



Gai Trillo At 36

The Last Of His Kind

by LINDA WHITE

“Nobly to live ... befits proud birth.”

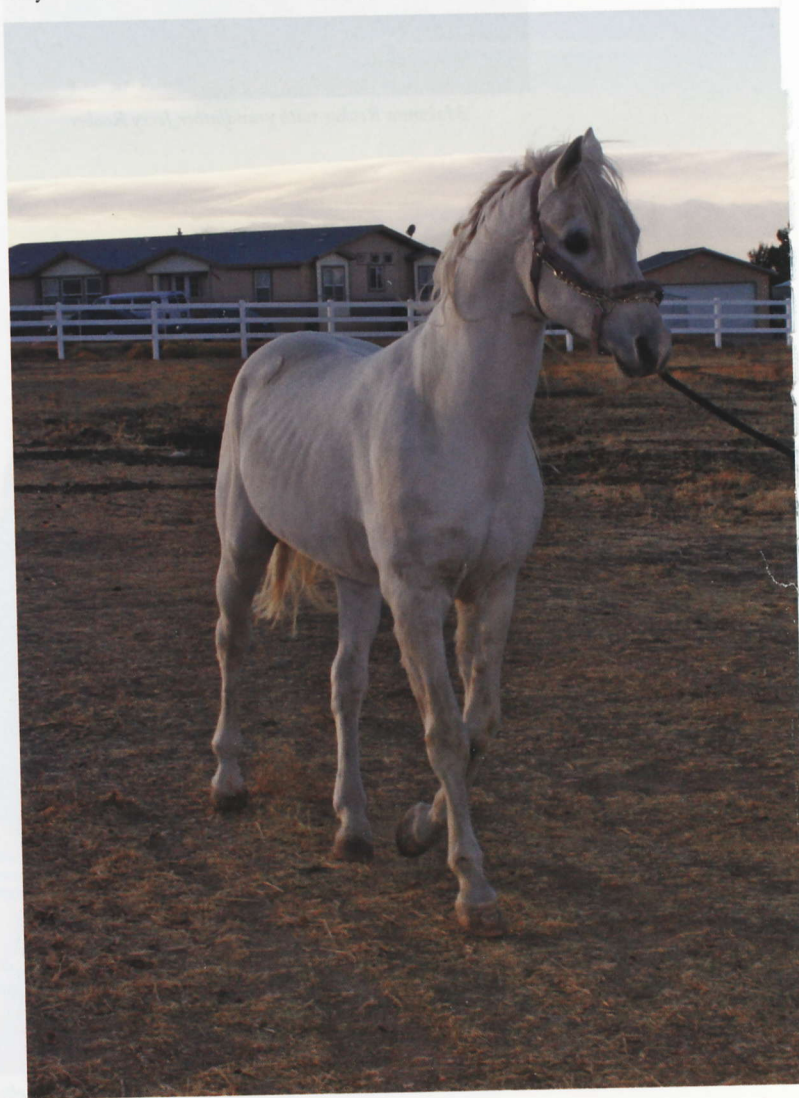
—Socrates

The sentiment above perfectly describes Gai Trillo's earthly journey thus far. He is a Gainey Arabian, and as befits his proud birth, his life has been filled with noble accomplishments. Most notable was winning the 1977 U.S. National Pleasure Driving Championship. The grand old stallion will be 37 this March, but he is only old on the *outside*. He seldom looks, acts, or even acknowledges his 36 years. Although he has reached a time of life in which most horses look, act, and feel their age, Gai Trillo is the exception. *Inside*, in his mind and heart, he will forever be a breathtaking young stallion, defeating a tough field of older, more experienced grown-ups to win a national performance title.

He is as sound today as he ever was. He wears no shoes, and his clean, straight legs could be those of a much younger horse. A look at recent photos confirms that there is no hint of sagging pasterns, a problem often found in older horses. Thanks to a lifetime of wise, loving care and good management, his huge brown eyes sparkle with good health, contentment, and even mischief. The old fellow is in good flesh, too, especially for such an elderly gent. Pelleted “seniors” feed and alfalfa pellets are serving him well.

