

= Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration =

The Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration (TWHNC) , sometimes known as the Celebration , is the largest horse show for the Tennessee Walking Horse breed , and has been held annually in or near Shelbyville , Tennessee since its inception in 1939 . The Celebration was conceived by Henry Davis , a horse trainer who along with several other horsemen , felt the Shelbyville area should have a festival or annual event . Although the Celebration was originally held in Wartrace , Tennessee , it moved to Shelbyville , the county seat , a few years later . The Celebration spans 11 days and nights in late August and early September annually , and finishes with the crowning of the World Grand Champion Tennessee Walker on the Saturday night before Labor Day . The TWHNC draws an estimated 2 @, @ 000 horses and 250 @, @ 000 spectators to Shelbyville each year .

= = History = =

The Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration was founded in 1939 . A Wartrace resident , Henry Davis , went to Winchester , Tennessee to buy hay and while there observed the Crimson Clover Festival being held . He felt that Wartrace should have a similar festival , and proposed the idea to a group of fellow horsemen , who accepted it . The first Celebration was held in 1939 . It began with a parade and elaborate pageant that depicted the evolution of the Tennessee Walking Horse breed from its original use as a plow and utility horse , to its present use as a show horse . The first Celebration attracted over 40 @, @ 000 people . The Celebration later moved to Shelbyville , which is located about 60 miles southeast of Nashville , due to space issues , as small Wartrace was unable to cope with the volume of visitors and horses the show attracted . Shelbyville is now known as the Walking Horse Capital of the World .

The modern Celebration spans 11 days in late August and early September prior to Labor Day every year , and finishes with the crowning of the World Grand Champion Tennessee Walking Horse on the Saturday night before Labor Day . The TWHNC draws an estimated 2 @, @ 000 horses , 250 @, @ 000 spectators and US \$ 41 million in revenue to Shelbyville every year .

= = = Notable winners = = =

The first horse to be named World Grand Champion was Strolling Jim in 1939 . Strolling Jim was a former plow horse retrained for show by Floyd Carothers , and was only three years old at the time of his win . Although Strolling Jim was a gelding , many World Grand Champions were stallions who became notable sires . Midnight Sun , winner in 1945 and 1946 , sired over 2 @, @ 600 foals , of which five became World Grand Champions . The World Grand Champion in 1947 and 1948 , Merry Go Boy , was known for producing the most desirable Tennessee Walker conformation type in his offspring . The stake is traditionally a stallions ' class , and has not been won by a mare or gelding since 1954 , when the gray mare Garnier 's White Star , owned by W.V. Garnier and ridden by Percy Moss , was crowned as the World Grand Champion . Incidentally , 23 @-@ year @-@ old Moss was also the youngest rider to win the stake . The first female rider to win the World Grand Championship was Betty Sain on Shaker 's Shocker in 1966 , and the oldest rider to win was 81 @-@ year @-@ old Bud Dunn on RPM in 1999 . Although there have been six horses who won the stake two years consecutively , there have been only two three @-@ time winners in the history of the Celebration : The Talk of the Town in 1951 , 1952 and 1953 , and I Am Jose in 2013 , 2014 , and 2015 .

= = = Controversies = = =

The Celebration has often been criticized with allegations of soring of horses at the event , an abusive practice designed to make horses step higher and illegal under federal law by the Horse Protection Act of 1970 . The sponsors of the Celebration have consistently denied the allegations .

Every horse entered in the Celebration must undergo an inspection designed to detect sore horses conducted by an APHIS @-@ employed inspector before the horse is allowed to show . Inspectors may use hoof testers (plier @-@ like tools which direct pressure on an area of the foot to find any source of pain) , leg swabs and other tools such as thermography to detect signs of horses being sore . In 2006 , the concerns escalated between trainers and inspectors from APHIS . Initially , trainers refused to submit their horses for inspection , creating a stand @-@ off that required law enforcement intervention . Then , prior to the World Grand Championship finals , inspectors disqualified all but three of the finalists . A group of approximately 150 people gathered , demanding that the disqualified horses be allowed to show . However , citing safety concerns , the show management cancelled the class altogether and no World Grand Champion was crowned that year .

= = Venue and classes = =

The Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration is held in Shelbyville at the 105 @-@ acre Celebration Grounds , which encompasses Calsonic Arena . The facility contains 60 barns and two arenas , with warm @-@ up areas . The outdoor arena has seating for 30 @, @ 000 , including box seats , and is the one used for most classes . The indoor arena has seating for 4 @, @ 500 and is used for small classes , or in case of rain .

The TWHNC features a wide variety of classes in both in @-@ hand and performance , including divisions for youth , amateurs , and professionals . Horses may shod with keg shoes or performance stacks ; flat @-@ shod classes are particularly popular among amateur owners who train their own horses . Leadline classes , for children under six , are a crowd favorite . All horses entered must be registered with the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders ' and Exhibitors ' Association , although some may be registered with the Spotted Saddle Horse and Racking Horse associations as well . Double registration does not affect a horse 's ability to enter the Celebration . The only exception to this rule are ponies competing in lead line classes . Over 20 World Championships are awarded in different classes throughout the course of the Celebration . The most anticipated class , however , is the World Grand Championship , the largest honor in the Tennessee Walking Horse breed . Competition at the Celebration is traditionally opened each night by a white or gray Tennessee Walking Horse and rider carrying the American flag , during the singing of the American national anthem . Over the course of the Celebration , over \$ 650 @, @ 000 in prizes is given out . The Celebration also includes attractions such as a dog show , barbecue cookout , and barn decorating contest .

= = = World Grand Championship = = =

The World Grand Championship , also known as the " Big Stake " or " Rider 's Cup , Canter " is the final class of the Celebration . It is held late on the Saturday night before Labor Day , or more often , very early Sunday morning . To compete in the stake , horses must qualify by showing in a class on the first Saturday night of the show . Previous World Grand Champions are automatically eligible to compete again . The competing horses enter the arena to the song " Flat Walk Boogie " which was composed and is played by official TWHNC organist Larry Bright . Horses are required to perform the flat walk , running walk and canter twice each in two separate workouts . Between workouts , riders dismount and unsaddle their horses so the judges can evaluate their conformation . The winner is announced by a spotlight sweeping back and forth along the line @-@ up of horses and then settling on the World Grand Champion . The winner is awarded \$ 15 @, @ 000 in prize money .