



Fjords Dominate *at Villa Louis* 2011

by Phillip Odden



Elsa and I just got back from the well organized and fun ADS sanctioned Villa Louis Carriage Classic pleasure driving show. 2011 was a great year for Fjord horses at Villa Louis, which is a most beautiful venue located on the banks of the Mississippi River. This has become one of the nicest, most prestigious and competitive pleasure shows in the United States, with participants from several states and horses and ponies of many breeds represented. At Villa the quality increases; in the animals presented, the vehicles driven and in horsemanship skill. Those who were able to win easily in the past now are having problems winning ribbons if their horses do not move well enough, their turnouts are not nice enough or their driving skills are not strong enough. On the other hand, there are several Fjord owners new to driving who are making the effort to learn how to compete at American Driving Society pleasure driving shows and they are doing very well. Those who choose modern, athletic Fjords, find that Norwegian Fjords make good pleasure driving horses.

Here is a short report on what I could gather regarding the Fjord effort at Villa Louis 2011. Please understand that I was showing my own Fjord pair while I was helping my student, Alyssa, show my mare Gunvor for her first ADS show. So we were busy and I am certain I missed a lot during the weekend.

Debbie Ulrich, driving Ballycalmar Skye, took Reserve in the Novice Driver Pony division.

Monica Gjoringbo

Villa Louis 2011

Fjords were entered in seven divisions, won four Division Championships and two Reserve Championships this year.

One Fjord was entered in the Junior Division, driven by Alexandra Parker. This young lady has a very calm willing Fjord. Alexandra has primarily shown her pony the past few years at 4-H driving and riding shows. She, with help from her mother, did a nice job showing her mare. Most importantly, they seemed to be having a lot of fun at Villa Louis.

Large Pony Open is one of the most competitive divisions to enter, with twelve experienced whips driving very well trained ponies. Jessica Rueterskoid drove her mare Kandi, put to a road cart. Jessica recently started showing at ADS shows, winning three first place ribbons, which landed her in the open division at Villa. Jessica and Kandi were very steady and looked good together. Tyler Schlickman drove Kandi in the ride and drive and Jessica did the riding. I was surprised they did not place, since it all looked very nice from where I stood. But the competition was tough. Samantha Poirier won the Ride and Drive as well as an overall Championship in the Large Open Pony division with Green Valley Farm's stallion, Sjokolade (known as Hershey). Hershey has great presence with big movement and Sami certainly drove him well in a division filled with extraordinarily well trained animals and masterfully driven turnouts. The Poirier/ Hershey combination have been doing extremely well at ridden dressage shows this summer, which certainly transfers nicely to driving.

Gretchen Huff took a reserve Championship in the Novice Driver Horse Division, driving a horse size Fjord owned and trained by her sister, Susan Keating. There were eight turnouts in her division but she had the only Fjord. Gretchen was quick to give a lot of credit to her sister, Susan Keating, because,



Else Bigton

Above: Dr. Chet Thomas, driving Trina, won a special first place for Reinsmanship in a very tough class!

Below: Chet Thomas and Trina.



Else Bigton



Samantha Poirier and GVF Sjolokade won the Championship in the Large Open Pony division.

Else Bigton

Villa Louis 2011



Else Bigton

Gretchen explained, this was Susan's passion and Gretchen had only very recently started to drive again after many years away from the sport, therefore she felt she was a total novice.

Susan Keating has been training Fjords for many years dating back to the early days with Gene Bauer. She earned a Championship in the Novice Horse/Pony Division. Susan has competed very successfully for many years with Fjord horses at Pleasure driving shows, always with high quality, well trained Fjords.

In the same division, Amy Hartwig drove a gelding named Uno, newly imported from Norway by Bob Long. Amy is a talented horseman and did a fine job. I expect in the coming years we will hear more about Uno because he is very well put together, and has big movement and a good mind. Amy did very well in the ride and drive class too, earning a third place ribbon.



Else Bigton

Phil Odden won four first place ribbons, a second in working pleasure and fifth in turnout, to win the Pairs Pony Division (for the sixth year in a row) with veterans Marcy and Herger (and Howard Fiedler in the dicky seat).

I expect in the coming years we will hear more about Uno because he is very well put together, and has big movement and a good mind.

