

MARBILL HILL FARM OWNER OF THE YEAR



Photo Credit: Cara Grimshaw from HorseSport.com

MarBill Hill Farm named Owner of the Year

With content from Tracy Hanes, Horse Sport, World of Showjumping, and Chronicle of the Horse

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 2021 award goes to Marion Cunningham and Bill Tilford of MarBill Hill Farm in Bradford, Ontario for their dedication and investment in mares Coralissa (Com Air x San Patrignano Corrado) and Evita (Canturano x Farmer) for young Canadian rider Sam Walker to campaign in international grand prix competition.

The couple are big supporters of Canadian young riders and have been sponsoring the Pony Jumper Challenge for the last ten years and since 2017 have also supported the U25 Young Riders Development series including at Angelstone, Ottawa and Caledon shows as well as at Thunderbird Show Park in Langley, BC.



At their MarBill Hill Farm they also breed Oldenburgs and offer specialized care boarding for retired show horses. “Bill had no idea what a horse was until he met me,” Cunningham has said. “I have turned this golfer into a serious horse guy.”

They purchased Evita (born Eolita Ho) for Walker after top Swiss show jumper Steve Guerdat parted ways with her in 2020. The 2009 Dutch Warmblood mare had a successful career in Europe under the world number one Guerdat in the 1.45/1.50 division in 2019 and was formerly ridden by Kevin Jochems of the Netherlands.

The son of hunter/jumper trainers Scott and Dee Walker of Nobleton, ON, Walker has said, “Evita is an incredibly special mare and a great addition to MarBill Hill. They have a genuinely nice group of horses that they breed, and they also own Coralissa – one of my other top horses.”

Walker is ever thankful to his long-time sponsors for their continued support, and over the years the connection has been more like family. Since moving back from the west coast to Ontario in 2008, Cunningham and Tilford have become close friends with the Walker Family. “Dee had been my trainer and our son’s trainer, but more importantly she has done the training of all of our horses,” Cunningham has said.

2021 saw the young Walker show MarBill Hill horses with great success and with Evita, the pair have quickly grown into a force to be reckoned with. The biggest wins with Evita include the \$36,600 Welcome Stake CSI2* at the Traverse City Spring Horse Show in Michigan and two CSI5* wins in October in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

“Evita generously was bought by MarBill Hill Farm for the sole purpose of being a sport horse for me,” Walker has shared in interview. “They’ve been longtime supporters of me since I did the pony jumpers—since I was 8 or 9 years old. And Evita has been a really, really amazing horse for my career so far.”

“She had come straight from the World No. 1. I was a little bit nervous at the start, and it took a couple months to get along. But once we clicked, it was like a match made in heaven,” Walker said. “Any time I go into a class with her, I truly feel like I can win. It’s such an incredible feeling to be on a horse that gives me so much confidence.”

Cunningham and Tilford are true personification of how owners are the backbone of the sport, and worthy of this recognition. They provide the means to have talent on both sides of the saddle for Canadian combinations to succeed on the world stage. The equestrian community benefits overall from their generosity and commitment to quality horses for Canada.