



# THE Standardbred — JOURNAL —

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# GERG MY HCASEY

2021

WORLD CHAMPION ROADSTER TO BIKE

*Howard Schaffter*



# THE Standardbred — JOURNAL —

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings to all of you! We hope this finds you all enjoying and transitioning to the fast approaching fall season. This summer has flown by like a whirlwind with all the equine events that fill the summer weekends (a great thing!) It gives everyone a reason to come together more often, to visit, and to get to know each other better.

Isn't what the equine industry is all about? If we stop and think, it's the relationships that we create as we do our business that pay off at the end of the year. That's just what Steve Jones is telling us in his article entitled, "Integrity In The Standardbred Industry." If we think about what is best to do in the long run and not just what benefits us that day, we will create friends everywhere we go.

We've just come out of a great show season. In this issue, you will find show results of thirteen roadster shows from across the country. Plus, we have Bob Funkhouser's exciting, in-depth article, "Roadster Mania," which talks about the World's Grand Championship in Louisville, Kentucky.

This past summer has been a great experience for me, building relationships with a great new set of friends. I cannot wait to see what the future holds and the people I will get to meet!

When you see us at an event, I invite you to stop and visit, or give us a call if you have ideas or questions. Your input is very valuable. I hope to assist you in any way possible!

*- Mark Yoder*

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**Next Issue: Stallion Issue**  
**Mails out January 12, 2022**  
**Advertising Deadline: December 1, 2021**  
*For advertising information, see page 152.*

## ON THE COVER



Our front cover features the World Champion Roadster to Bike from the Kentucky State Fair, GRCH My Casey. Driven by Ricky Harris.

*Cover photo courtesy Howard Schatzberg.*





*Slate Acres Training Facility near Baltic, Ohio. Aerial Photos: Wade Wilcox*

*“If you’re not moving forward, you’re moving backwards.”  
– Dave Hershberger*





# Slate Acres Stables

## *A Destination for Fine Harness Horses*

*By Reuben Dourte   Photography Provided by Slate Acres*

Approximately two and a half miles west of the quiet town of Baltic, Ohio, nestled against a backdrop of sparsely wooded, “rolling hills” is one of the country’s premier training barns of fine harness horses.

The rich red color of the steel on the neatly kept barns, with their accents of charcoal-colored trim, along with the well-manicured grounds of Slate Acres Stables, is plenty enough to attract visitors. It also offers the impression that this is a facility where the finer details about fine harness horses will be attended to in great detail.

Robert Hershberger set out to turn his vision of an elite stable of horses into a reality around the turn of the 21st century. Striving to do things the right way, find new and better ways to achieve superior results, and improve constantly is the kind of mentality Robert Hershberger carried with him.

He accomplished his goals and set up an empire for fine harness horses. Now, Robert’s son David has taken that mentality and used it to propel Slate Acres Stables to new heights over the past several years.

Slate Acres Stables is now a well-known source of show quality prospects within the Amish Standardbred industry and the fine harness show world, alike. However, this was not always the case. In the late 1990s, the Hershbergers began a horse habit that would transform into a full-time business for the family’s second generation. This came with the purchase of Percheron Draft Horses.

### **Draft Horses Beginnings**

Robert had developed an interest in horses. Therefore, he attended a draft horse sale with his brother-in-law. Soon after, the family was breeding their Percherons under their Slate Acres prefix. Moreover, the product of their program was regularly finding themselves on the front pages of sale reports across the Midwest.

More importantly, the presence of the horses on the farm allowed a young equestrian to grow up within the horse industry. It also gave him the time to learn by trial and error with the Percherons he began to train and fit for sales. It would be this experience with drafts that resulted in Dave catching the horse “bug.” Moreover, it would also lay the groundwork for a career in training and presenting fine harness horses and roadster prospects.

### **The Early Years with Draft Horses**

During those early years, Dave enjoyed attending draft horse sales with his father as a young boy. The two would regularly visit Dublin Valley Farms to watch Robert Hershberger trained and prepped a string of Percheron mares for auction each spring. These trips helped to solidify Dave’s desire and vision further to start his training stables.

