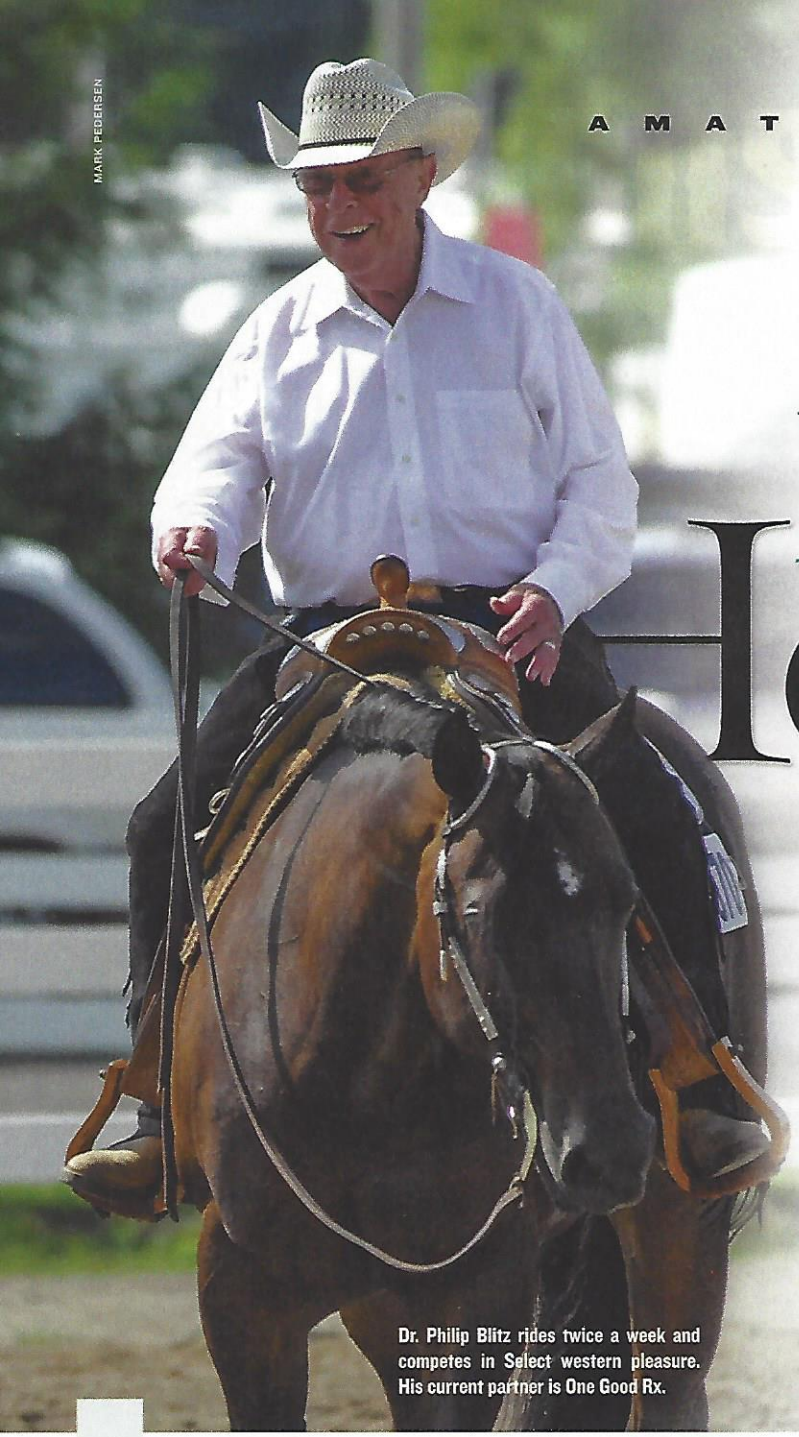


MARK PEDERSEN

Dr. Philip Blitz rides twice a week and competes in Select western pleasure. His current partner is One Good Rx.

