

AERC Hall of Fame Award 2003

RAMEGWA DRUBIN
owned by Stagg Newman

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by Genie Stewart-Spears

"If 'one day, one horse, one hundred miles' is the epitome of endurance riding, then Ramegwa Drubin is the epitome of a 100-mile endurance horse," stated Stagg Newman. Although he stands only 14.1 hands, the plucky gray Arabian gelding has taken on and beaten some of the best horses in the country, racing on some of the toughest trails in the U.S. and Canada. With his recent induction into the AERC Hall of Fame, he has joined a select group of great endurance horses.

In 1992, Drubin, or "Pony," as he is fondly called, carried his owner Stagg Newman to win the national middle-weight and 100-mile championships. That same season Drubin earned 3,825 points in the 100-mile AERC National Championship series. For that championship win, he started and completed nine 100-milers with seven wins, one second, and one third place finish and accumulated five best condition awards. No other horse before or since has ever earned more than 3,000 points in one season.

The next year wasn't too shabby either. Drubin carried Newman to a team gold medal (Northeast time zone) and an individual bronze medal in the North American Championship.

The 1983 gelding was purchased in 1987 from AERC Hall of Fame member, veteran endurance rider, and past AERC president Maggy Price.

"NATURAL STATE" UPBRINGING

Drubin was, according to Newman, "raised close to the same environment and social status of a wild horse. He spent his first year in a large herd of mares and young horses, running on 60 to 80 acres of rocky terrain without a flat spot on it. Once weaned, Drubin and another young stud colt were turned out with Ramegwa Priceless, Maggy's first great endurance horse. The threesome bachelor herd ran on 80 acres where Drubin spent the next two years continuing to learn how to handle himself on rough terrain."

Besides his good genes and conformation, Newman believes this "natural state" upbringing contributed greatly to Drubin's athleticism.



“Put him on a difficult and dangerous trail and he is very surefooted and confident,” says Newman, who has ridden Drubin over 6,000 miles of endurance and competitive trail riding (CTR). “He is aggressive yet professional and focused on the task ahead. Like a professional, he loves his job of going down the trail.”

Despite Drubin’s near pony height, Newman says, “He is short-backed, but from the front to back, he is the same length as our 15-hand horses. This means he is a short horse with very sturdy legs, big bone, and powerful front and rear ends. Ideally he should have a little longer neck, but that is about the only place I can fault him. He has the strength of a larger horse, but he is compacted into a smaller, sturdy horse.”

Getting started

Drubin was Newman’s first Arabian. Newman started competing in CTR on a thoroughbred mare in 1979. While she won some ribbons and top tenned in a couple of rides, she eventually pulled a suspensory ligament in 1985. She recovered and carried Newman through some rides in 1986, but the injury resurfaced and Newman began looking for another horse.

“I had met Maggy Price on the CTR circuit and knew her farm, Ramegwa Arabians, was one of the places in the East to look for performance horses,” explained Newman. “I wanted to buy Ramegwa Kanavyann, who went on to place fourth in the 1991 North American Championship and third in the 1992 World Championship. But, Maggy was set on selling me this 3-1/2-year-old, unbroken, recently gelded colt that thought he was quite the stud. She told me he would be a good horse, but he needed a ‘strong rider’.”

Newman chuckled and said, “This really meant that he was a handful, and she would be glad when he was my handful!”

Nevertheless, Newman agreed to purchase the studly gelding. He said, “Not only did I get a horse that developed into an outstanding athlete, but Maggy became my mentor into the sport of endurance riding.”

Memories of 1993

Recalling his ride in the 1993 North American Championship, Newman said, “Maggy and I had ridden together all day. We were riding for the East team and had hoped to do well. We had ridden 50 miles in the company of RO Grand Sultan+ / (three-time world champion) and Judith Ogus—something I am still honored to have experienced. At 82 miles, when Rio out-recovered our horses and headed out to overtake the two leaders, Maggy and I agreed that we were there to earn a team medal, and we wouldn’t try to catch Rio. Chasing Rio would have been really stupid!”

But, Newman and Price agreed to overtake the third-place horse (On A High), and approached the finish line with one of them looking at winning the bronze medal. Choking back emotion, Newman shared that Maggy turned to him and said, “I’ve already got a medal so this one is yours.”

“She allowed me to take the bronze medal,” he said. “Maggy was my mentor, and she is an outstanding breeder of endurance and competitive trail horses. She’s been a tough competitor, but she is also very gracious.”

