

The Multi-talented OTTB Peaches Babu *by Erica Gregg*

I often get emotional when someone asks me about Peach's story. Eight years ago my sales horse turned my forever horse when I said goodbye to her as she went into emergency surgery following a freak pasture accident. She had a 50/50 chance of survival. Everything we've done since that horrific day has been our second chance.

Have you ever known a horse so well that you know what she is thinking- and vice versa? Well that's me and P. Anyone who knows Peach would say she is probably the sweetest chestnut off-the-track Thoroughbred mare they've ever met. She's made a non-verbal child laugh. She's taught up-down beginner lessons, taken family members trail riding, and - while she's sweet - fire courses through her veins. She's a chestnut Thoroughbred mare, after all. She will do anything, but will do it at 150%, and has to do it her way. She loves to work, and thrives off having a job.

Funny enough, she's had many jobs since her time on the racetrack. She earned me my last two USDF Bronze Medal Scores; completed a USEA long format three day event; won jackpot jumper shows, hunter derbies, equitation medals, Thoroughbred showcase finalist - you name it, Peach has probably done it, or can do it. Last year, I became immersed in my young OTTB's training. Peach, however, does not do well on the back burner. So I continued three to four rides per week, more for fun, to keep her happy and healthy, and help me wind down from long days at work. Some days we did tempi changes and canter pirouettes. Others we went for long trots, or galloped the cross-country field. On Halloween of 2020, I took her off the farm for the first time in a year to go trail riding. That kicked off our next adventure, The Foxcatcher Endurance ride, and what a ride it was!

After a winter of hacking, fitness, and trail riding P came out in true P fashion: fit and sound as ever, and ready to take on our first endurance ride - by her rules of course. P's rules were simple; 1) She got to set the pace, 2) I stayed out of her way, and 3) My friend Mary's horse, Hogan, stayed visible at all times. As always, P knew best. We tied with Mary & Hogan for 10th out of 64 pairs. We had four veterinary exams, which P sailed through with perfect scores. I was honored and elated to learn that Peach, the teenaged Thoroughbred eventer and show horse, with a leaky aortic valve, bare feet, dressage saddle, and bitless bridle was named the Best Conditioned horse of the 25 mile ride. The pride I have for my little horse's accomplishment is difficult to convey into words.

I am so lucky to have so many great people over the years that have been part of Team P. They all know who they are. Most of all, my husband, John, has been unwavering in his support. We had been dating for two months when I bought Peach, so he's been there for the whole ride. Our signature wedding drink was even called the "Peaches Babu" after her Jockey Club name. Peach is the quintessential Maryland-bred Thoroughbred. She's just all heart, all the time. She doesn't really have an off switch. I think this is why she has found success in so many different equine sports. Her mind and body are so active, and she loves a good challenge.

She's by the late Yarrow Brae, out of Charging Ruby, by Rubiano. She was bred and trained by Big Lick Farm and won just shy of \$30,000 as a sprinter in her 13 starts. The connections at Big Lick Farm still keep in touch; it's great to see how much they care about their homebred. When I went to see Peach for the first time

it was 20 degrees, windy, no arena, and only a frozen pasture to work in. After surviving that first ride in less than ideal conditions, I hopped off and she leaned her head on my chest. The rest, they say, is history.



Erica Gregg's OTTB Peaches Babu earned Best Conditioned at this year's Foxcatcher Endurance Ride in the 25-mile division.



A young Maryland-bred Peaches Babu's win photos from Laurel Park (left) and Charles Town Races (right).