

Quite A Star Is More Than A Bridesmaid At Sallie B. Wheeler/USEF/USHJA Hunter Breeding National Championships

After making an important wedding appearance, she earns her own spotlight on the line.

By **Martha Drum**

Photo By **JUMP Media/Molly Sorge**

It's been a busy summer for Emily Anne Belin-McDonnell, and not only because she swept the overall champion and reserve titles at the Sallie B. Wheeler/USEF/USHJA Hunter Breeding National Championships with North Hill Farm's Quite A Star and Linda Mancini's Caberneigh. Quite A Star topped the 2-year-old filly class and earned the Sallie B. Wheeler East Coast Best Young Horse in Lexington, Virginia, Aug. 24, and Caberneigh finished just behind her in the class and as reserve East Coast—and they then topped the overall grand championship, which included horses judged in Del Mar, California, on Aug. 28.

In addition to her professional wins, Belin-McDonnell's personal life also featured some excitement: On July 5 she married Cory McDonnell, who surprised her by arranging for Quite A Star to make an appearance at their wedding.

"She's so easy, and plus she's beautiful, so we used her for our engagement photos," said Belin-McDonnell, of Magic Hill Farms in Honey Brook, Pennsylvania.

The wedding took place at a fancy, non-horse-friendly venue, but the bridegroom organized a plan to let the 2-year-old Oldenburg filly (Qredit Hilltop—Feiner Dance, Feiner Stern) crash the party.

"Cory had my staff help him get her loaded up. They had her all wrapped, and he came driving up in our rig as we started getting ready for pictures," Belin-McDonnell recalled. "She walked right off the truck, and she stood and posed, quiet as could be, didn't get any dirt on my dress. That's just the kind of horse that she is."

Breeder Margaret Sherman of Delaware trusted her instincts when she acquired Quite A Star's dam, Feiner Dance. "She was a little difficult, but I saw something in her," Sherman said. "She's the smartest horse I ever owned."

Belin-McDonnell, who has campaigned several other horses out of Feiner Dance, credits her professional relationship with Sherman for changing her life. "Meg Sherman has become a wonderful friend who's like family through the horses, and that's one of the things that I love about the business," she said.

When Sherman was ready to sell the mare, in foal with Quite A Star at the time, Belin-McDonnell made the connection with Maggie Neider at North Hill Farm in Fabius, New York.

"I really wanted to make sure that I kept a good, watchful eye on Feiner Dance and her foals," Belin-McDonnell said. "I needed the perfect partner to do that,



Quite A Star, handled by Emily Anne Belin-McDonnell, won the East Coast Best Young Horse title before being crowned the Sallie B. Wheeler/USEF/USHJA Hunter Breeding national champion. Belin-McDonnell displayed her awards with husband Cory McDonnell and Susan Weigand.

and I was so happy to have Maggie Neider be the one. She and her husband are dairy farmers, and they are the most humble, kind, down-to-earth, nice, family-oriented folks you'd ever meet."

Overall reserve champion Caberneigh's dam, Special Consideration, had also produced several foals for owner Linda Mancini, an R-rated judge and trainer based at Winner's Circle Farm in Warwick, New York, and Ocala, Florida. After being impressed with Cabardino's get in

the show ring, she decided to give the Holsteiner stallion a try.

"There are an awful lot of really nice horses that are bred here [in North America]," Mancini said. "There are a lot of beautiful homebreds, and you don't have to go to Europe to find them."

The resulting filly almost missed the opportunity to impress the judges on the line this year. "I'm in Florida for the whole winter, and she was out in my field," said