

Mountain and Moorland Ponies Shine Brightly in California!

By Kelly Davidson Chou

Thirty-one ponies, five British Native breeds, and spectacular “Indian summer” weather conspired to make the Welsh Pony and Cob Association of California’s 2008 Pacific Coast Classic (PCC) Mountain and Moorland event in Elk Grove, California an overwhelming success. Represented breeds at the 12 September show included British Shetland, Connemara, Dales, Fell, and Highland ponies. The M&M event at the PCC was one of the most extensive showings of British Native breeds in the United States and certainly the largest ever on the West Coast!

The Welsh Pony and Cob Association of California (WPCAC) has hosted the M&M event since 2006. This year, with encouragement from M&M class organizer Kathryn Rayner Freeman, they graciously agreed to add performance classes to the standard in-hand and Ridden M&M classes they have offered the past two years. The performance classes were judged by Ms. Shirley Antrobus from Dixon, California, a delightful and witty native Brit who brought a great sense of fun and camaraderie to the entire M&M affair.

Ms. Antrobus’ classes included: Working Hunter Pony (WHP) 2’, WHP 2’6”, Novice Ridden Pony, M&M Pleasure Driving, M&M Carriage Driving, and M&M Driving – Obstacles. Connemaras, Dales, and Highlands battled for the blue ribbon in each of the six performance classes. The Dales Ponies, all owned by Davidson Dales Pony Farm, took the top spot in the WHP 2’ (Colliery Alick), M&M Pleasure Driving (Bickerdike by Design) and M&M Carriage Driving – Obstacles (Colliery Alick), while the Connemaras enjoyed wins in the WHP 2’6” (Tintern Merry Robuck), Novice Ridden Pony (MGRM Ailish McBriggs), and M&M Carriage Driving (MGRM Brigadoon). Ms. Antrobus extended hearty congratulations and a “Well done!” to Ms. Gwendolen Rowe who, with Mary Merralls’ Highland mare, Ceol Beag Lismore, placed in all three driving classes despite the fact both driver and pony had limited experience in the sport.

After the conclusion of the performance classes, Colliery Alick and his driver Mr. Roger Cleverly provided a thrilling exhibition with a fast canter through the cones course in their marathon carriage. The team demonstrated both speed and finesse, to the great enjoyment of the spectators. The boisterous crowd and Ms. Antrobus’ enthusiastic commentary created quite a stir in the neighboring Welsh in-hand arena, much to the chagrin of the Welsh judges and ponies, though the good natured Welsh exhibitors took it all in stride.

Once the performance classes were complete, the M&M exhibitors earned a well-deserved break before they had to start grooming ponies for the breeding competition. The in-hand classes were judged by Mrs. Joanna Macinnes from Penrith, Cumbria in the UK, and included M&M 3 and under, M&M 4 and over, M&M Part-bred, the NPS America M&M Championship, and Ridden M&M.

Because of an extremely large showing of Welsh Ponies and Cobs, the M&M 3 and under class didn’t begin until 6 PM that evening. The class was well

represented by Connemara, Fell, and Highland ponies, with the blue ribbon going to a Fell filly (Braeberry Anne). The 4 and over class consisted of 17 ponies and included British Shetland, Connemara, Dales, Fell, and Highland. The top spot again went to a Fell (Laurelhighland Rose Petal) who went on to win the NPS America M&M Championship, with Braeberry Anne earning the Reserve. Both ponies are owned by Fell Legend Farm.

The M&M part-bred class was, like the performance classes, a first with this year's show. The winner was a British Shetland cross mare (Thunderheart Woman), a last minute entry who took her win in stride, though her owner/handler Mrs. Ceci Graham Widby was clearly overjoyed with the results. Considered part of the in-hand competition, the Ridden M&M was the last class of a very long day. As the sun faded over the Central Valley, the arena lights were brought up for the 5 ponies entering the ring. Though there were originally 10 ponies competing, the lateness of the hour forced several exhibitors to scratch their entries. The class was ultimately won by the Dales mare Bickerdike by Design, affectionately known as "Dessie" to friends and family. With previous second places in both 2006 and 2007, Dessie and her rider, Adrienne Grasso, were determined to earn the blue this year, and thanks to a fine individual show, they weren't disappointed.

With the size of the United States presenting a very serious obstacle to getting some of the rarer breeds like the Dales and Highlands together for fun and competition, the M&M event at the PCC was an important victory for British Native Pony enthusiasts in the US. Congratulations go out to all the competitors who came from both far and near to make the event such a success for everyone. You are all winners in the quest to share the joy and satisfaction of owning and competing Mountain and Moorland Ponies in America!

A complete list of show results and additional photographs can be found at www.NPSAmerica.org.

Kelly Davidson Chou is a dedicated Dales Pony breeder and promoter in Clayton, California. She can be reached through her Web site at www.DavidsonDales.com.