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Cover photo by  
Shelley Higgins,  
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# Area Horsemen Fare Well at Prestigious Royal Agricultural Winter Fair

By **Kim MacMillan**  
Freelance Writer

At least three drivers and one rider from the Equine Times coverage area made the trip north to Toronto, Canada, to compete in the 95th renewal of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in November. For some it was their first appearance and others had been competing there for years, but all agreed that there is no place quite like the atmosphere at the Royal Winter Fair.

Each year the Royal brings together draft horses, hunters, jumpers, eventers, dressage horses, Hackneys, roadster ponies and road horses, Arabians, Welsh Ponies, and sport horses along with classes for livestock, crops, butter sculpting, garden produce, honey, maple syrup, jams and jellies and beer and wine. Mixed in for extra fun at the Fair is live entertainment, educational opportunities for kids and adults, a wide variety of food and beverages, and a huge shopping area. While the custom of dressing in evening wear to view the night-time horse show performances has virtually died out at big shows in the U.S., it remains a big part of the ambiance at the Royal too.

**All Star Percherons Continue Royal Success:** The All Star Percheron Hitch from Bellevue, Michigan, finished out a very successful competition year in their eighth appearance at the Royal where they won the Percheron Uni-

corn Hitch, Percheron Four-Horse Hitch, the Percheron Six-Horse Hitch, the Percheron Two-Wheeled Cart and took Reserve Champion Royal Six-Horse Hitch Championship over all of the draft breeds participating.

All Star driver Ross Honsberger, 33, talked about their competition year with the all-mare

hitch, "We've had the best year we've ever had showing. We actually competed in the North American Classic Series Finals down in Oklahoma and came out victorious in the Six-Horse Hitch Championship. We were real happy with that; we were very fortunate. You show three nights and they combine the scores. You have



1-The All Star Percheron Hitch from Bellevue, Michigan, owned by the Dingman and Wagner families and driven by Ross Honsberger accompanied by his wife Nicole on the box seat. The hitch won the Percheron Six-Horse Hitch Class and was Reserve Champion in the Royal Six-Horse Hitch Championship (all breeds). The hitch horses are all mares ; listed from the driver's perspective (position in hitch, name and age): right wheel horse, Miss, 5; left wheel horse, Silk, 7; right swing horse, Candy, 5; left swing horse, Ellie, 5; right lead horse, Tory, 5, and left lead horse, Queen, 9. Photo by Shelley Higgins/MacMillan Photography



The Smart Cabinetry Belgian Hitch from New Paris, Indiana, was driven by Bud Miller, Three Rivers, Michigan. The hitch horses are all mares ; listed from the driver's perspective (position in hitch, name and age): right wheel horse, Patsy, 4; left wheel horse, Terra, 7; right swing horse, Belle, 7; left swing horse, Cindy, 4; right lead horse, Brittany, 4, and left lead horse, Angie, 4. Photo by Shelley Higgins/MacMillan Photography



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Misdee Wrigley-Miller and her husband James Miller, Hillcroft Farm, Paris, Kentucky, won both of the Four-in-Hand Coaching Suitable for Pleasure Classes and the Green Meadows Four-in-Hand Class, with their team of four Dutch Harness Horses put to a Park Drag.

Photo by Shelley Higgins/MacMillan Photography

to qualify to make it. You have to earn points at all of the shows you go to throughout the year; kind of like a NASCAR thing. The top four hitches from each breed make it. Actually, the team that we were beat by tonight [at the Royal] were Reserve Champion at the North American Classic, so we've been battling all year."

Although he did spend a few years working with Belgian draft horses, most of the time Honsberger has shown Percherons because his family and his wife's family both have Percherons. The All Star hitch is owned cooperatively between two families, Doyle and Renee Dingman, who are his wife Nicole's parents, and the Wagner family, who are farmers and own a trucking company in Ohio. All told the two families have over 25 years of experience showing Percherons. Honsberger was driving for the Wagners when he met his wife and that's when

the two families came together in the hitch.

Honsberger said that the Royal is the end of their show season for 2017. "We are going to go home now and pull shoes and have some babies. Quite a few of the mares in our hitch are in foal. The first foals on the farm are due in January and the mares in our hitch will start to foal in February. We still have our stallion Bellevue Crown Royal, but a couple of the mares are related to him, so we also have a couple of different outside stallions that we used too."

**Smart Cabinetry Belgian Hitch Shows Well at Royal:** The Smart Cabinetry Belgian Hitch from New Paris, Indiana, was also successful at the Royal this year. They won the Belgian Two-Wheeled Cart Registered Mares class, the Two-Horse Team Registered Belgian Mares, were third in the Belgian Six-Horse Hitch class and fourth in the Belgian Unicorn Hitch Class.

Smart Cabinetry driver Bud Miller said that this year was his sixth time competing at the Royal, which he won in 2010 and 2012 with a team of Belgian geldings owned by Wilderness Ridge Belgians in Iron Mountain, Michigan. This year's Smart Cabinetry Team of six Belgian mares is owned by Miller's cousin Marlin Miller who has a 250-acre Amish Farm in New Paris. The Miller farm is expecting 29 foals in 2018.

Bud said that while the family Belgian breeding operation remains in Indiana, he and his immediate family moved to a training facility in Three Rivers, Michigan about five months ago where they have 65 acres, an indoor arena and 16 stalls for the show hitch live and practice. "The Wilderness Ridge Belgians are still showing, but I just got a job offer to come home and show these mares for my cousin. Now I am home with family plus doing what I love," said Bud.

