



## **ROBERTA SHEFFIELD** **OWNER OF THE YEAR**



*Photo Credit: Silke A. Rottermann*

### **Roberta Sheffield Named Owner of the Year**

Roberta Sheffield has been named the 2022 owner of the year in recognition of her investment in, hard work and dedication to her 14-year-old Para dressage Gelderlander mare Fairuza. Sheffield purchased and then single-handedly developed the young mare from an apprehensive, unhandled six-year-old to a top competitor in the international Para dressage ring. This award recognizes Sheffield's remarkable devotion to her horse's healthy and welfare, training, and the pair's success throughout the 2022 season.

The Owner of the Year Award was created to recognize the dedication, commitment, and support owners provide in order to ensure Canadian athletes have access to world-class horses. This award is presented to an owner, individual, or group who has progressed equestrian sport by investing toward, breeding, or supporting a horse in competition at the national or international level.



The Canadian Paralympian's journey with Fairuza began in 2015. While others saw an unhandled driving bred horse with little aptitude for dressage, Sheffield saw potential. "I saw a striking horse with heaps of charisma, a strong, powerful body and a really good movement mechanic. What I didn't know at the time was how incredible her work ethic is and how her driving breeding means she's a natural team player. The long-eared, roman-nosed, big-footed horse has risen to every challenge she's met," Sheffield said.

Wholeheartedly committing to Fairuza's development, Sheffield took on the challenge of training the young mare herself. "I do a lot of groundwork. I like to develop the horses' emotional stability and develop the partnership with them, so they trust me, so when I come to ride, they are much more looking to me for what to do with a strange situation of having someone on their back than running away from it," Sheffield said of her approach to training.

While some may consider her unconventional, "Wonky" has proven to be an ideal match for Sheffield. The mare's height and width support Sheffield's hips, and the biomechanics of her movement suit Sheffield's pelvis - ideal qualities in a para horse. Her thorough, patient training process allowed Wonky to grow into the reliable and thoughtful mount that Sheffield needed.

Just three short years later, the pair made their FEI debut finishing second with an impressive score of 68.912. The pair have gone on to represent Canada in 42 FEI tests, including performances at the Herning World Championships, and the Tokyo Paralympic Games where they set a Canadian record.

With Sheffield currently the highest-ranked Canadian at 4th place in the FEI global Para dressage rankings, the duo's success is a testament to Sheffield's training and the strength of their partnership.

Despite facing challenges, together they achieved their personal goals at the 2022 World Championships. Wonky had fallen ill just before the competition, but Sheffield prioritized her horse's health, delaying their trip to Herning and sacrificing their training. Thanks to that decision and a strong support team, Wonky recovered in time to compete, and the duo finished in the top five with a score of 70.882.

With their 2022 season behind them, Sheffield has set their sights on the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris, France. When asked about their future Sheffield said, "Nothing is a foregone conclusion, and we are as hungry for it as ever."