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## Seasoned Style

*Chrome* APHA Member

Model Search Winner

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LIFE AS UNIQUE AS THE HORSE

AMERICAN PAINT HORSE ASSOCIATION





## A New Path

*A career-ending diagnosis could've sent Kiss This Gentleman into retirement. Instead, owner Susan Butler found him a new calling.*

By Amy Olson

**A**fter years of supporting her daughter's horse-showing dreams, Susan Butler was ready to sell everything when her daughter sold her last horse. Some good friends, however, convinced Susan she could step into the saddle, so at age 47, Susan bought her first horse.

She began her journey in Western dressage after moving to Florida in 2014; she needed a horse that could step up to her competition level. After eight long months of searching, Susan found Kiss This Gentleman. "Goody's" previous owner had been in a serious horse accident a few years earlier, and the kindly 2011

sorrel tobiano gelding had boosted her confidence to get back in the game. Now, that rider was ready to step up too, which meant Goody was looking for a new home.

"I was getting older and had a fall or two myself, so he was perfect for me," Susan said.

Susan immediately began showing Goody in Introductory Level Western Dressage; by the next year, they had stepped up to Basic Level, earning loads of awards and their bronze medal from the Western Dressage Association of Florida. Goody also helped Susan earn her first trophy buckle in dressage

through APHA's Paint Alternative Competition program.

### A Drastic Diagnosis

Just two years into their partnership, Goody began struggling at the lope and resisted picking up his left lead. With veterinary care and joint injections, they were able to continue competing. At a show in May 2021, Goody won both of his Western dressage classes on Saturday; but on Sunday, however, he refused to lope at all.

Susan enlisted the help of a lameness specialist to take X-rays of Goody. The results were heartbreak-

ing: at only 10 years old, Goody's hocks were full of arthritis and bone spurs, the joint space was too small to attempt more injections, and his left hock was beginning to fuse. The diagnosis brought Goody's show career to a screeching halt.

Forced to consider retirement for the gelding, Susan struggled to find an option that would meet her high expectations and provide Goody the care he needed; she didn't own land on which he could reside at pasture, nor could she bear to keep him cooped up in a stall forever. She reached out to Stirrups N' Strides Therapeutic Riding Center, based in



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Citra, Florida, and the organization enthusiastically agreed to take Goody into their program.

"It all happened very fast, but it was the right thing to do for Goody and all of those special riders," Susan said.

## Helping Others

Súrrups N' Strides provides equine activities, including riding and driving, to disabled people of all ages. Through the program, Goody not only helps students make emotional connections and stay active, but he also gives them a reason to communicate with others.

"Some of the kids in wheelchairs that couldn't sit up are now sitting up, some of the kids that didn't talk are interacting with volunteers now. They all have their favorite horses and favorite people. It's amazing the gift that the horses give to these kids," said Diane Mathieson, a staff member at Hillcrest School, which is a satellite location for the Súrrups N' Strides program.

Many of the horses donated to the program are gentle and kind, but don't have show experience. Goody's extensive show experience, however, makes him a perfect fit for Hillcrest School. He arrived at Hill-

crest in June 2021 and was already showing with their riders by August. Susan attended Goody's first show with Hillcrest students and says she cried at the sight of him being able to continue doing what he loves.

"When all he has to do is walk and trot a little, without any kind of collection, he is happy to do it," Susan said.

Goody even helped students earn gold medals at the Florida Special Olympics; his performance there earned Goody, and a few of his riders, the opportunity to compete in the 2022 Special Olympics USA

Games, which took place in Orlando, Florida, in June 2022.

"Because of being in the horse show world, Goody knows how to take these kids around the ring even when our riders might lose focus," Diane said.

Goody and his riders usually compete in walk/trot trail and walk/trot equitation. At the national event, Goody was the colorful mount for riders on various teams, not just his own Hillcrest School students.

"He was meant to lead the life of giving special riders the attention and confidence they need," Susan said. 🐾