Lover of Horses

It took 50 years, but Philip Blitz found his place in the horse world.

By Katie Navarra

IT TOOK NEARLY 50 YEARS FOR PHILIP BLITZ OF AVON, OHIO, TO follow his passion for horses, but once he got hooked, he couldn't get horses out of his blood.

"Horses are my life; I'm so lucky to have gotten involved with the industry," he says.

At 83, Phil rides twice a week and travels to AQHA shows as far away as Syracuse, New York, and Centre Hall, Pennsylvania, to compete in Select western pleasure.

"I'm thinking that a Select class for us riders over 70 is a good idea," he says with a laugh.

Although Phil didn't begin seriously riding until his early 50s, he has wasted no time finding success in the show pen. Since buying his first western pleasure horse, Silken Sally in 1989, he and trainer Dan Lemmon have campaigned four different horses to Superior titles.

Back to His Roots

BORN IN NEW JERSEY AND RAISED IN PHILADELPHIA, PHIL spent much of his childhood visiting his Uncle Phil's farm.

"He worked for Eugene Mori who ran Garden State Raceway and the Atlantic City Racetrack in those days," Phil says, "He's also the one who told me my name means 'lover of horses.' "

"Philip" is a derivative of the Greek term Philíppos. When the compound phrase is broken into its roots, it translates to "friend or lover of horses."

When Phil visited his uncle's farm, he was allowed to ride a few of the racehorses around the property.

"He taught me that you never 'chirp' to a racehorse because he'll go and you'll go with him," Phil reminisces. "I never chirped, and they never took off."

After high school, Phil enrolled at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. As often as he could sneak away from campus, he and several friends visited the nearby Garden State Park, a harness and Thoroughbred racetrack in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

"We'd get the daily double and get the heck out of there," he says.

As he neared the end of his studies, Phil applied to Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine along with some classmates, and he discovered he liked the coursework. He became certified as a specialist in internal medicine.

Phil graduated and relocated to Ohio to begin his career in medicine in 1963. Nearly two decades passed before he reconnected with horses in the early 1980s.

"I was single at the time, and my girlfriend had a horse," he says. "I went out to the barn with her and decided I wanted a horse of my own."

He bought a horse, started trail riding and entered open shows. He was winning, and Dave Hudak, the organizer of the local show series, encouraged Phil to contact Dan Lemmon, a Quarter Horse trainer in Grafton, Ohio.

"I started at the bottom and worked my way up," he says. "It was like starting with a rowboat and working my way up to a yacht."

Show Pen Success

IN 1989, DAN KNEW THAT DALE LIVINGSTON HAD A 4-YEAR-OLD sorrel mare for sale. The Silky Fox mare had good training, good conformation and a disposition that could teach Phil the skills he needed to be competitive.

"Silken Sally taught me how to ride, and when she walked into the show pen, she was the queen," Phil says. "She put her head down and won the class."

In May 1991, "Sally" earned an open Superior with Dan, and less than a week later, she carried Phil to an amateur Superior.

"We had many purchase offers on Sally," Dan says. "She was never sold, and retired to my pasture where she died in 2014 at the ripe old age of 29."

Good N Tiger, a 1995 Zippos Mr Good Bar gelding, followed in Sally's hoof prints and then Zip Me An Invitation earned Phil another Superior in 2006.

His most recent Superior pleasure horse was Potentials Lil Rose, a 2003 bay mare by Potential Investment and out of Zippos Red Rose by Zippo Pine Bar.

"That horse took me places," Phil says. "I had a lot of judges tell me she was the best loper in the world."

Phil attributes much of his success to the 30-year relationship he has maintained with Dan.

"Dan has picked horses with good minds and good movement that have helped us win a lot," Phil says. "He's tough on us when we're wrong, and he's a lot of fun to be around."

