

Lippiatt Stables — A Special Horse Show

Bob and Sherry Lippiatt had one thing in common when they were children, growing up in Salem and Alliance, respectively. They both loved horses. Now married 16 years, the parents of two teenage daughters and proprietors of a 54-acre farm, Bob and Sherry still share the same common bond.

Neither Lippiatt's affection for equines began with harness horses. They met while participating in 4-H horse shows. Bob has lots of trophies and ribbons from those early days, but Sherry was an even more accomplished rider. "She has so many trophies it's pathetic," smiles Bob. "She was a very good 'show-er' and was once a candidate for State Queen of the Quarterhorse Congress."

Daughters Theresa, 15, and Bobby Jo, 12, are following in their parent's footsteps. Both are active 4-H members and seldom does a summer weekend pass that the family isn't heading for a horse show where the girls put their registered quarterhorses on display.

Bob was introduced to harness horses by his father Ike who fooled with two or three from time to time despite his hectic schedule as owner of an Alliance carpet store. The elder Lippiatt put in a quarter-mile training track and small barn behind his carpet business on Rt. 62, which is now owned by Bob's brother Rick.

An average student at Salem High, Bob didn't find time for sports — preferring to hurry home after school to care for the horses. It wasn't until he was 15, though, that his interest shifted from show and riding horses to standardbreds.

The 6'0" Lippiatt took a summer job with Clyde Woolman Jr.'s stable at The Meadows near Pittsburgh upon graduation. Soon he had his first drive at the Carrollton County Fair, Dominic Staffrey of Canfield took an interest in the blossoming young horseman, too, and gave him a horse named Big Jerk to campaign on the fair circuit, helping Bob to get his pari-mutuel license.

For the next five years, Lippiatt installed carpet for his father by day and trained and drove harness horses by night. "I never liked the carpet business," he says, "and I always loved the horses. I knew it was just a matter of time until I went full-time with them."

Now 38, Bob has won 424 races and earned \$770,412 in purses. With a 17-horse stable that includes hard-hitting open class horses like Osborne's Show Gal and April's Flower those numbers are increasing rapidly.

Show Gal is a four-year-old pacing mare who was purchased for \$4100 as a yearling for Lee Mercer of Damascus, one of three longtime Lippiatt clients. She is nearing \$50,000 in career earnings and has taken a record of 2:00.1 at Northfield Park, where Bob does most of his racing.

Although he's had equal success with pacers, Bob prefers the trotting gait "because it's a bigger challenge. When you get one going right you get more satisfaction. And because there are less good trotters, you make more money than with a comparable pacer."

His first good trotter was Ike's Dream, named after his father who died 14 years ago. He won numerous races and estab-



Paddock Profiles

By Greg Keidel



SHERRY AND BOB LIPPIATT have enjoyed 16 years of harness horse training and have no plans to slow down. Their current 17-horse stable includes a mix of aged raceway stock and juvenile county fair campaigners. Bob is a full foot taller than his wife Sherry and 70 pound heavier, proving that harness drivers can come in all sizes. (Photo by Rand Broadstreet)

lished a track record at the Carrollton Fairgrounds which stood from 1978 until just this year. Lippiatt struck a lucrative deal with a large New York stable to sell Ike's Dream when he hit his prime.

April's Flower, currently resting after a very successful winter and spring meet, is a feared foe in northeast Ohio trotting circles, but it wasn't always that way. As a matter of fact, he contributed to a horrible scare the family will never forget.

"April's Flower was a fast trotter all along," Bob explains, "but we couldn't keep him from making breaks in stride during his two and three year old seasons. Out of frustration we put hobbles on him and made him a pacer. One night two years ago Sherry was driving him at Northfield (on the pace) when he caught a shoe and fell in the first turn. Sherry was run over by a couple trailing horses and was hospitalized with a concussion and three broken ribs."

Northfield regulars remember the incident well. It was one of the most spectacular pile-ups in memory and the sight of the diminutive 5'1", 100-pound Sherry lying motionless on the track had an apple in everyone's throat.

