You should come to the barn and meet the new Standardbred that just arrived” were the kind words from a friend urging me out of my melancholy.

Due to prolonged illness and debilitating accidents, I’d had to make the agonizing decision to sell my horse of eight years and I was still in a slump, but it was high time to move on. For several years, I’d been helping to retrain and place Standardbreds in pleasure homes after their racing careers, so there was no question that I would help another Standardbred in need.

When I was introduced to “Nipa,” the average brown gelding was standing alone in a round pen with a coat still shaggy and rough from a winter’s growth. In other words, he was not a horse that catches the eye, but I wasn’t looking for a stunning show horse.

It was apparent that he had been handled well, as he had fine manners
In seven starts at two, All Speed Hanover had five wins including the $700,000 Breeders Crown (defeating “2YO Pacing Colt of the Year” Sportswriter), Bluegrass Stakes and International Stallion Stakes. At three, he won a North America Cup elim in his record 1:49.4 and an elim of the New Jersey Classic (finishing second by a nose in the final, timed in 1:49.1). He added over $161,000 to his bankroll as an aged performer, retiring with over $819,000 in career earnings. He was race-timed in sub-1:50 on nine occasions.

By Cam’s Card Shark, he is from stakes winner Allamerican Cool 3,1:54.4 ($58,066), a half-sister to the great Eternal Camnation p,1:49.2 ($3,748,574)! From nine foals of racing age, Allamerican Cool is the dam of nine winners, including five in 1:55 or faster and three $100,000+ winners.
and was not the least bit shy of any human contact. In fact, he seemed gentle and mellow, and that was exactly what I needed for pleasure driving.

Nipas One, by Jate Lobell-Famed Princess, was 15 at this time and had taken compulsory retirement the previous December. He’d been cared for at the track through the winter, but was required to move out in the spring, and that was Nipa’s and my good fortune. Even after years of racing, he was pretty sound, and of course had been exposed to all sorts of machinery, crowds and noise at the track. One possible drawback was that after years of being in hobbles, he would only pace when hooked to my cart.

“He may never trot. Are you sure that’s OK with you?” asked my trainer, whose work retraining Standardbreds is internationally recognized.

“Fine with me,” I replied.

That summer we got to know each other, and Nipa began his new career as a pleasure horse. After some basic ground work and a little exposure driving in pleasure harness, the same friend who had introduced us—who is younger and more experienced than me—suggested that we try a saddle on him. We worked in a round pen, gently adding objects and weight to his back. Then my friend mounted and I led them around. The barn was busy with lessons, so there was no place else to go but out the door and down the dirt driveway.

Off they went, with Nipa behaving as if this was only what a thoroughly trustworthy Standardbred would do!

**So far he had proven to be willing, obedient, and good with other horses, so we began, and still do, weekly lessons with other pleasure drivers. These sessions can present quite a challenge, because our trainer mixes it up with bits of dressage, cones and obstacle courses, and exercises that encourage straightness and balance.**

Nipa might be the most willing student in the class; while I will not ask of him what he finds way too difficult to do, he’s such a good sport and will try his best to bend, turn and change directions, perform figures, and basically do what is asked of him. He shines as a star student and seems to enjoy it all.

We’ve also done some work under saddle both indoors and with lovely trail
One of the fastest & richest sons of the great Rocknroll Hanover

ROCKIN IMAGE

A multiple stakes winner at two, including the Bluegrass in his record 1:50.4 and International Stallion Stakes, for freshman earnings over $285,000. He came back at three to add over $600,000 to his bankroll, winning the Jersey Cup, Oliver Wendell Holmes and elims of the Meadowlands Pace and Adios while finishing second in the Cane Pace Final and a Breeders Crown elim. He was race timed in 1:49.4 or faster nine times at three.

He is by the great Rocknroll Hanover and the first foal from the great millionaire racemare Kikikatie p,3,1:50.3 ($1,268,463)—dam of five foals, all in 1:52.2 or faster and all winners of over $100,000! His family continues to improve as his 3-year-old full brother Rockin Amadeus p,3,1:49.3-'13 ($645,383) won the Breeders Crown at 2 and multiple stakes at 3. His 2-year-old half-brother is stakes winner Tellitlikeitis p,2,1:52.2F’13 ($123,591).