Similarly, his father credits Rob from Dublin Valley for his exemplary help and support over the years. As it turns out, the Mid-Ohio Memorial Trotting Sale, which Rob

was heavily involved with, became an annual highlight for Dave. So, he consigned horses to the public auction every year since its beginning.

Dave Hershberger will be the first to tell you that it would have been beneficial to do some formalized job-shadowing with a top-end trainer in hindsight. He will go so far as to tell you that he feels it could even be worth paying for the privilege to learn from them to shorten a learning curve.

However, hindsight, as they say, is 20/20. Therefore, sometimes, when you couple being young and hungry with having a curious personality and a mentality that seeks progress, it is enough to achieve the results you are looking for in the long run.

### **Refining Their Approach To Training**

With that mindset, Dave has developed and continuously refined his approach to fine harness horse training over the past decade. Along with expressing a great deal of gratitude to his father for helping him follow his dreams, Dave credits much of Slate Acres Stables' success to having a quality barn crew and knowledgeable assistant trainers working with him.

His success comes from having the right people working with him toward common goals. Moreover, an open mind and willingness to learn have helped Dave glean information and techniques from other top trainers who are willing to share their methodology. These are trainers like Steven Yoder of Sterling Equine, whom Dave credits with helping him make great strides in how he fits and presented the horses that came to Slate Acres. They helped him with bridling and his conditioning regime for the fine harness athletes in his barn.

Now, Dave is armed with over a decade of experience, shared knowledge from other top trainers, and an enduring desire to set higher standards for himself and the horses in his care. So, Dave Hershberger has developed a fine-tuned approach to train, fit, and present the fine harness horses at Slate Acres Stables.

Get Dave talking about both the philosophy and meth-

odology behind his training practices. You will find an approach that is foremost rooted in logic while maintaining the ultimate goal of addressing all the finer details required to bring a horse to its maximum level of performance.

### **Training Routine for New Horses**

When a client brings a prospect to Slate Acres Stables to be trained or sale-prepped, the first thing Dave takes into consideration is how much time he and his crew have to work and develop the horse's potential. As a trainer, there is always a balance between the amount of time one would prefer to have with a horse and the amount of time given.

When a horse is brought to the stables on short notice before a show or sale, the preferable slow and gradual training process may have to be tweaked to produce the desired results for the client.

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*“As a trainer, there is always a balance to be found between the amount of time one would prefer to have with a horse, and the amount of time that is actually given.”*

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However, amending this ideal slow and gradual development of a fine harness prospect to meet a sale or show deadline is done carefully by evaluating the individual horse's ability, potential, and temperament. For this reason, each new horse begins at Slate Acres with the same standard approach; a one-week evaluation period.

Beginning horses in this way provides invaluable intel that will pay dividends in the training process to come. During this week, the horse is allowed to relax, jog at a comfortable pace, and have its head, typically with-





*Nordic Dream*  
*A Slate-trained horse who became a 2021 Reserve World Champion. Sold at the Memorial Trotting Sale.*

out any check. This basic approach gives Dave and the assistant trainers a chance to see what the horse does naturally. So, it can help uncover and expose any initial problems or discomfort.

In an optimal situation, where time permits, the next month is spent slowly developing the horse from this base-line and gradually asking more of them. It is beyond the one-month mark that the true customized and tailored approach to each horse can begin.

During the weeks following the horse's first month at Slate Acres, the finishing touches will begin to be applied, and this can maximize a horse's potential. They may try further variations in biting during this time for horses requiring different mouthpieces to stay comfortable, happy, and expressive.

Dave mentions a need for a training facility to "have a lot of bits available, however, use but a few." Moreover, options are necessary to have on hand, but as a trainer, you will often find a bit that works in the majority of the horses in the barn. Knowing when to try something different is one of those things that comes with years of experience and the discriminating eye of a good horseman.

Horse owners will do well to remember that it is the smallest of details and these finishing touches that separate the good horses from the great ones. Even when



*CU Later*  
*Another Slate highlight, CU Later (sired by Hard Rock N Roll) winning the USTA Classic with Debbie Foley.*

a horse has the natural ability for greatness, it is so often that the last 10% of training, fitting, and prep work creates the highlight-reel finish in the show or sale ring.

