

A Championship For The Jell-O Wagon

by Lynne Belluscio

It's taken a couple of years, but the Jell-O wagon finally made it into the championships at the Walnut Hill Horse Show.

The first year, in 2005, we had to borrow a horse to get the Jell-O wagon into the show, because our horse had gone lame. We borrowed "Rebel" who did a wonderful job, but didn't have the flash that our all black Morgan stallion Beaman has.

Then in 2006 and 2007, we had a reasonable show, but couldn't catch the judges' attention over the huge impressive beer wagon and the unusual fishing tackle wagon, owned by John Greenall. But we have always said we only show the Jell-O wagon for the fun of it. It is always a crowd pleaser and receives a hardy round of applause.

The first year, we gave out Jell-O snack cups which everyone remembers and we are always asked if we will do that again. This year, I made up some Jell-O shots in the egg molds and they were very popular. My daughter, who parceled them out, said that I had better plan to make at least double the recipe for next year. (We did not, however, give any to the judges, unless we were suspected of bribery.)

John Skivington has driven the wagon every year and does a really fine job. I am sure there are some people who wonder why he has a cigar in his mouth when he drives the Jell-O wagon. (I have to thank Frank Davis for supplying the cigars each year). Sid Ward who worked for the Jell-O Company in 1915 remembered being on one of the last horse-drawn Jell-O wagons. "There were two of us on the wagon ... the salesman and his assistant. The assistant did the detail work, including manicuring the horses. I was the assistant. The salesman was an ex-circus man. He was delightfully tough and remarkable for his ability to wear a derby hat on the side of his head, even while eating and for his knack of chewing tobacco and smoking a cigar at the same time." John is willing to smoke the cigar, but draws the line at chewing tobacco.

At Walnut Hill there are three classes for the Jell-O wagon in the trade division. First on Friday morning was the "performance class". All the vehicles go into the ring and work at a slow trot, a working trot, a fast trot and a walk. Then one by one they have to drive to a spot, stop, then go forward while people, dogs and flower carts cross in front of the horse, simulating a village street. Then they proceed further, stop, back up a short distance and then pull forward. In this class we placed third behind "John Henry", the mule who pulls a butcher wagon and the three-horse hitch of mini horses that pulls a flower wagon.

The next class called "turnout" was on Friday night. Every brass buckle (there are more than 24 buckles on a harness) has to be polished. The harness has to be impeccably clean. The horse has to be washed and groomed - his mane and tail sprayed with Show-sheen - his hooves painted black and shiny. We even put a little baby oil on his face and nose to make him look a little blacker. The wagon is filled with wooden crates of Jell-O, big yellow and black posters, recipe books, store displays and some free samples for the judges. The horse has to perform well and the judge inspects every little detail. On Friday night John, Beaman and the Jell-O wagon won their first blue ribbon.

The last class was on Sunday afternoon. It's called a working class and it's a little like the performance class, but it's more about the horse and how well he goes. Beaman won again! Now the scoring for this is a little weird. Since there were only four entries, a first place ribbon only receives 3 points (instead



of 7 points in a full class of six entries). Second place receives 2 points and third place receives 1 point. Fourth receives only 1/2. So we had two firsts and a third for a total of 7, but "John Henry" had a first and two seconds for a total of 7. We were tied for the championship, but because we had two blue ribbons, we were declared the champions and John Henry was the reserved champion.

I have to admit the competition was a little light this year. The beer wagon wasn't able to compete this year and John

Greenall's horse on the fishing tackle cart was lame. But at least in 2008 the Jell-O wagon was the champion in the trade class. We had the opportunity to go into the Parade of Champions on Sunday afternoon, and disguised as a cigar-smoking Jell-O salesman in a derby hat, I rode with John to receive the championship tricolor ribbon. With the finish of Walnut Hill, fall isn't far behind and the Jell-O wagon goes back in the barn, covered up for another year.



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