“He has gotten a bit creaky in the joints,” concedes Natalie Nicotra-Angstadt, his new and final owner, “but when we head for his turnout, he prances at the end of the lead like a young horse, ready to show off. Not long ago, he was running in his turnout when he slipped and fell. We held our breath, as the momentum of falling at speed rolled him over onto his back. He hung up there, for an instant, like a turtle. I started to run in to assist, but he righted himself by himself, stood up, bucked, leapt into the air, and took off again.”

Gai Trillo is one of several hundred champions and national winners bred over more than 50 years by the late Daniel C. Gainey, and after him, his son Daniel J. Gainey and family. The expression in this grey stallion's markedly large, intelligent, low-set eyes; his tiny ears; and the distinctive shape of his short, finely



sculpted face immediately give away his ancestry. Gainey dynasty-founder Ferzon is Gai Trillo's sire. His dam, Morningstar PHA Geyma, was by Pharaff, a champion park horse and successful herd sire for Ohio breeders Clyde and Betty Fisher.

Dan Gainey spent his life marketing and selling beautiful things, and his intuitive knack for knowing what the public wanted became legendary. It was no surprise, then, that his horse breeding instincts would be on target as early as 1942, when the Registry first listed him as "breeder." For the next 10 years, he bred his growing herd of exceptional, meticulously-selected Crabbet mares to a variety of stallions. Several sires, he purchased; more were outside horses who interested him. But there was always something missing—until early in 1952, when he visited Arabian breeders Frank and Helen McCoy in Chino, Calif. There he found Ferzon, a yearling colt whose almost eerily intelligent expression and exquisite, thin-skinned, finely drawn quality stopped Gainey in his tracks. He bought the



*Facing page and above:
Gai Trillo (Ferzon x Morningstar PHA Geyma, by Pharaff).*

colt on the spot, and took him home. (At the time, Gainey Arabians' only location was the Owatonna, Minn., farm. Later a 2,200-acre ranch in Santa Ynez, Calif., begun in 1962, and a Scottsdale, Ariz., property would essentially replace the Minnesota original.)

Ferzon (Ferneyn, by Ferseyn x Fersara, by Ferseyn), intensely linebred to Crabbet import *Raseyn, and through him to Skowronek, exceeded Gainey's expectations. In his role as Gainey Arabians' foundation sire, the stallion's prepotency amazed Arabian breeders and fanciers throughout his long life. Here was a sire they could count on! Ferzon's glamorous offspring, each one immediately identifiable as his son or daughter, soon put Dan Gainey's breeding program on the map. An ever-increasing number of professionals and amateurs were exposed to the right-thinking, beautiful, talented animals, and word got around.



The Gainey Arabians became one of the Arabian horse world's most beloved families. Today, Robin Gainey continues the family tradition, but the herd was largely dispersed in 1995. Nearly 70 years after its beginnings, horses with one or more Gainey Arabians in their pedigrees continue to exert a positive influence in show rings and Arabian breeding programs everywhere.

"Gai Trillo has kept the Gainey bloodlines alive through his own get and grandget," explains Tammy King, whose parents, Irma and Joe King, bought Gai Trillo from Gainey in 1979. "I have trained, shown and won with his get and grandget in English, western and hunter pleasure. They all have had the Ferzon 'look,' that penetrating, intelligent, almost eerie gaze that seems to look right into your soul. I would break them to drive first. They all have been sweet-tempered, safe and problem-free, with Gai Trillo's wonderful willingness and desire to please, so typical of the Gainey horses."

