what he’s producing. His offspring have great size and length of leg, and they represent Arabian type. The young ones that we have are really showing the athletic ability and trainability to get them to do anything.”

With the oldest purebreds just now coming on line, the stallion's early standard bearers have been Half-Arabians, such as Scottsdale Champion Second Sight. "Second Sight was amazing," Vento says of the gelding's performance. "He's 16.1, grey, impressive, and Bob could ride him through fire if he wanted."

There is a growing corps of national and regional champions on the books as well. Trainer Josh Quintus shows Victory Visionn, who will be at the U.S. Nationals this year in Half-Arabian country English pleasure open. "I really love him," Quintus says frankly. "He's a great horse. He's a big horse; he's probably 16.2 or so, and one of the best things about him is his neck—he just has an incredible neck, the way it's placed on his shoulders and the way it bends up onto his poll. It's one of those things that makes his job way easier."

Victory Visionn has a go-ahead attitude as well. "He's gung-ho," Quintus confirms. "He comes out ready to do his job everyday—doesn't argue with you about it, just wants to go and do it. He loves it. When I work him every day, it takes us only about 10 or 15 minutes to go through the steps."

Ashton Kiesner is equally enthusiastic about the mare Divine Vision, who is in training with her husband, Joel. "She's very big—long-necked, long-legged—and very beautiful. She has a good head on her shoulders, too; her owner has ridden her a lot and could easily show her, which is saying a lot for a 4-year-old. She has the qualities to be a great show horse—attitude and talent."

Like her sire, Divine Vision is experiencing professional competition (her second appearance in the show ring netted a top five at Region 14), and is slated for amateur in the future.

"Bob and I are so impressed with Afires Vision and what he is capable of doing that we bought both of his full brothers," Vento says. One of the colts was sold when they got an offer they couldn't refuse, but the other remains at Battaglia Farms. "It's that pedigree that is coming through. If you know a horse will train, and has a brain and can be open or amateur, that's a huge factor. You want horses that are athletic. It doesn't matter if they are English, hunter, reining or what; if they are athletic and can perform and do something, that's an extra benefit."

The buzz being generated by the Afires Vision sons and daughters now is heating up as more of them grow up and enter the show ring—and as more people note the "Vision stamp" that he bestows. To encourage even more participation, the Stulls recognized the uncertain economy by dropping his stud fee to enable breeders with good mares to participate. "The goal of any young stallion's breeding career is to get the babies out there," Vento explains. "That is what will make the stallion."

They have not had to work hard to generate interest; Afires Vision has been his own best advertisement, winning in the open ranks and now further developing his career as Karen Stull's amateur partner.

"He is such a blast to ride," Stull smiles. "Very forward-moving. And he's so fun to be around! When I come in the barn and he hears my voice, he comes over, and his ears are up and his face

is pressed against the bars of his stall. He'll call to me to get my attention—he wants to be petted. He likes treats and carrots, of course, but he doesn't really care about them; he just likes to be petted. He's a very busy breeding stallion, but he's such a personable, sweet horse. I see that in his offspring too. If you talk to the people that have them, they'll tell you the same thing."

Lollie Ames, asked about Cedar Ridge's 2009 filly by Afires Vision, agrees. "She's beautiful!" she responds enthusiastically, and offers, "I've always liked him." She adds that the selection of the stallion was natural for them; they know his talent and ability better than most. "We've competed against him!"

So what is the challenge facing Afires Vision now? It's just a race with time: How great will his legacy be?