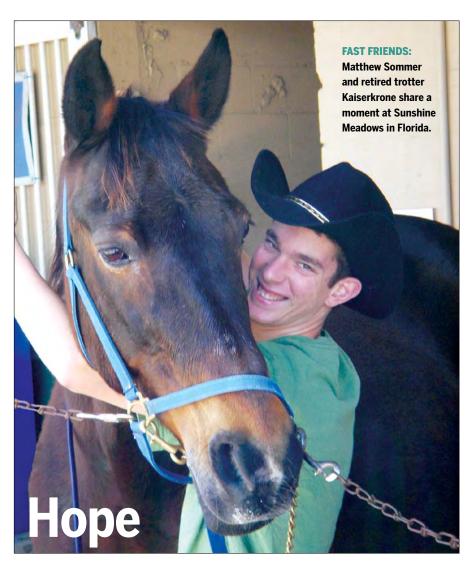
Winner's Circle



Each issue *Hoof Beats* asks its readers to share personal stories of their favorite horses in "Winner's Circle." This month, **Matthew Sommer**, with the help of his mother, **Ronni**, writes about what his Standardbred experiences mean to him.

To make a submission to "Winner's Circle," send it via e-mail to nkraft@ustrotting.com, fax 614.222.6791, or write to Winner's Circle, c/o *Hoof Beats*, 750 Michigan Ave., Columbus, OH 43215.



Florida Standardbred opens a whole new world to autistic boy

y name is Matthew and I am a 17-year-old boy diagnosed with Autism and Fragile X Syndrome. The reason my mom has to write this letter for me is that I can't write a whole sentence. I

can't read a book and I am not able to stay at home by myself. I have no friends who are my age and I am not attending parties or sleepovers.

But I can do something that kids without disabilities can't do. I can drive

a Standardbred racehorse!

Kaiserkrone, known as "Krone," is a 22-year-old trotting mare, and is one of the therapy horses of the Children's Foundation for Equine Assisted Therapy, Inc., located in Sunshine Meadows Equestrian Village in Delray Beach, Fla.

When I went to Children's FEAT for my first therapy lesson and met Krone, I knew that she would be my friend. She

I know that I can do something a lot of other 17-year-olds never did. I can drive a Standardbred racehorse on the track—and it is the best feeling in the world for me!

never tells me what to do. She never tells me that I talk too much or that I don't make sense, and she never whispers things about me behind my back. She just looks at me with her big brown eyes and puts her nose in my hands and I know that I have a true friend.

My mom is so excited when I put my jeans and boots on without complaining before I go to ride Krone. And for some reason everyone was amazed that I knew that I had to take her saddle off before giving her a bath (like that wouldn't be logical?).

School seems to think that I am not able to put things in the right order, but when I am at the stable everything seems to be clearer to me.

When I am sitting on Krone, I like it the most when she trots. But because

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of my low muscle tone, I am not able to hold myself up for too long, so my therapist had a great idea. Being an ex-racehorse, Krone knows how to pull a cart, and with my therapist on my side and split reins (one set for me and one for her), we can go on the beautiful racetrack at Sunshine Meadows, and I can let her go fast for as long as I want.

When I am sitting behind her and the wind blows around my face, I know that I can do something a lot of other 17-year-olds never did. I can drive a Standardbred racehorse on the track—and it is the best feeling in the world for me!

It makes me really sad when I hear that a lot of ex-Standardbred



OUT FOR A JOG: Sommer said he loves driving Kaiserkrone alongside his therapist.

racehorses have no future after their racing career. They are the perfect therapy horses. They have a convenient size, a great personality and have a wonderful, large gait which helps children like me to deal with our physical issues.

I don't really know where my future path will lead me and I know that my parents are scared, and sometimes I am scared, too, but I know, with Krone on my side, I have something everyone needs: hope.

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— Donald Hawk North Carolina

"Glad to help."

— Maurice Chodash

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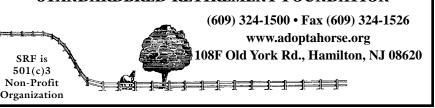
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STANDARDBRED RETIREMENT FOUNDATION



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