Bred to full books of 138-136-132 mares in his first three years at stud, his oldest foals sold as yearlings in 2013. He led all first crop pacing sires in yearling average at the 2013 Indiana Premier Sale and led all sires in yearling average at the Hoosier Classic, including the pair of sale topsers that brought $67,000 each!

2014 Stud Fee: $3,500

ROCKIN IMAGE
p,2,1:50.4; 3,1:48.2 ($901,756)
Rocknroll Hanover-Kikikatie-Real Artist

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rides out in the fields and in the woods. Nipa isn’t crazy about water in ditches and puddles, but with a little urging, on he goes. Other than that, he has proven to be curious about his new surroundings—there were probably not many woods and fields in his 12 years at the track—but he always goes where I ask.

In fact, he will do so in the extreme.

We had a freakish occurrence one day after about 20 minutes into a driving lesson when my left rein mysteriously became detached from the bit. Before I knew it, we’d taken a sharp turn off the track and into the brush going in ever-decreasing circles to the right.

“This seems pointless,” he must have thought, “but if this is what she wants . . .” He soon stopped and all ended well.

Another time a group of us had trailered to a farm with cross-country fields and wooded trails. With Nipa and me in the lead, and another cart behind us, we followed directions to a trailhead and into the woods. Immediately the trail narrowed drastically and went straight uphill over fallen logs. We could literally not move forward a single step. With my trustworthy and dependable Standardbred leading, we did a 180-degree turn and bushwhacked out of there, crushing and trampling down saplings and brush all the way. Once again, Nipa calmly did what was asked of him.

My husband and I are both septuagenarians, but that is not the reason for his hippophobia; it actually has to do with self-preservation. He has what he calls his “one fence rule”: there must be at least one fence between him and any horse, and he adheres to his rule firmly. Recently, I was hooking Nipa to my cart, getting ready to take visiting friends for a drive, and I was practically left speechless when my husband voluntarily stepped up to head Nipa while they climbed in. I cannot imagine a more superlative testimonial to how trustworthy the Standardbred is.

Nipa is now a sleek and handsome bay, trots freely and under saddle, but still only paces in harness. It still doesn’t matter to me.

We’ve been to Acadia, to the beach on the Maine coast, and on a variety of trails and cross-country courses, both in harness and under saddle. He trailers willingly, happy to get home, and ready to go the next time. A variety of breeds come for training at the barn where I board, and seeing all their problems that might be avoided, I often wonder why everyone doesn’t have a Standardbred.

As a friend who is a longtime owner and fan of the breed has said, “Standardbreds are just so much fun!”

Pamela Rhodes is a freelance writer living in Maine. To comment on this story, e-mail us at readerforum@ustrotting.com.
**FIRST** in Indiana…and among North America’s leading pacing sires!

**ALWAYS A VIRGIN**

#### #1 in 2013 2YO earnings...$1.2-million
#### #1 in 2013 3YO earnings...$2.2-million

Indiana’s leading sire in both 2 and 3-year-old earnings in 2013, and in the top 10 among all pacing sires in both categories. He remains Indiana’s all-time first crop money-winning sire from his 2012 freshman crop (now 3) that includes 3-time INSS Gold Champion **Always About Katey** p,2,1:53.1; 3,1:51.3-'13 ($657,532) and 2-time INSS Gold Champion **Right Touch** p,2,1:52.2; 3,1:50.1-'13 ($489,660). His 2013 2-year-old crop includes 42 winners with 10 in 1:55 led by the pair of INSS Gold Champions **Color’s A Virgin** p,2,1:53.3-'13 ($211,700) and **U R It BB** p,2,1:53-'13 ($171,336) and Hoosier Park track record-holder **Nat A Virgin** p,2,1:52.2-'13 ($51,566).

He led all pacing sires in yearling average at the 2013 Indiana Premier Sale and was the sire of the $50,000 sale topper.

**ALWAYS A VIRGIN**

*is now Indiana’s single-season highest money-winning sire of all time with 2013 earnings over $3.4-million...and counting!*

#### 3-Time INSS Gold Champion
**ALWAYS ABOUT KATEY**

#### 2-Time INSS Gold Champion
**RIGHT TOUCH**

#### INSS Gold Champion
**COLOR’S A VIRGIN**

#### INSS Gold Champion
**U R IT BB**

**ALWAYS A VIRGIN**

p,2,1:52.1; 3,1:48.4 ($1,135,559) • *Western Ideal-Neverhaveneverwill-Big Towner*

2014 Stud Fee: $4,000

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