HOLLAND WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The following year, Newman and Drubin were selected to represent the U.S. at the World Championship in Holland. But, regrettably, Drubin was pulled at the first vet check, apparently due to an injury that occurred during unloading off the plane in Germany.

“Larry Kanavy and I were on the pallet with the horses,” explained Newman. “The forklift driver was slamming on the brakes and bouncing the horses. Larry and I were screaming at the operator until the airline officials came and whisked him away. Then we had a long, all-day haul from Frankfurt to The Hague in an all-time record heat wave. Drubin most likely developed the hematoma during that episode.

“He’s never been quite the same caliber that he was before that injury,” stated Newman. “Nevertheless, he has gone on to complete 13 more 100s over the next eight seasons, almost all top 10, including one win and two BCs. Today he continues to compete in 50-mile and competitive trail rides, and he serves as a role model for our younger horses. He will be 21 years old this June. As long as he is having fun and stays sound, I will continue to ride him.”

A MEMORABLE RIDE FOR DRUBIN

Newman wears the Virginia City 25th-Anniversary (1992) belt buckle that represents what he says was his most memorable ride on Drubin.

“He set the course record, which still stands, at that 1992 ride,” stated Newman. “And Drubin earned the best condition award.

“Early in the ride I was riding with Darla Westlake on her great horse, Muffy, also a Hall of Fame horse. In the early morning light, we had at least a dozen wild horses galloping down the trail in front of us. It was an awesome sight!

“Then, about 90 miles out, riding alone in the desert when the light was soft, I looked up and there was a bright red wild horse on my right. It charged across the trail, whirled, and challenged us. I’m sure what the drama was all about was that behind him were three other horses, probably his little band of mares. Drubin just kept focused on going down the trail, so it was not a problem. However, it was quite a breathtaking experience.”

THE WORST DAY

Besides Drubin getting injured on the way to the World Championships in Holland, Newman says Drubin’s third 50-mile endurance competition was one of their worst experiences. “I broke one of the cardinal rules of endurance—I changed tack the day of the race. I couldn’t get the freshly-launched string girth as snug as I would have liked, but since I planned to only trot to the first check, I didn’t correct this,” said Newman.

“There was a big hill shortly after the start, and the saddle slipped back into the bucking position. Drubin bucked me off, and while I was looking for a soft rock to land on, he took off down the trail. On foot I followed the trail and came to the first road crossing. No one had seen him pass that point. So I got a ride back to the start and set out on foot again, looking for him.

“Fortunately it had rained the night prior, and so when I came to an intercepting trail, I could see he had turned off the marked trail. I found him shortly, standing in a stream with the saddle hanging under his belly. He was all right, but it had been a horrible three hours for both of us.

“He was too frightened to move. I got the saddle back in place and secure, and I ended up riding the last half of the course with my wife Cheryl. Although there would be no completion on this ride, I used the time and the second half of the course to get some training in on him.

“In fact,” added Newman, “he led a group of horses through a swollen stream that they were too frightened to cross.”

MOVES MAKE FOR CONDITIONING

Because of his work as a telecommunication consultant, Newman has lived in several states. Each place of residence offered a different terrain to condition Drubin. Newman believes that helped to develop his horse's athletic abilities.

"He developed tough feet and good bone from the rocky terrain where he was raised in Pennsylvania. When he was 5 and 6 years old, he lived with us in New Jersey, near the coast. The many miles of mostly trotting on sandy trails helped to build ligaments and tendons. Then we moved to California where we did lots of mountain riding that gave him the strength and metabolic edge."

Today, the Newmans and their horses live in the mountains of North Carolina. Behind their house is a 2,000-foot climb that Drubin often runs free on when the Newmans condition other horses. "Free running," said Newman, "keeps the weight off his back and stress off his joints. There are thousands of forested acres out the back of our property where the trails are hardly used by anyone else for riding. Drubin will not leave the horses we are riding, although he usually leads. If he gets too far out in front, all I have to do is stop and he comes back.

"Cheryl and I often play games with him. For instance when we come to an intersection, he will go one way and we'll go another. All of a sudden he slams to a stop, whirls around, and blasts past us to take the lead again."

Newman said, "I am fortunate indeed that Maggy Price bred such a tough, athletic and strong-willed horse. Despite being a handful in his early years, the Pony and I became 100-mile partners. Thanks, Maggy!"