The durable grey stallion is Ferzon's last living son. Gai Trillo and the late, great Gai Parada are perhaps the best-known Ferzon sons. Those two and their siblings and grandkids accounted for many national championships and other national, regional, and Pacific Slopes titles in performance and halter. The Ferzon daughter Gavrelle produced 1974 U.S. National Champion Stallion, Gai-Adventure. Gai Trillo's immediate family and their descendants clearly demonstrated their ability to perpetuate their Gainey heritage. Although his own opportunities in the stud were limited, his offspring won halter and performance championships left and right.

Gai Trillo went to the horse shows with several trainers, including Larry Lewis and Michael Byatt. Sterling White trained and drove him to his 1977 national championship. When Irma and Joe King, of Burbank, Calif., bought Gai Trillo from the Daniel C. Gainey estate two years later, the couple chose to retire their still gorgeous, still

competitive new purchase to a career at stud. Very few outside mares were accepted, however.

“Getting Gai Trillo was quite an adventure!” says Tammy King, an attorney and member of the California Bar Assn. “My parents knew somebody who knew somebody who knew somebody who knew Sterling White, who was then trainer at Gainey’s. Mother and Dad went to see Gai Trillo, loved him at first sight, and bought him. When we drove to Scottsdale to pick him up, I rode all the way down in the shell on the pickup truck bed! I was about 7. We never showed him or any of our other horses (whose number totaled 50 at one point) at halter after we lost Rose of Azraff. She developed an ulcer that killed her, brought on by what Mother always believed was the stress and high pressure the halter division imposes on horses of all ages.”

Joe King passed away in January 2001, and his beloved Irma followed him in 2005. When their estate was probated, their daughter reluctantly began to disperse the aging herd, carefully placing individuals in pairs in loving homes. Gai Trillo went to Natalie Nicotra-Angstadt in May 2009. Two months later, King’s Gai Trillo son Kings Trillomar, 28, a stallion she had shown successfully in western pleasure years before, joined his sire at Nicotra-Angstadt’s. King still has an elderly Half-Arabian Gai Trillo daughter who is out of a Saddlebred mare. She would like to place the mare in a loving home.

The two aged stallions’ new lodgings could not have been more propitious. Kindness, knowledge and a profound love for Arabian horses undergirded Nicotra-Angstadt’s decision to provide them with a home where they would be loved and well cared for. She had ridden and shown hunters on her New York circuit as a kid. In 1993, riding and training a local breeder’s young Arabians, Nicotra-

Angstadt, then 19, made a deal with her employer to get her first horse: a 3-year-old, Crabbet-related Arabian filly. She still owns the mare, who kindled her fascination with Crabbet horses and their descendants.

“When I discovered Daniel C. Gainey and the Gainey Arabians, I knew I had found the horses of my dreams,” she explains. “I fell in love with Ferzon and *Raffles before I ever knew of their enormous influence on the Arabian breed.”



The Gai Trillo son Kings Trillomar (x Rose Of Azraff, by Azraff).

She adds that Gai Trillo’s immediate appeal was that he even still existed. “I believe his age and good health speak volumes about his genotype,” she says. “Descendants of the early Crabbet imports are sound, hardy, intelligent, long-lived, and wonderfully willing to do whatever is asked of them. Being a part of Gai Trillo’s life helps me to understand and appreciate how much he is his father’s son. I remain a true believer in the kind, gentle ways of those bloodlines, and will continue to surround myself with their descendants.”

Tammy King can now put aside her grief and take the long view of her parents’ most cherished purchase. “In my eyes,” she says sincerely, “Gai Trillo’s greatest accomplishment will always be how happy and proud he made my parents. For as long as I can remember, their nightstand had a photo of themselves at the airport, holding one of his trophies.

“When Dad became too ill to drive anymore, I would take him out to the ranch to visit the horses. They all knew him, of course, and would come right up, very friendly. If Gai Trillo was outside in his paddock when we came up, he would come right over to the fence. Dad would kiss him on the nose, give him a peppermint, and tell whoever was nearby, ‘This is my horse. The rest belong to my wife.’” ■