Amy Hartwig drove Bob Long's gelding, Uno, recently imported from Norway. The pair earned third place in Ride and Drive.

Villa Louis 2011

Else Bigton



Above: Alyssa Tisdell (with her boyfriend Josh) driving Phil Odden's mare Gunvor, won the Championship in the Novice Driver Pony division.

Below: Alyssa Tisdell and Gunvor

Bob Long had his new pair of Fjords entered in the Pair Pony Division, along with five other competitors including me, Phil Odden. Bob was planning to use a seasoned pair of Fjords but, due to an injury, ended up substituting a three-year-old gelding (newly imported from Norway) in his pair. Bob was able to win some nice ribbons, including two seconds on Saturday but chose to pull his horses from competition on Sunday because he was afraid the mental challenge was perhaps too much for his young horse. Hats off to Bob for taking care of his horse (even though he would have loved to have given me more grief in the Pair Pony Division).

In the end, I won four first place ribbons, a second in working pleasure and fifth in turnout, to win the Pairs Pony Division (for the sixth year in a row) with my veterans Marcy and Herger. I am sure Bob's ponies will be mighty tough in the future, with a little more experience under their girths. And, I understand there is a new pair of Fjords from Illinois getting ready to compete in pleasure shows next year.



Else Bigton

Villa Louis 2011

Chet Thomas, driving the horse-size Trina, won an impressive blue ribbon in Reinsmanship in the extremely competitive Single Horse Open division, proving that both Trina and Chet have learned to listen well each in their own right. Chet and Donna Thomas have a good thing going. Donna coaches Chet when he drives Trina and Chet offers suggestions to Donna when she rides. Trina was looking better than ever. This certainly has much to do with the fact that Donna has been training Trina under her experienced and competent Dressage saddle while Chet has been working her in driven dressage to compete in Combined Driving Events. Chet had his "game face" on in the cones course and did well there too.

Novice Driver Pony division was dominated by Fjords with both Grand and Reserve Championships. Debbie Ulrich took the Reserve, driving one of her own ponies with a nice blue ribbon in working pleasure. My student, Alyssa Tisdell of Barronett, Wisconsin, won the Championship, driving one of my experienced mares, Highland Prairie Gunvor. Alyssa learned how to harness a horse about two months before Villa Louis but she has ridden horses since she was a little girl. Having just turned twenty-one, she is now a beautiful young woman with a great big smile and lots of poise. Alyssa (with her boyfriend Josh as groom) won four blue ribbons in six classes, which means she will now have to compete in open divisions at ADS pleasure driving shows. It gave me great pleasure to see how well Alyssa and Gunnie worked together at their first ADS show. Gunnie is calm, collected and has big movement. If asked, she can move very fast and focused in the games classes. Alyssa is thinking of trying her quiet hands at Combined Driving Events in 2012.



Photo courtesy of Susan Keating

Susan Keating and Galt earned Reserve Champion Novice Horse Pony.

No other single breed did nearly as well as Fjords at Villa Louis in 2011.



Photo courtesy of Susan Keating

Gretchen Huff driving Mai, earned Champion Novice Driver.

Villa Louis 2011

I understand there are a couple more Fjord owners planning to compete next year at Villa Louis. During the show, I heard comments on how much improvement they have seen in the Fjord breed at ADS driving shows in past years. No other single breed did nearly as well as Fjords at Villa Louis in 2011.



Photo courtesy of Susan Keating

Susan Keating driving Galt with her husband, Bill.

Fjords make very good driving horses, for experienced as well as novice whips, but if you want to do this right you will need help from someone who knows the ropes and knows how to help people learn the ropes. Dressage training probably is not critical when you first start to enter ADS shows, but if you want to be competitive in open driving classes at the bigger shows, classic dressage training and an athletic Fjord with a good mind is hard to beat. Fortunately, there are competent mentors in the Fjord community as well as the wider driving community in several parts of the United States and Canada. 🐾



Elsa Bigton

Championship winners: Gretchen Huff, Debbie Ulrich, Susan Keating, Samantha Poirier, Alyssa Tisdell and Phillip Odden.

Work, School, Horse...

by Jessica Rueterskoid

Who isn't busy?

This may not be unique everyone, but to succeed in the show ring, this situation can prove to be difficult.