He talked about the Smart Cabinetry Hitch's 2017 show season and why he enjoys showing at the Royal, "We just came back from Raleigh, NC, and we took first place there. And we went to Georgia and took first there. We did about 15 shows this year. I just love it at the Royal, the atmosphere and the stands are full. It's pretty cool."

## **Kentucky Drivers James & Misdee Miller Compete In Royal Green Meadows Coaching Classes:**

James Miller and Misdee Wrigley-Miller from Hillcroft Farm in Paris, Kentucky, made the trek to Toronto to compete in the elegant Green Meadows Coaching Division at the Royal. The coaching classes showcase antique coaches and teams of four horses complete with fancy costumes for driver and passengers, a coaching horn player, fancy picnic spreads and other beautiful appointments. For the Royal the Miller's team of four bay Dutch Harness Horses was put to a beautiful dark blue Park Drag and James and Misdee alternated driving in the various classes.

The Hillcroft Farm team won both of the Four-in-Hand Coaching Suitable for Pleasure Classes and the Green Meadows Four-in-Hand Class, placed third in the Unicorn Hitch and Coaching Appointments Classes and fourth in the Four-in-Hand Coaching Performance Class. Wrigley-Miller represented the U.S.A. in combined driving at the 2014 FEI World Equestrian Games in Normandy, France.

At Hillcroft Farm the couple raises American Saddlebred horses and also bases their driving and polo activities at the farm as well. Besides coaching classes and combined driving, they also compete in pleasure driving, Saddlebred shows and polo. About half of Hillcroft



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A close-up of the intricate and colorful Arabian native costume that Milford, Michigan, rider Stephanie Kelts and her horse My Generation wore at the Royal Winter Fair this year. Photo by Sarah Miller/MacMillan Photography

Amateur rider and pediatric nurse Stephanie Kelts, Milford, Michigan, rode her 15-year-old Arabian gelding My Generation to ribbons in the Arabian Native Costume and Country Pleasure Classes at the Royal this year. It was her first visit to the Royal Winter Fair. Photo by Sarah Miller/MacMillan Photography

Farm's acreage is devoted to agricultural crops including hay, soybeans, corn and wheat. The couple also has a residence in Lakewood Ranch, Florida.

Wrigley-Miller's great grandfather, William Wrigley, Jr. founded the Wrigley's Chewing Gum Company. Wrigley-Miller currently serves on the United States Equestrian Federation Breeders' Committee.

**Michigan Native Kelts Competes in Arabian Showcase at the Royal:** Stephanie Kelts, Milford, Michigan, and her 15-year-old Arabian gelding My Generation participated in the two Arabian showcase classes, the Country Pleasure and Arabian Native Costume classes, during this year's Royal Winter Fair. They placed fifth in Country Pleasure and eighth in Costume against competition from Canada and the U.S.A.

She talked about her first time showing at the Royal and sharing the experience with her husband Jim, "It was great. I think that they do a wonderful job of making everybody feel welcome. I think the facility is really neat; it's very different from things I am used to. I think that they do an excellent job of hosting all of these shows [at one venue.] Especially since my husband isn't very horsey, I thought it was great to be able to show him one place to be able to experience all of these breeds. We do a lot of shows locally and we travel a lot to shows — to

Oklahoma and Ohio and other places — but there is no other place where you can see something like this. So, educationally it was wonderful to be able to share it with my husband."

Kelts, who rides as an amateur and is a full-time pediatric care nurse, trains with Zach and Lisa Powell of Powell Training Stables in Hastings, Michigan, and boards My Generation, a.k.a. "Fletcher." "I highly recommend them," said Kelts of the Powells, "If anybody is looking for an Arabian trainer or just a good trainer, I recommend them. They are wonderful!"

The Kelts also keep several other Arabians and Half-Arabians at home. Their two children, a four-year-old daughter named Tennley and a six-year-old son named Tristan, and they both ride Arabians too. "We have some older Arabians that they ride. They have both ridden since they were 18 months. My son shows now on his own and he did the 'Show Me' shows and did the Walk-Only Classes this year and my daughter is still doing Lead-Line. Then, next year my friend has a wonderful Half Arab [for Tristan to show] and Zack and Lisa are going to help him move up to Walk-Trot Classes," explained Kelts.

Kelts' beautiful blue and gold native costume was made by her friend Carol Jackson. She said that Fletcher already had costume experience when she purchased him at the Arabian Nationals five years ago, so getting him used to the new costume wasn't too difficult.

However, special care and training is involved in introducing a horse to wearing the costume if they haven't done it before. Kelts talked about the process of introducing a horse to costume, "A majority of time you introduce a horse to the costume piece by piece. Most of these show horses are used to wearing coolers and blankets and things like that, so the body pieces aren't so much. But, there are a lot of things that jingle on the costume and in the class, it is a canter-hand gallop class, so the horses are like, "Woo, I get to go, and pick my head up and run around and there are a lot of things flying around!"

Since the Royal is a show with a lot going on, Kelts said that a good trust bond between horse and rider is necessary to have a good experience there. She said that the Powells spend lots of time making sure to not only train the horses, but also to train their riders to ride their horses even through potentially scary situations.

"Fletcher handled the Royal show atmosphere well," shared Kelts. "I am really lucky he did so great. He did look around a lot and at the six-horse draft hitcher — it was really cute, he got really big and really snorty, but he has such a good mind. He was my choice to bring here. Everyone thinks that Arabians can be hot, but really they are very sensible and once they learn and understand what is going on they take it in stride. Like today, we had to go through all of the draft horses getting hitched on the way to the ring and then back through all of the hackneys coming out of their carriages on the way out and he was excellent."