

Winner of the 2012 AN TOSTAL Hall of Fame Trophy

Balmullo's Beacon; My Horse of a Lifetime By Vanessa Morgan (January 2)

If the An Tostal Trophy is meant for stallions who have been outstanding representatives of the Connemara breed, Balmullo's Beacon is certainly deserving. He has achieved much fame and recognition for both himself and the breed from his excellent performance record both in the show ring and in the breeding shed. Balmullo's Beacon has led many equine enthusiasts to become devotees of the breed with his displays of talent, disposition and beauty.

Balmullo's Beacon is a 14.3 hand gray registered purebred Connemara (ACPS S545 XXXI), born in 1992, bred by Donna Duckworth in Alachua, Florida. He was sired by Aladdin (Erin Laddie x Fox Ridge Irish Lady), who has also won the American Connemara Pony Society's Hall of Fame "An Tostal" Trophy for outstanding performance stallions. Aladdin was owned by Catherine Mack in Virginia. Donna had leased a mare from May Medley in Georgia to breed to Aladdin. That mare was Tullymor's April Fool (Montully's Son x Aillteh Mhuire by *Jiminey Cricket). At the 1994 ACPS Region IV Connemara Extravaganza, where April was Grand Champion Mare, the guest Judge from Ireland commented that April was everything you could want in a Connemara!

We purchased Balmullo's Beacon as a stallion prospect to use on our Camus John line-bred mares, but hid him in the back paddock, until he had time to grow into his gangly legs and not-so-beautiful head. Beacon arrived with the nickname "Bubba", and it stuck.

Thankfully, by the time he was 3, he had blossomed into a gorgeous dapple gray stallion, with a lovely expression, temperament and conformation, so we nominated him for the first-ever round of breeding stock inspections. We had no idea if the Irish would approve of him, but we were hoping for validation that he was the right choice for us. The initial inspection team consisted of 2 prestigious inspectors from Ireland and 3 very knowledgeable and experienced breeders from the US. The Irish judges commented that Bubba was a stallion they would each be proud to own and all gave him very high marks, praising him for meeting the high standards required of approved Connemara stallions.

That same year, Bubba was lightly started under saddle and we took some footage to include in the 1st volume of the ACPS Stallion Video, which is a real hoot to look back on! By the following year (at age 4), he had 8 foals on the ground and started more serious training with Jill Mooney.

Bubba's first show was at Hopeland Farm in SC, where he finished in 3rd place at BN. That same year he was the 2nd place Stallion and the Reserve Champion Regular Hunter at the ACPS Region IV Show in GA. He also moved up to Novice level, competing under Jill, and found time to breed 9 more mares.

As a 6 year old, his competitions really took off and we were very pleased with his progress, so moved him up to Training Level Eventing. His first event of the season was Novice at the USCTA Horse Trials at Pine Top in GA, where he finished 3rd and was again the 2nd place Stallion and the Senior High Score Dressage Champion at the ACPS Region III in VA; at this show he was accompanied by one of his offspring, Piedmont MoJo, who won the halfbred yearling futurity. Bubba was Reserve Champion Novice Horse at the USCTA Middle TN Pony Club Horse Trails that fall, so we moved him up to Training Level for his next horse trials. Bubba ended his first serious competition year winning the Grand Champion In-Hand at the ACPS Region IV Show and earned Bronze Medallions from the ACPS Achievement Awards Program in both Combined Training and In-Hand.

Bubba's competition year as a 7 year old was nothing short of stellar. He competed regularly and very successfully, placing in every recognized event he entered, and was usually in the 3 ribbons, winning the majority:

- 1st Place Open Training, Suncatcher Farm Horse Trials (FL) 1/23 - 24/99
- 1st Place Training Horse, Jumping Branch Horse Trials (SC) 3/6 - 7/99; Beacon had the best dressage score (24.5) at the Jumping Branch Event
- 3rd Place Training Horse, SAFE-FENCE Horse Trials (SC) 3/28/99
- 3rd Place Training Horse, Pine Top Horse Trials (GA) 4/17 - 4/18/99
- 2nd Place Training Horse, Virginia Horse Trials (VA) 5/22 - 23/99
- *Took a break to breed mares at home in Tennessee*
- 2nd Place Training Horse, Tryon Horse Trials (NC) 10/2 - 3/99
- 1st Place Training Horse, Pine Top Horse Trials (GA) 10/16 - 17/99
- 1st Place Training Horse, Big Bear Horse Trials (GA) 10/23 - 24/99
- 3rd Place Training Horse, Happy Valley Horse Trials (MS) 10/30 - 31/99
- 1st Place Training Horse/Rider, River Glen Horse Trials (TN) 11/6 - 7/99; Won Best Dressage Score (29.0) at the River Glen Event
- 1st Place Training Horse, Pine Top Horse Trials (GA) 11/27 - 28/99

Bubba very quickly became well known as the gray Connemara stallion that you did not want in your division, because he was so hard to beat. Connemaras were not well represented in our area at the time, and Beacon brought a tremendous amount of positive recognition to these wonderful ponies. His performance was consistently excellent, his temperament outstanding, and his looks...well, I can't say enough about how handsome he is☺ Bubba introduced countless people, who are now devoted fans of the Connemara breed, several of whom became owners. By the end of that year, he had earned the "Award of Excellence" in Combined Training from the ACPS. He was also chosen to receive the McKenna trophy; however he could not receive it because of a membership goof by his owner (i.e. me!)