"What makes our relationship work is that there is a mutual respect for each other and our professions," Dan says. "Phil has made me understand that the horses are his hobby, and he understands that the horses are my business."

Don't even think about asking Phil when he is going to retire from medicine or stop showing.

"When people ask me if I'm going to quit, I tell them, 'Heck no,' " he says.

He continues to see patients four times a week and travels to the barn twice a week to ride. Phil's belt buckle is engraved with "Doc," and his current western pleasure horse is the 2005 black gelding One Good Rx by Rx Goodbar and out of the Heza Snazzy Asset mare Schautzly.

"It was really an accident that I ended up with this horse," he says. "I switched horses with a fellow exhibitor at Dan's training facility where we ride."

Sheer Delight

"PHIL TRULY DOES THIS FOR FUN," DAN SAYS. "HE LOVES THE camaraderie with other AQHA members. He puts no pressure on himself to win: He just likes showing horses, and the winning comes because he likes to have the best ride he can, without consideration of a placing."

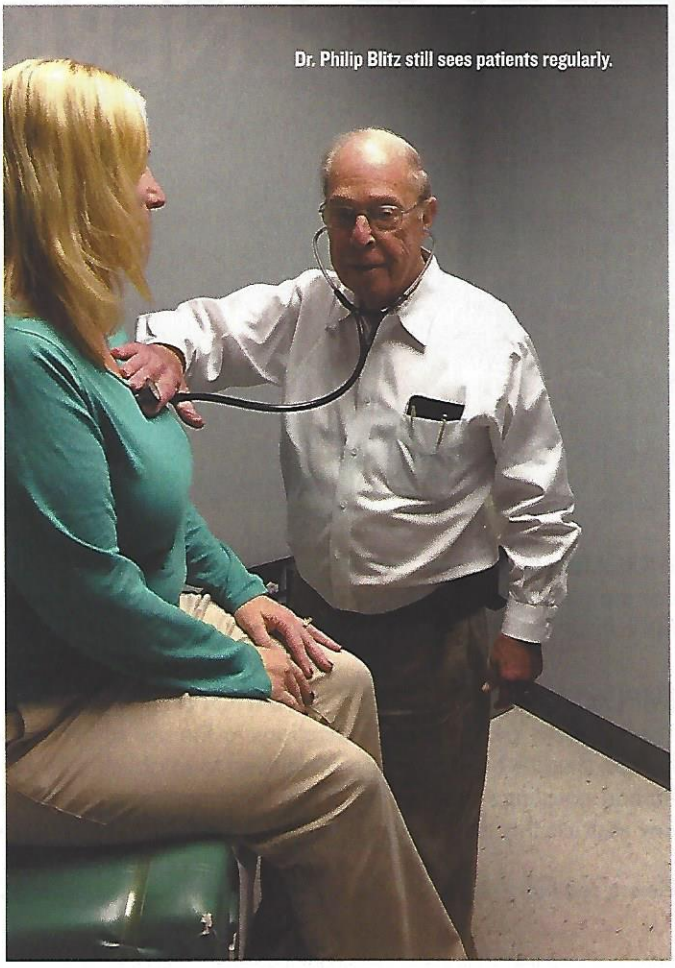
Phil's enthusiasm for showing has inspired his fellow competitors.

"When I first met Phil at Dan's barn, I was and continue to be impressed with his infectious great attitude," says Gary Brown, a fellow Select exhibitor. "He never seems to have a 'down' day and never really complains about where he places at the show as long as he is satisfied with *his* ride."

Gary purchased his first horse in 1966 and has owned and shown ever since.

"I am the only person at the barn anywhere near Phil's age, and I am still nearly a decade and a half his junior," he says. "I can only hope to be riding when I reach my 80s. Phil has given me a target to strive for. He really is my hero." ■

Katie Navarra is a special contributor to the Journal. *To comment, write to* aqhajrnl@aqha.org.



Dr. Philip Blitz still sees patients regularly.

LAKOTA DRAPER