To make this work, I have to prioritize my daily activities. My job is the most important, of course. School comes second and the horse follows after. School you ask? I am currently working on my Master's degree online from Michigan State University. When I am finished, I will have a Master's degree in Pharmacology and Toxicology.

Along with starting my Master's degree last fall, I thought I would give a try at ADS driving. This would be a new adventure me and my Fjord mare Wood's Kandi. I have been showing horses at open shows and such for about 20 years! In the past couple of years, I have added driving to my list of skills. It is not my most favorite thing to do, but I am becoming more comfortable and confident. A good friend of our family and fellow Fjord lover, Pat Holland, convinced my family and me to try some ADS shows. We were hesitant at first because we weren't sure if we would fit in. My step dad (Tyler Schlickman) has been driving horses for years and I had been showing for years, so we thought we could make it work. Last year we went and watched classes at the Columbus Carriage Classic in Columbus, Wisconsin. It looked like a nice show and it looked like we could fit in with this new crowd. I also knew of an ADS show that was hosted in Hampshire, Illinois by the Fox Valley Saddle Association.

It worked out that the Fox Valley show would be our first attempt at ADS showing. My parents got our cart all refinished (they did this all on their own) and I got Kandi ready. Working full time and doing school



left me with limited time. Off we went to Hampshire, a little nervous, but excited about this new adventure. We arrived at Fox Valley and were immediately impressed with the facility and show management. Kudos to Julie Kneip (www.fvsa.org) and her crew for putting on a fabulous show! Kandi and I competed in the Novice Whip division and Tyler competed with her in the maiden pony division. Kandi and I had great success; earned 3 blue ribbons and the Novice Whip Division Championship! Tyler only did the rail classes so we would not wear Kandi out at her first show! Winning at this show meant we were no longer novices and we had to move up to the large pony open division.

Our next adventure was the Columbus Horse and Carriage Festival over Father's Day weekend. Rebecca Remmich and her crew put on a wonderful show and it was another great venue. Kandi and I competed in the Large Pony division while Tyler did the Novice Whip division. This time we both did all the classes for each division- a total of 12 classes. We did 8 on Saturday and 4 on Sunday. It seems that this high number of classes is unusual for ADS shows. Typically one division is plenty for one horse to do at a show. Kandi is a super pony and she was up to the challenge! She came through with flying colors as usual. Kandi and Tyler were Novice Whip division champions (one blue ribbon in the large Novice Whip Working class)! Kandi and I were third in our division, but only missed reserve by a few points. We were neck and neck with Dr. Joan Kempros. What a great honor that was!

Our final outing for the summer was the Villa Louis Carriage Classic held in Prairie du Chien on September 9-11. This is the largest pleasure driving show in the Midwest. There were many beautiful turnouts and the Large Pony Open division was very competitive. This show

provided us with a great learning experience. We came away with a 5th place in the Large Pony Open Cones class. Overall, Villa was a great venue and we can't wait to go back next year!

All and all, these competitions were great experiences. The competitors were very friendly and helpful. I would encourage anyone who is sitting on the fence about trying ADS to jump off and dive in! Go to a smaller show like Fox Valley and learn the ropes. Columbus was also a great atmosphere for a newcomer. The Villa Louis Carriage Classic (www.carriageclassic.com) in Prairie duChien, Wisconsin in September is the crème de la crème of Midwest driving shows. Even if you don't feel ready to compete at Villa, you should go watch and experience the atmosphere from the side lines.

As the owner and driver of Wood's Kandi, I cannot be any prouder! She truly exemplifies what a Fjord is and represents the breed well everywhere she goes. What many don't realize is that this whole experience has been a family affair. I have done the core training of Kandi while my step dad has helped with the driving aspect. We bought a used cart and refinished it to a new look. My mom has helped make our outfits suitable and fashionable. My husband is the photographer. We all are each a small piece of the complete puzzle.

We can all be truly proud of our accomplishments and have true satisfaction that we did it ourselves! We may not have the fancy expensive carriage or pony, but we have family and that is what is most important. We have had these great experiences because we have worked hard together! It is not just one person who gets all of the credit. We each played an equal part and can be proud!

Don't be afraid to try something new! Who knows where it can lead you! 🐾