Bubba had definitely proven himself in the open competition world that year, showing against all breeds of horses. He was awarded the USCTA Area III Training Horse of the Year, and he placed 4th in the Nation at USCTA Training Level (all breeds), earning his rider the title of Training Level Rider of the Year.

After his outstanding performances in 1999, Bubba came home to resume his breeding duties. However, I could not resist the temptation to take up the ride myself. After a 6-year hiatus from the eventing world, Bubba carried me to the winner's circle in my first 2 events; we also placed at the Area Championships, and we won the blue at the USCTA "Chronicle of the Horse" Eastern Region Adult Team Championships. Since Bubba had several mares in line for breeding, I didn't want to overdo it, so we ended our competition year on that high note and settled back into our routine on the farm.

We focused primarily on breeding for the next few years, but found time to squeeze in a few more competitions. At the 2001 ACPS Region IV Show in GA, we won the Novice CT, took first and second in TR Tests 1 & 2, and again placed 2nd in the Stallion class.

I also did a couple dressage shows, the highlight of which was the River Glen Dressage Show in TN, where we earned High Score for the show. It was one of those rides that was so harmonious, that if I thought something, he did it. The amazing feeling of such partnership we had brought tears of joy to my eyes. That year, Bubba earned his ACPS Bronze Medallion in Dressage.

Although the An Tostal is a performance award, I believe it is significant and noteworthy to mention that throughout his show career, Bubba performed double-duty as a breeding stallion for Foothills Farms and Piedmont Connemaras. Out of his own mares and several visiting mares, he has sired over 60 foals (roughly half of them being crossbreeds), who have gone on to provide much joy and success to their owners, along with additional recognition for the breed. He has offspring located all across the United States, from Washington State to Florida, where they are used for a variety of purposes including: eventing, competitive trail, pleasure and breeding. They have proven themselves worthy as successfully performance ponies. Their accomplishments, too numerous to mention, include Championships in Pony Hunters, Jumpers, Driving, Dressage and In-hand. All of his daughters that have been presented for ACPS inspection have been approved and we are also now seeing lovely 2nd and 3rd generation offspring carrying on the hopes, dreams and promises of futures riders, owners and Connemara enthusiasts.

The next few years, Bubba stayed at home mainly just breeding, due to my health issues, but he was shown by Carla Jimmerson at the 2004 ACPS Region IV show, mostly having fun in the jumper classes. By 2006 (4 years after my diagnosis), I was well enough to get back in the saddle for a few shows. The highlights for me were:

- 2nd place Novice Rider at the USEA Jump Start Horse Trials in KY, where his son, Piedmont Sundance won his division with rider/owner Marion Caldwell.
- At the ACPS Region IV show, Bubba was Reserve Champion In-hand and Combined Training Champion. He also won Training Level Test 3 dressage class. His daughter, Piedmont Penelope, was Reserve Champion Halfbred In-hand.
- That year he earned his ACPS Silver Medallion in Dressage.

Charlie and I decided to end our breeding program in 2007. We were done with accepting visiting mares on the farm for live cover and were also tired of collecting for shipped semen at all hours of the night and day. Since we were officially out of the breeding business, we decided to collect frozen semen and geld Bubba, so he could "semi-retire" out with the rest of the herd. As a 17 yr old gelding, I took him to the ACPS Region IV Show at Pine Top Farm where he won the Gelding class and placed well in his ridden classes. We had a great time riding in the Jimmy Wofford clinic I organized for the day after the show. After that, Bubba came back home to our farm in TN and took up a couple hobbies: trail riding and babysitting.

Perhaps the greatest achievement in Bubba's life is his current job in semi-retirement. Bubba was not such a cute name for a little girl's pony, so his barn name is now "Beacon". Beacon is schoolmaster for his new little rider, Avery Lewis. The giggles of excitement, the swelling of her confidence, the huge grins after her jumping rounds, the ribbons on her wall and the love she has for this pony fill my heart with the greatest pride and satisfaction that Beacon could possibly provide.

I have described Beacon as my Horse of a Lifetime. He carried my middle-aged fanny around many jumping and cross-country courses and always took such good care of me. Now he is doing the same with his very young rider. In 2011, Beacon and Avery won two (2) championships at the ACPS Region IV show. Avery's father, Jeff, described Beacon as Avery's Horse of a Lifetime – so that makes two of us!

At an event in the fall of 2011, the two horses stabled next to Beacon were owned by young ladies in their 20's that were completing against his 10 yr old rider. Halfway through the competition, their mom asked if Jill Mooney had ridden Beacon. She was told the story of Bubba's history, to which she responded 'Oh great! Ten years ago that horse always beat me, and now he is beating my daughters! What luck!'

