

Shining Stars

A very special mare helps Autumn Zundel return to competition at NSBA World Show in EWD classes

Text Katie Navarra **Photos** Larry Williams

Shines Like New doesn't have a lengthy show record with the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) but she has drastically changed the lives of those who have owned her. Kelley and Rick Christy of Ocala, Florida bought the 2007 mare as a 2-year-old from Richland Ranch.

They sold Shine twice and developed close friendships with the new owners, creating a "Shine Family." When both owners had to sell, the Christys bought her back.

"She's always been one of those horses that you wanted to keep around because anyone could ride her," Kelley said. "We always felt because Shine's first owner we'd sold her to lost her life to cancer that this mare has a guardian angel."

The mare is shining again – this time for 13-year-old Autumn Zundel, the daughter of Dave and Stacey Zundel, of New Alexandria, Pennsylvania. In August Kelley listed Shine for sale on Facebook but she knew it had to be a special home. Stacey Zundel grew up showing with Rick, saw the posting and immediately reached out about buying the mare for Autumn.

"The mare seems to understand that her job is to take care of her rider and takes her job very seriously," Kelley said.

That's exactly what the teenager needed.

In 2019, Autumn had a successful trip to the All-American Quarter Horse Congress, winning her Showmanship go-round and placing in a few classes. At the Congress she complained of shoulder pain, had shortness of breath and the family thought it was the "Congress crud." In early 2020 she brought home three ribbons from the Pennsylvania State Farm Swine Show but while there she still didn't feel herself.

After a few trips to the doctors, Stacey took Autumn to Children's Hospital Of Pittsburgh on Jan. 8 because Autumn was still fatigued and plagued by shoulder pain. That day she



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was diagnosed with an anterior mediastinal mass between her heart and lungs. She was scheduled for surgery a week later for removal of the tumor. During the procedure she experienced hemorrhagic shock (major blood loss) and went into cardiac arrest. Complications from the surgery impacted her ability to walk, talk and see.

Autumn finally returned home in April to a new bedroom complete

with a small gym for her rehabilitation exercises and a ramp out to see her animals thanks to donations from 84 Lumber employees. When the community learned of Autumn's story, employees of the locally owned building supply store rallied together to help her parents make renovations to their home to make Autumn's bedroom more accessible.

Although Autumn struggles with the fatigue and other lingering complications, one of her first requests was to ride. Pennsylvania trainer Alex Bryner, a close family friend, helped Autumn transition from riding a pony to showing at breed shows. When Autumn was in the rehabilitation facility, Bryner hauled a horse for a visit in the parking lot. Bryner also helped Autumn back into the saddle.

"The first time she got on a horse at my house we were extremely nervous," Bryner said. "We wanted to wait, and she was determined. We were all so nervous and thought maybe she would forget where to put feet or what would happen. We think muscle memory took over and her body formed right where should have been."

Autumn insisted the adults let go and she jogged while they stayed within arm's reach. The family went to watch an AQHA show in Centre Hall to see all their friends. At the last minute she entered the Equestrians with Disabilities (EWD) classes with borrowed clothes and horses. Hannah

Lundy offered up Dee Lighted Version for EWD Showmanship and Trail. Kylie Goode shared Maximum Invitation for EWD Western Pleasure and Horsemanship.

"Sometimes when people see her, walking and talking they have perceptions that are so different than reality," Stacey said. "Yes she can ride a horse, but can't ride by herself and it's a big difference in what she was doing before. That's hard as a parent."

When Autumn arrived at the NSBA World Show she was ready to get back in the show pen. She had only owned Shine for two weeks but she has the confidence of a skilled showman. There she was Reserve Champion in the EWD Walk-Trot Showmanship Supported class with Ruby Do Good. Then riding Jake Hartman's horse, Branded Stylish, she won the EWD Walk-Trot Trail Supported class. She also showed Shine to a win in the EWD Walk-Trot Western Pleasure Supported class.

"Rick and I watched Autumn win the NSBA World online and cried like babies," Kelley said. "To say we were proud is a total understatement."

Stacey says attending NSBA World Show wouldn't have been possible without Bryner and the support of the barn community. All of Bryner's clients pitched in to help Autumn with make-up, practice and prep for the show pen.

"It's a hard thing as a mother because she did so well in the show pen. She was doing Western Riding and Showmanship and then to have her regress, it's like starting at the beginning again," Stacey said. "It's been a dream of hers to compete at the AQHA Youth World and they don't offer EWD there so it's hard to see her not able to go after her dream."

Autumn receives outpatient therapy in her home three days and home instruction for her classwork. The simplest tasks exhaust her, yet she is determined and hopes that more shows will offer EWD classes so she can show more often.

A GoFundMe page (search Autumn Zundel) is helping raise funds for her medical needs and the Facebook page Autumn's Army provides updates on her progress.

NSBA WORLD SHOW EWD CLASS RESULTS

Additional winners in EWD classes at the 2020 NSBA World Show include:

Walk-Trot Showmanship - Setting The Stage, owned by Stable Strides Farm and shown by Amy Bentler, Rowlett, Texas;

Walk-Trot Trail Independent - ZE Hunting, owned by Stable Strides Farm and shown by Spencer Lee Roberson, Sanger, Texas.

Walk-Trot Hunter Under Saddle Independent and Walk-Trot Equitation Independent - Officially Noticed, owned by Katie Tuck and shown by Lydia Sellers, Galena, Ohio.

Walk-Trot Western Pleasure Independent - Dontsasstismachine, owned by Corbett Ryan and shown by Rhiannon Huffman, Antioch, Illinois.

Walk-Trot Horsemanship Independent - Officially Noticed, owned by Katie Tuck and shown by Lydia Sellers, Galena, Ohio.

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Autumn Zundel is pictured on the opposite page (top) competing with Shine in the EWD Walk-Trot Western Pleasure Supported class and (bottom) winning the EWD Walk-Trot Trail Supported class with Branded Stylish. On this page she is pictured wearing the helmet Alex Bryner bought her to wear at the show.