

WCAHA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

ELAINE SWEET

One of the hallmarks of a good teacher is the ability to be (or have been) a good student. This appears to be the case with Elaine Sweet, a member of the Western Carolinas club for the past 18 years.

A Greer, SC, resident, this tall, reserved elementary teacher takes a scholarly approach to her involvement with horses. Sweet rides her horses in several disciplines, but concentrates on hunt seat and dressage events. She works hard to improve her technique and her mounts' skills by learning everything she can from mentors she has met over the years.

"I have great respect for those that are doing a great job at their particular skill," says Sweet. "I am always seeking out those that are really knowledgeable and willing to share their knowledge with me, so I, too, can be improving all the time--I just try to get more educated in all that I do!"

Sweet has owned appaloosas, thoroughbreds, a standardbred and a Hanoverian during her 25 years of horse ownership, but Arabians and half-Arabians are her preference.

"My first half/Arabian (out of a standardbred mare) was Oakside Hassan," she says, "who earned his Legion of Merit with me. He inspired me to continue showing and training Arabians; he was so multi talented!"

And getting involved in Arabians has been quite successful for Sweet.

"Dancinn Till Dawn, a National Show Horse, and I won 2 Top Tens in Dressage at the Nationals, and is a Supreme Legion of Honor horse," Sweet says, "I earned USDF Bronze Medals on her, as well as on AM Romany Honor, a purebred Arab. Both horses had dressage scores through third level."

The newest addition to Sweet's horse family is ZP Helios, an Arabian/Trakhener cross. Only 4, Helios went Top Ten Junior Sport Horse under saddle with Sweet riding, at the recent US Sport Horse Nationals held in Lexington, VA. As a two year old, Helios was named Reserve National Champion in the two-year-old Jackpot class. He has also earned all the points necessary for his Legion of Merit award at a very tender age, and appears to be headed for a stellar career.

All of Sweet's horses have had Regional Championships in their divisions.

Sweet not only continues her dressage work, she also rides and shows her own horses in open and AHA shows and judges at open horse shows and at SCDCTA dressage shows. (She recently judged

at a dressage schooling show at Riverbend near Greenville, and conducted a dressage clinic there the next day.)

Sweet has learned some life lessons along the way. Here are a few:

- Life is not about winning, although the wins are great highs!
- It is about learning from those ups and downs, and how to keep on improving on what you have to work with.
- Enjoying the fun moments along the way.

She also has some ideas for how AHA might better serve its membership. “They should give more recognition, both verbally and financially,” Sweet says, “to those Arabians and half-Arabians that are out there competing in areas ‘outside the box’ of the traditional Arabian show ring. Those horses that are educating people as to the versatility and great personality/talent of the Arabian horse.”

She notes that riders in disciplines such as reining, dressage, hunter-jumpers and three-day eventers need to see the Arabian shining and competing well against the horses that have dominated those areas for so long.

On the show ring, she has a few ideas as well.

“The cost of showing has continued to go up with little or no financial gains for show competitors,” she explains. “Several people who once showed Arabians have gone to showing other breeds with great success, and have cut showing costs and gained much more financially from prize money offered. Let's increase the value of the Arabian to prospective buyers by offering more in the show ring and at USEF open shows in prizes and gifts.”

Horses are not the only “hobby” Sweet enjoys. She and her husband collect and show antique cars.

“I have a 1931 Chevy special sedan, and a 1973 Rolls Royce Silver Cloud,” she says. She also enjoys working on various art projects and working with young people.

And from the looks of it, Sweet will still be riding when she is 80...

“When the day comes that I can no longer throw my leg over a horse,” she jokes, “maybe I will be driving a small Arabian pony hooked up to a lovely carriage.. and still learning!”

You just can't take the “student” out of the teacher.

