

# Fjords & Western Dressage

BY GINA DESANTIS



## A Formidable Pair: Gabby Watson and Winnie

Article and photos by Suzan Fisher

Norwegian Fjords were represented at the 2014 Western Dressage America Association (WDAA) World Championship Show! This was the second year for this event and it experienced a three hundred fifty percent growth from the first year. There were more than four hundred thirty scheduled rides, filling four arenas over the weekend of November 1-2, 2014. More than twenty breeds of horses were represented and riders came from twenty-one states as well as Canada and two overseas countries.

Gunnar VI is a five-year-old Norwegian Fjord gelding (Plain Dealing's Tomten x Majestic Presence) bred, raised and trained at Let's Dance Dressage (owned by Gina DeSantis) in Clearfield, Pennsylvania. He was one of two Fjords at this show. The other Fjord was shown by young rider

Gabby Watson on Init 2 Winit, aka Winnie, in the Introductory and Basic levels. Both Fjords did a fantastic job of representing the breed!

My experience at the World Show was memorable to say the least! We traveled approximately 1100 miles from Pennsylvania, through Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Missouri to Oklahoma. We spent 20 hours driving and made overnight stops in Ashville, Ohio (Hold Your Horses Stables) and Eureka, Missouri (Circle R Horse Lodge).

Saturday, November 1st we competed in Basic Test 1 Open. Gunnar warmed up wonderfully and trotted into the Pavilion Arena like he owned it! He was energetic, attentive and responsive. We have been working through some issues with the left lead lope and although we had gotten it correctly in the warm-up we missed this lead in our test. Fortunately, he came right back to the trot and we continued the test without any lingering issues. The highlights were our free walk—we scored an 8.5 ("good stretch and overstep") and our final trot down centerline, halt and salute—we scored a 9 ("very steady, good straightness, square halt"). What a blast! I had a great ride and couldn't have been prouder of Gunnar's effort! We received a 64.677 % which ended up earning us 6th place out of 29 riders.



Top to bottom: Ready to start our test on Saturday. • Proud Gunnar! 6th place out of 29 entries in Basic Test 1 Open! • At the Circle R Horse Lodge getting ready to leave for Tulsa. Gunnar, Raylan (the dog) and Gina. All photos taken by Jake Peters.

Sunday, November 2nd we competed in Basic Test 2 Open. Our ride wasn't until 5:00 pm and Gunnar was lacking some energy at that point. Other than missing our left lead lope again there were no mistakes in our test but he was heavier in my hands and slightly less responsive than on Saturday. Again I left the arena with a big smile and was very proud of my horse! We earned a 67.639% on this test which tied us for 12th place out of 30 riders. The winner of the class had a 79%!

We had a great time and it was a pleasure sharing this amazing breed with the world! Hopefully in 2015 there will be more Fjords competing at this event!

Gabby and Init 2 Winit, aka Winnie, were a big hit in Tulsa. Winnie, who is six, came to our barn thirteen months ago with limited "backyard" training. Gabby has worked with Winnie consistently for the last year in a variety of disciplines. Gabby has taken Winnie to the All American Youth show, cross country, jumping, classical dressage, county fairs, open shows and to the Worlds show. They are an amazing pair and are always in the ribbons. Among their many feats have been Ride and Drive Versatility Grand Champion at Union County Fair; overall second place at Backyard horse Trials (against all adults); top five/top ten in all classes shown at All American Youth Horse Show (AAYHS); three top fives at Worlds and two top tens. None of this would be possible without the guidance and generosity of her instructor Leah Wilson from the Western Dressage Riding Center at Central Ohio Riding Club, located in Marysville, Ohio.

The highlight of showing in Tulsa would probably be the fact that this duo placed in the top five not only in the junior division, but also in the open division against adults and some amazing professionals. The competition was tough and most open classes had at least twenty competitors with some thirty deep. Gabby and Winnie were the first ride of the show in ring number three and also the last ride of the show in the same ring.

For the limited showing experience that Winnie has, she handled everything like a champ! She kept her head high and kept moving forward towards their goal. They both have so much still to learn but make an amazing team. Winnie is one of the barn favorites as she always has a great attitude and can get along with not only her humans but also her pasture mates. She is an "in your pocket" pony and we jokingly say she thinks everyone is a tootsie pop. She just wants to see how many licks it takes to get to the center. We spoil her constantly as she even got her own French fries at AAYHS after an amazing job in the arena and a Danish at the WDAA which results in her being lovingly called pig-pig.

The only downside that we can see is Winnie is on the small side, and regrettably Gabby will outgrow her in another couple of years, but the experience Gabby and Winnie have gained from each other is immeasurable!



Gabby Watson and Winnie have quite the extensive show record since beginning their partnership in 2013.