

# Reflecting on a pioneer in Canadian Warmblood breeding

BY CHRIS GOULD / CWHBA

PHOTOGRAPHY: © DANA YOUNG; BRANDON SUN

*Wilf McKay and his wife Karen, were one of a small group of early Canadian Warmblood breeders that operated on a relatively large scale. Based near Alexander, Manitoba, the McKays were active breeders from the late 1990s to 2021, producing many quality competitive horses.*

One of their most celebrated products is WKM Xenia (Cat Weasel x Nicholson B) Equestrian Canada's 2018 Canadian-bred Horse of the Year.

A life long horse enthusiast, Wilf competed in his youth in barrel racing and other gymkhana events. His interest transitioned to the English disciplines when his three children joined Pony Club. At the time the McKays were operating a large PMU (pregnant mare urine) farm with 110 mares. Another PMU operator got him interested in Warmbloods through a stallion syndication.

In 2000 they acquired the Dutch Warmblood stallion Nicholson B, as a result of a connection made by his son Scott, by then a professional trainer and coach based in Ontario. Nicholson B was a very modern stallion by the famous Concorde (Voltaire) out of a Zeus daughter. He covered between 20 and 25 mares a year on the farm. These mares were mostly seven-eighths Thoroughbreds and combined well with Nicholson's excellent conformation to produce modern athletic horses for sport. The PMU business came to an end in 2003 and WKM Stables now focused entirely on Warmbloods.

Nicholson B was followed in 2008 by Cat Weasel (Carthago Z x Quidam de Revel) a stallion with a very strong jumping pedigree. Cat Weasel was a tall horse with a long

top line in the style of the C-line Holsteiners. The cross to the elegant Nicholson B daughters produced typey, athletic Warmbloods.

One of the keys to WKM Warmbloods' success was following the advice of Albert Kley† (1943-2016), former riding master at Spruce Meadows. As Wilf repeated "a breeder has got to turn over your breeding mares often. Use their offspring for the next generation. You just need to do that to get better. That's the number one thing."

Having a son active in the sport has also been a huge help. Wilf found that the more trained and developed horses fetched a better price, so he aimed to market well-started four- and five-year-olds to his target market of amateur competitors. WKM horses can be seen at horse shows across the country. A comment, from a local coach, talking about a particular WKM horse sums up their breeding goal "You put an amateur on him, and it even makes them think they're a good rider."

The CWHBA studbook has registered 96 WKM Stables horses. Including some outside breedings, Cat Weasel produced 39 foals and Nicholson B produced 63. An incredible 55 WKM horses are sport recorded with Equestrian Canada... Too many to single out any one horse. Consistently these horses have found success with amateurs in Hunter, Equitation and Jumper

classes. Wilf and Karen still go to the shows as spectators, but now they can just sit back and enjoy watching the WKM horses compete.

In reflecting on his long association with the CWHBA, where he served on the Manitoba Chapter executive and as a national director for many years, he said "The CWHBA was always good to us". The McKays hosted a number of inspections on their farm and he was pleased to see how well his home-bred horses stood up to the expensive imports.

Given the volume and quality of the WKM Warmbloods, the McKay's have made a mark on Canadian Warmblood breeding that will stand for many generations. ■



Top: Wilf and Karen McKay; Below: WKM mares