

*Show true colors at Penn National*

# Local exhibitors applaud adaptable equines

**BY DONNA TOMMELLEO**  
**HARRISBURG** — Melanie, 19, and Marta, 17, Lipensky along with their mother Anne were returning home to Lebanon from a shopping trip about two years ago when they spied "Louie."

The big bay Saddlebred was passing through Lancaster pulling an Amish buggy. To most motorists he was just another buggy horse, a common sight in the Red Rose region.

But the Lebanon sisters knew better.

They followed the rig to its destination and approached the Amish family about a possible sale.

"The Amish family was suprised," Marta recalls. "They told us they used him as their Sunday horse."

"He was groomed very nicely, but his shoes weren't exactly the best," she adds.

Nevertheless, the big bay, formally called Wings Shamrock, had caught the sisters' eyes. The Lipenskys and the Amish owners did not strike a deal at their first meeting, so Marta and Melanie returned again — this time with a saddle in tow.

The girls went home to sleep on the idea of owning a buggy horse. Meanwhile, their parents Anne and Mel were vacationing for 10 days in Las Vegas. During that time, it was Melanie, a freshman at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, who broke the bank and finally bought "Louie."

Strutting his stuff on the Penn National tanbark is a far cry from pavement pounding along the Lancaster highways, but with time "Louie" adapted.

"It took us a good two or three months to get him ready for the show ring," Marta explains. But the 10-year-old gelding didn't let

the traffic of the show ring bother him either as Melanie piloted him to a fifth place in the ESHBA Five Gaited class, during this week's Penn National competition.

The tall gray Saddlebred, affectionately dubbed "Rocky," started out as a pleasure horse, remarks owner Patricia Nucci.

But thanks to "Rocky's" trainer Nancy Deep, employed at Symbol Acre Farm in Leola, the good-natured gelding entered three-gaited competition this year.

"He needed a lot of changes. We gave him special attention and training on figure work," Deep explains.

Patricia and husband Richard Nucci undoubtedly were pleased with their "special student's" performance this week. With Patricia on board, "Rocky," christened Mountain Highland Legend walked off with a fourth in his ESHBA Three-Gaited class.

"Rocky's" improvement parallels that of his rider. Patricia Nucci began riding just two years ago and has since been a part of the major show circuit.

Beth Wentz of Leola is certainly no stranger to the show circuit. Born and raised on her family's Symbol Acre Farm, Beth has been working as a full-time trainer for 10 years.

Along with her brother-in-law George Nash and assistant trainer Nancy Deep, Beth helps oversee the training of nearly 20 Saddlebreds.

The Symbol Acre staff had a challenge, however, in their liver chestnut gelding, Loose Change.

"He started out as a five-gaited horse, but didn't want to go around the ring," Beth recalls.

The horse's inability to cooperate earned him the

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Marlene Sweigart of Denver purchased her ribbon-winning Hackney pony Pegasus five years ago at the Devon Horse Show. Since then, the Sweigarts have turned down several offers to sell the 50-inch gelding, one of the leading ponies in the nation.



Patricia Nucci, atop "Rocky" gets a last-minute check from Symbol Acre trainer Beth Wentz. Wentz, a full-time trainer at the Leola stables, owned by her father Robert, is no stranger to the Penn National tanbark and has collected two Horse of the Year awards in her career.



"Louie" was an Amish buggy horse when Marta Lipensky, 17, at halter, and her sister Melanie, 19, first saw him along the Lancaster County highways two years ago. Today, the big bay Saddlebred pulls in ribbons, instead, including a fifth place in the ESHBA Five-Gaited class with Melanie in the saddle.



Symbol Acre trainer George Nash is at the halter of Loose Change. Earlier this year stable personnel began calling the liver chestnut gelding "Last Chance," when he refused to cooperate with five-gaited workouts. Nash switched the Saddlebred to three-gaited and piloted the horse to a blue ribbon in the Penn National's Open Three-Gaited class.