Sherry doesn't drive often, although she'd like to. She has compiled 22 wins and \$38,263 in career earnings despite only driving when Bob has a conflict and can't be in two places at one time. On the night Sherry took the frightful spill, Bob was racing at The Meadows near Pittsburgh.

"We had Rite's Rite in a race there,"

he recalls, "and he was known as a tougher horse to drive, sometimes making bad breaks. That's why I wasn't driving April's Flower. I never had such an empty feeling as when I got the call that Sherry had been hurt."

But the incident convinced the Lippiatts to put 'Flower' back on the trot and as an aged horse he has developed into one of the best half-dozen in the area.

When asked if he and Sherry considered her retirement from the sulky following the accident, Bob said, "Yeah...for about a minute. I'm not crazy about her driving in races, I get real nervous, but she works every bit as hard as me and wants to drive more than she does, not less, so she deserves to do what she wants. And despite her size, she can handle any horse that I can."

A former majorette and cheerleader at Marlinton High School, Sherry also served as outrider — leading the post parades on horseback — at Northfield for a couple years before management forced a decision between that task and her occasional sulky assignments, which she couldn't give up.

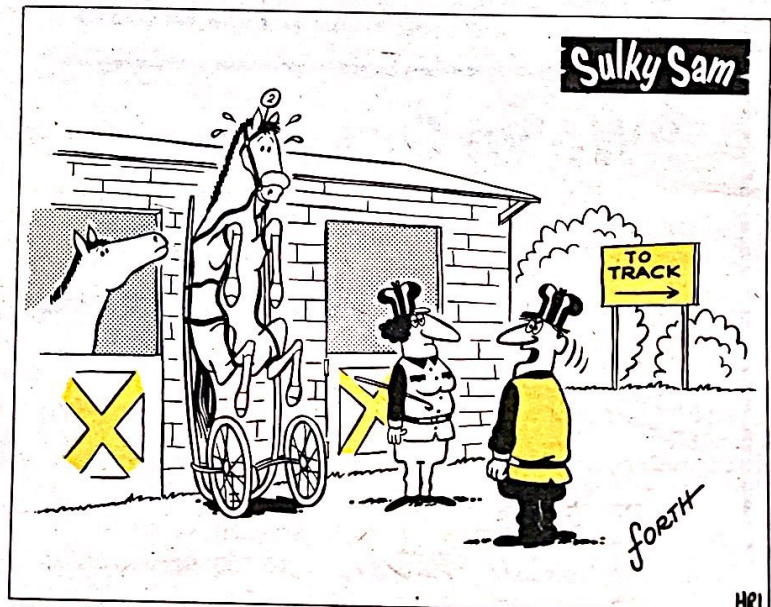
The Lippiatts and their daughters moved to their farm just north of Alliance eight years ago. The property now includes a well-maintained half-mile training track and a 20-stall barn.

"The constant shipping of our horses to race is a hassle," they admit, "but we like to be home in the daytime. Just get up and go to work. We do our own horse-shoeing and grow some of our own feed and it's easier at home. Plus, a lot of horses race better out of a farm environment rather than being stabled at the track all the time."

In addition to Mercer, who is semi-retired and visits Bob and Sherry almost daily to see his horses, the Lippiatts work for owners Versie Ahart of Southington and Anthony Stimac of Canfield. They also own about half of the 17 horses currently in training themselves.

"I'd like to move to Florida because I hate cold weather," Bob laughs. "But Sherry won't hear of it. She has family ties and likes things the way they are here."

So the likeable couple will be a fixture in northeast Ohio, continually searching for a "super" trotter — their common goal. "The ever-increasing quality of the breeding in Ohio is making it tougher for the smaller stables who can't afford to buy top yearling stock," Bob explains. "But there's always a couple good trotters who surprise everyone, too, and we're going to get one."



"Martha, I told you before . . . always unhitch the horse before you stand the sulky against the barn!"