### **Growth in Standardbred and Harness Industry**

As results in the ring began to follow the hard work and efforts at home, the Hershbergers began to find the fitting and training aspects of their business growing ever busier. This resulted in attendance to more and more sales and presentation events within the Standardbred and fine harness industry. Subsequently, this would result in having a finger on the pulse of the market.

Just as they had done a few decades prior with their Percherons, the Hershbergers were keeping a watchful eye on some of the top producing bloodlines and prospects in the Standardbred breed. This would lead them to the young Hard Rock N Roll son, Rev N Roll, who they first noticed as a yearling and who had recently concluded his first season.

A partnership of Starlight Acres, Nelson Ledge Stables, and Slate Acres Stables was formed, seeing great potential in the well-bred stallion. Therefore, Rev N Roll would relocate to Ohio, where he would be entered into Dave's training regimen before the upcoming stallion presentation season. Rev N Roll continued to develop into the kind of stallion his pedigree would suggest he should be.



He was entered into a few key stallion presentations to allow breeders in different geographic areas the chance to see him in person.

Rev's 2021 breeding season was a busy one, with the stallion breeding well over 100 mares. Helping in his promotion was his weanling offspring averaging over \$10,000 at the National Breeders' Showcase Auction in December of 2020, with his top weanling offspring selling for \$18,000.

### The Secret Behind Slate Acres Success

Like with so many stories, Hershberger's success with Slate Acres has come from an uncompromised dedication to improving their craft and progressing with an industry. Dave likes to say, "if you're not moving forward, you're moving backward." With this vision, he and his father, Robert, conceptualized a new entity named Slate Acres Investments.

Dave states that the two of them were looking for a way to reimagine and broaden the horse industry. They often encountered people who wanted to invest in the equine marketplace and either did not have the money to buy a top-tier horse alone or wished to keep their ownership anonymous for various reasons.

Other times, willing and enthusiastic investors didn't have

the means or the time to locate horses but were interested in being part of something "bigger." Slate Acres Investments would ultimately become a means these participants could eliminate many of the barriers to entry to owning a top-level harness horse prospect.

The investment group has not only seen success in bringing some elite equine highlights to market, but it has also had a marked impact on Dave's training and prepping services. More often than not, horses purchased by the investment group are arriving at Slate Acres Stables with an adequate amount of time to develop their natural potential through a full training regimen fully. For this reason, Dave looks forward to seeing the growth of the share of horses in the barn that are owned by Slate Acres Investments.

Over the past two decades, the Hershbergers have built their brand, reputation, and market share from the ground up through hard work, honest representation, and a commitment to quality in both their horses and their craft.

There have been plenty of highlights and accomplishments over the years, but Dave Hershberger has never been one to get comfortable while looking backward at past results. If you ask him what his goals are for the future of Slate Acres, his answer comes without hesitation, "Set an even higher bar, and keep moving forward!" *TSJ*



*2019 Royal Champion. A Memorial Trotting Sale consignment presented by Slate Acres.*



*A Mr Cantab sired, multiple-time champion. Was presented by Slate Acres at the Memorial Trotting Sale.*





*Rev N Roll, co-owned by Slate Acres*



*Drop The Pilot*

*Drop the Pilot sold at the 2021 Memorial Trotting Sale. Renamed Breaking Bad, he was purchased by Scott Hagan, and in training with Shane Mullens.*



*Danger Zone*

*Another gelding who sold at the Memorial Trotting Sale. Trained by Rick Adams.*

The Hershbergers would like to offer a special thanks to all of their suppliers for the great products and services that help keep Slate Acres operating at its best. Being folks who always love to talk horses, the Hershbergers invite fellow breeders and equestrians to stop by their stalls and inspect their offering of fine harness horses at various key events during the year. This includes the National Breeders' Showcase Auction, the Mid-America Trotting Sale, The Midstate Trotting Horse Sale, the Mid-Ohio Memorial Trotting Sale, and various stallion presentations. Inquiries about learning more or becoming part of the excitement that the Slate Acres Investments Group is bringing to the Standardbred industry.





REVVED N READY

USTA Roadster to Bike  
Classic Champion

Howard  
Schaffter  
2021  
World's  
Championship  
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