

Equestrians say goodbye to The Gypsy King

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When Dennis Thompson first brought a stunning Gypsy stallion to Ocala more than 16 years ago, the steed came with the rather bland name of Bill.

That changed after the stout, black and white horse began producing equally stunning babies and was renamed The Gypsy King.

The stallion went on to become one of the most recognized Gypsy horses in the world. The 24-year-old horse was put down recently after a breeding mishap caused the animal to fracture one of his front legs.

“They carry 70 percent of their weight on their front legs. There was nothing we could do for him, so we made the hard decision to put him down,” said Thompson, who, along with his late wife, Cindy, introduced the breed to North America and established the Gypsy Vanner Horse Society, the first Gypsy breed registry in the U.S.

The breed is known by different names around the world, but they were originally developed by European Gypsies to pull their caravans. The best examples were carefully bred as a source of pride among the members of the Gypsy community, leading to today's breed.

The Gypsy King was buried on the property of Gypsy Gold Horse Farm in Ocala, where he had lived since 1998.

Pam Fowler Grace, a top dressage rider and trainer, worked with The Gypsy King and was saddened to hear the news of his death.

“He was the first Gypsy Vanner I trained, and I was very impressed with him. He had a big heart and tried real hard,” said the Houston-based Grace. “To me, he's one of my all time favorites. He was a one-in-a-million horse for sure.”

The Gypsy King was featured as a Breyer collectible figure. The popularity of his figurine was so great it was produced for six years before it was retired. The horse also was used in print advertising for Ferrari and was part of a Vogue magazine photo shoot, Thompson said.

The horse knew he was a star.

“The crowd always loved The Gypsy King. He was a performer. He'd puff himself up and really sell it,” said Grace of the times she performed with him during freestyle dressage performances.

Even during farm tours he loved to please the crowd.



Alan Youngblood/Star-Banner

The Gypsy King gallops around his pasture at Gypsy Gold Farm in Reddick on Oct. 20, 2003.

“He had a presence. Just standing there he was magic. He was always a gentleman and would stand there for eight hours and let kids sit on his back,” Thompson said.

Just before the time came to euthanize the horse, Thompson said the equine acknowledged him.

“He came up to me and nuzzled me. There were others in the stall, but he came to me and nuzzled my arm and my chest. It was like he was trying to talk to me,” he said.

“He was the sweetest thing. He had an illustrious career and I was privileged to have him in my life.”

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