Jeff Lewis wrote this for me when he learned of Beacon's Hall of Fame Award:

"It is hard to say anything about Balmullo's Beacon, or Beacon, as we call him, without getting a bit sentimental. To say he is a once in a lifetime pony is to say the least. Two years ago we took our 8 year old daughter up to Athens, TN to meet Beacon and see if they were a good fit for each other for a lease. Beacon had been a stallion for most of his life, and we were all worried that he might be a bit much for her. That day he was a bit too strong for Avery, but we all decided to have a short trial to see what happened. From that moment on, it was a love affair between Avery and Beacon. Prior to that time, Avery had come off numerous ponies, sustaining two concussions and some broken bones. In two years, she has never come off Beacon. They have ridden in too many Horse Trials and Dressage shows to mention, winning or placing many. Beacon seems to sense what is needed for each jump course and cross country course, taking pains to insure Avery's safety. If Avery messes up an approach, Beacon quietly corrects for it and jumps cleanly. Avery is often heard yelling encouragement to Beacon as they ride Cross Country, "Good boy Beacon, great jump, keep it up, here comes another." It is true love.

Traveling to shows with Beacon is like traveling with a celebrity. It never fails that people stop by the stall to see him, either because they have a 'Bubba Baby', or they were fascinated by his performance. I can't tell you how many times someone has come up to one of us and said, "Is that Bubba?". We always take the time to explain his history to them, often posing for pictures with Beacon. What a tribute to the Connemara name!

Beacon lives with us at our farm in GA. Often I will come home from work and find Avery sitting in the back yard, with Beacon quietly grazing next to her, untied. He is quite the class act! I can guarantee that Avery will look back upon her time with Beacon as a magical time in her life. He has touched all of our lives in so many ways. Whether it was them winning the Regional Championships at Poplar Place, or scoring highest dressage score in several nationally ranked Dressage shows, his exploits will stay with us forever."

In their first year competing together, Beacon and Avery won the first two dressage tests they ever entered; they tied for 1st (out of 19 participants) at their 2010 Pony Club Regional Dressage Rally; they were Walk-Trot Dressage Champions and won Training Test 1 at a GDCTA recognized show; Avery earned her D3 Pony Club; they won a division at Avery's first combined test; was on the 1st place Pony Club Show Jumping Rally team, and the dabbled in a couple hunter shows. They ended the year with an ACPS Certificate of Achievement in Hunters and in Pony Club.

2011 was even better. They won the USEA Horse Trials at River Glen in JNR; they won Jumper Champion and Combined Training Champion at the ACPS Region IV Show; they won the USEA Regional Championships at Poplar Place ; they earned the GDCTA 2011 Year-End Awards 3rd place BN Division and earned a number of 2011 year-end awards: the ACPS Award of Excellence in Dressage, the USEA Eventing Gold Medal in BN and a USEA Blue Ribbon Award for Jr rider Avery Lewis

2012 Highlights for Avery (age 10) and Beacon (age 20) include the following:

- They were Reserve Champion for Jr. High Score at the summer USDF Good Horsemen Annual Dressage Show
- Won a "Good Horseman 75% Metal" for their score of 75.357% (covers all levels and divisions) and was Jr. High Score Championship at the fall USDF Good Horsemen Annual Dressage Show.
- Won BN Jr division at USEA Area III Regional Championships; they also rode at the USEA American Eventing Championships at Chattahoochee Hills, where two of Beacon's grand foals finished in the ribbons.
- They rode in the USDF Regional Dressage Championships, placing in the ribbons in the Jr/YR Training Championship class.
- They were ACPS Region IV Connemara Jumper Champions; they won the JR/YR division (all levels) & the Training level division (all divisions)
- They earned the 2012 Good Horseman Dressage Foundation YEAR END awards
- Won the USEA Eventing Gold Medal Blue Ribbon Award in Novice
- And finished in 3rd place USEF National HOTY award for Purebred Connemaras in Eventing and 5th place in Dressage

And finally, he was inducted in the ACPS Hall of Fame Award winning the An Tostal Trophy for outstanding lifetime performance achievement of a Connemara Stallion!

Although we never moved Beacon to the upper-most levels of competition, he has served as an esteemed ambassador for the Connemara pony. His performance is routinely stellar, winning or placing in the top ribbons at his competitions. He has brought many, many people to admire and respect the Connemara breed through his consistency, reputation and endurance as a competitor.

We have owned him since he was a yearling and he has always been a wonderful pony to train, ride, compete and breed; we have thoroughly enjoyed every minute it. I am grateful to everyone that played a part in Beacon's life, starting with my husband, Charlie, for his unwavering support and all the help he has given to me (especially at breeding time and raising the foal), and to Jill Mooney for campaigning Bubba – demonstrating his potential and abilities, to the benefit of the Connemara breed and its popularity in the United States.

In closing, I want to also thank the ACPS Performance Committee for recognizing Balmullo's Beacon for his achievements. Above all, I am grateful to God for his love and mercy, and the promise of our salvation through Christ Jesus, and for blessing my life on this earth with the privilege of owning this fabulous creation of HIS, Balmullo's Beacon.