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by Catherine Girard

## ■ El Brio Vanner Ranch Coatesville, Pennsylvania

*A black and white stallion prances with ease  
His silky white mane tossed in the breeze  
Past hillock and hurst he dances and plays  
Over emerald fields with elegant grace  
On fast flying feet in brilliant white feather  
He races away through bright sunlit heather*

Welcome to El Brio Vanner, a purebred Gypsy Vanner breeding facility and home of the magnificent, trademark Gypsy Vanner stallion, Charlie. Owned by Susan Rathbone and Ed Fitts, founding members of the Gypsy Vanner Horse Society, the ranch is nestled on 200 acres of rolling hills, in beautiful Chester County, Pennsylvania.

"We are trying to produce horses that people will love and enjoy," says Susan. "We are working on breeding a sport-type of horse, one that can compete with other breeds in disciplines such as dressage, so that they can be mainstreamed into riding programs and still stay within the Gypsy Vanner breed characteristics. We are dedicated to keeping the breed pure; to try to distinguish the Gypsy Vanner from other breeds; to protect it from unethical breeding and importing. We want the horse to remain what it was envisioned to be. For this reason we will only breed to purebred Gypsy Vanner horses."

Both of the stallions on the ranch are registered and certified Gypsy Vanners, and are outstanding examples of the breed. The internationally famous stallion, The Roadsweeper UK, sired Charlie, a 1997 trademark black dark bay and white stallion. His dam is Old Mother Riley, a 14-hand bay mare. Imported into the United States in 2004, Charlie possesses superior conformation, size and temperament. He is a proven sire in both the U.S. and the U.K. Kind, gentle and intelligent, he is easy to handle and train. In his 2006 show career, he began competing locally in United States Dressage Federation (USDF) Region 1 shows. He won the Four-Year-Old Stallion In-Hand dressage class at Stone Tavern, New Jersey, and in Fair Hill, Maryland, he qualified for the USDF Breeders Championship (held annually at the prestigious Dressage at Devon). There, he won the Gypsy Vanner Individual Breeder Championship. Charlie is available for breeding to purebred Gypsy Vanner mares through artificial insemination only.

Cushti Bok sired Turley, another beautiful black and white stallion. His dam, Crown Darby, is a Gypsy King daughter. Born in 2003, Turley was the ranch's first embryo transfer foal. He was the 2005 winner of the Gypsy Vanner Individual Breeders Championship at Dressage at Devon. Trained to drive and show in-hand, he began his dressage career in 2006, competing at entry level in local shows and making an appearance at the Ohio State Fair. Currently offered for sale, he has a mare in foal for a 2007 delivery. His stallion reports may be accessed at the New Bolton Center at the University of Pennsylvania, where all of the veterinary and laboratory work for the ranch is performed. Since 2002 the ranch's embryo transfer program has been steadily growing.

"Of the nine foals soon to be delivered on the ranch (seven of Charlie's, one Gypsy King and one Turley), eight of them are embryo transfer babies," explains Susan. "Embryos may be purchased at any time. Additionally, the owner may choose to take the host mare home or to an approved foaling-out facility and foal her out there. As long as the facility is approved,



*Susan and the magnificent, trademark Gypsy Vanner stallion, Charlie, who is a perfect example of what the Gypsies envisioned when perfecting this special breed.*



*Turley, a beautiful black and white stallion, was the ranch's first embryo transfer foal.*



*Turley was the 2005 winner of the Gypsy Vanner Individual Breeders Championship at Dressage at Devon.*

with monitors in place and a few other restrictions, we offer a live foal guarantee.

"When the foals are born here on the ranch, someone is always on hand for the delivery. They are all handled from day one. They are real people lovers,

with 'puppy-dog' personalities. They're so friendly! It's easy to become attached to them. They become very much a family member.

"They easily accept the halter," she continues, "and within a few weeks are receiving their first foot trimming from the farrier with very little fuss. They are easy to train, and all learn to crosstie, clip and stand quietly for veterinary work. All of the horses here, no matter what their ages, love to be groomed. I can take a brush out into the field and they bump and push me, trying to be next. The young ones are like that, too!"

"Gypsy Vanners are versatile horses. They are easy to train and easy to deal with. And they are very hardy. They get good winter coats and they are good pasture cleaners. They'll eat weeds that my Quarter Horses refuse to touch. They were bred to be kept along roadsides and eat what was there. They are good at dressage, driving, jumping, and trail riding. Our ranch abuts the 900-acre Brandywine Conservancy, donated to the Conservancy by the Duponts. It is open only to people and horses – no motorized vehicles. We take advantage of this by working extensively on trail riding: water crossings, riding through the several wooden covered bridges that cover the streams, working on the steep, rocky terrain that is in much of the park. Very little of any of this ever bothers them."

The ranch offers a select number of weanlings and yearlings for sale each year. All are registered with the Gypsy Vanner Horse Society, and are colored. Some of them have already embarked on a show career. Chianti, a yearling, earned second place in the 2006 Gypsy Vanner Individual Breeders Championship at Dressage at Devon. She and her stable mate, Accacia, then appeared in the breed display at Equine Affaire in West Springfield, Massachusetts.

For owners interested in showing their Vanners, the Gypsy Vanner Horse Society has developed a national show calendar. "The breed is growing and the Society is growing with it," comments Susan. Offering the same classes as many of the open horse shows do in dressage, driving, hunt, western, lead line, trail/obstacles and games, the society will be offering a futurity show this year as well. It is now expanding its calendar to include shows in Kentucky, along with those held in Oklahoma, Oregon, Ohio, and the Great Lakes.

An interest in showing, however, is not a prerequisite for owning one of El Brio Vanner's beautiful horses. Many owners prefer to enjoy their horses in more leisurely pursuits, and their versatility makes them wonderful mounts for trail riding and trick training. This writer has even known of a few that have enjoyed chasing cows in local, low-level team penning events!

"These horses need not go to show homes. We love backyard homes!" says Susan. "We just want the horses to go to homes where they will be loved and cared for. They are wonderful, all-around family horses, and they make great companions, as well."

Spring, summer and autumn are wonderful times to visit the beautiful Pennsylvania countryside. Visitors from across the country have enjoyed the hospitality of the ranch and delighted in spending time with the beautiful Vanners. The ranch's website, [www.elbriovanner.com](http://www.elbriovanner.com), houses many lovely photographs of the equines, offering plenty of information including stallion reference pages and pertinent links. To place inquiries about breeding bookings or sales, or to schedule an appointment to visit the ranch, please contact Susan at 610-486-6150. ■