

Remembering The Big Red Machine (1992-2018)

4 December 2018, California, USA ~ His registered name was LF Crystals Charm (Crystal Wind AHS x Autumn Splendor), and because of his steady ground-eating stride and his *lets get down the trail* attitude, they called him, The Big Red Machine.

He did not come from a noted race pedigree and he was saved on the way to the killer's pen. In fact, if it hadn't been for the call from Pamela Chapman, who was monitoring auction yards looking to save good riding horses, this story would have had a different ending.

This is where I became intrigued with the horse they called **Big Red**. Writers are always looking for an interesting story, and one with a happy ending is always on the top of my list. When I heard about the horses rescued from the kill pen, I began to follow this plucky horse and his young rider.

In mid-1998, Skip Lightfoot received a call that some *decent* Arabians from a California valley breeding farm were going to be auctioned off in one of the yards where horses were sold by the pound.

"When I got there," Lightfoot remembered, *"horses were neighing and squealing and the dust was appalling."* He saw five chestnut Arabians in good flesh with white socks, bold blazed faces, and straight legs. Lightfoot purchased the geldings and a mare right off the stockyard truck, paying \$400 for the one he called Red. *"He was so terrified that he blew up and flipped over backwards and took off down the road,"* said Lightfoot.

Lightfoot found that Red was the most trained of the horses, and, after some additional work, he entered him in several **Ride and Tie** events, which were his forte. He found his new mount remained strong throughout the day and went forward with a steady-ground eating pace.

In 1999, at Lightfoot's suggestion and with not many miles under saddle, Red headed off to to a 3-day, 150-mile ride in Las Vegas, Nevada, with Heather Bergantz (now Reynolds). Red finished all three days, coming in second on the last day. "He just seemed to get stronger as the days went on," said **Heather**. *"He took to the sport immediately. He was never nervous. He canters in and his heart rate is down."*

In July of 1999, Red breezed through 100 miles, finishing 7th at the Tevis Western States Trail Ride, and received the Haggin Cup (Best Condition) award the next day. *"He just goes. It doesn't matter what type of terrain - rocks, hills, desert - he just keeps that steady stride,"* marveled **Heather**.

Out of five rides in 2001, Heather and Red placed second in the 100-mile Twenty Mule Team Ride, then won the next two 100-mile rides, Washoe Valley and the Swanton Pacific, and received Best Condition at all three. They capped off the year by winning the Individual Gold Medal at the 2001 Pan American Endurance Championship, again receiving the Best Condition award.

In 2002, Heather and Red received the **Off-Continent horse award** after competing in the February, President's Cup Endurance Race in Abu Dhabi, UAE, then won the **Ft. Howes, Montana, FEI 100 IAHA National Championship** in June, along with another Best Condition award.

I felt like an equestrian paparazzi. In those years between 1999-2002 I covered many of the top International endurance events around the world, and I often found Heather and Red in the competition. They were always confident and good for a story, generally with a happy ending.

After 2002, the top races came less often for Red but I saw Heather, now married, still competing, now with other horses, sometimes on those lucky siblings of Red. The horses had talent and Heather knew how to bring it out. She competed on one of them, LF Master Motion, to win the Tevis in 2003.

I soon lost track of Red. He raced in one additional AERC race in 2006, a 50-mile race, which he won.

Heather gave us an update: *“After Red was retired, he was given to a family with kids. Later he was returned to us and then went to the property owner of the pasture where he spent many years prior to that. In the end he was in a pasture with his friend, Sir Smith, in Almaden Valley in San Jose, California.*

“The vet that Red had most of his life had visited him about a month ago and had commented on how great he looked. Red was an amazing guy.

“Red was a rescue from the slaughterhouse. He was always up for an adventure and loved the trail and his job. At the Washoe Valley 100-mile ride, at 90 miles he was pawing the ground wanting to leave camp to do his last loop. When it was time, he took off from camp, lapping 50-mile horses to win the 100.

“He was truly one of a kind. He understood the game of endurance and he loved every second of it.”

~ end

Pamela