

Champion Country

Covering Rural Halton & Wellington County

Hard work pays off for horse and trainer

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

He had a difficult childhood that was made worse by his behavioural problems.

But as a Milton teacher used to dealing with problem children, Christine Bartliff wasn't about to give up on him — even though, in this case, it wasn't a child at all but a horse.

"If he didn't belong to me, he'd be glue," Ms Bartliff said, chuckling.

The adage 'No pain, no gain' is particularly true when it comes to the effort Ms Bartliff has put into her horse, Dance of the Century, and the rewards she's now reaping.

Just recently, Dancer won first place in the Classic Pleasure Saddle category at the Ontario Morgan Horse Championship Classic in Palgrave, Ont.

The judging in the category is based on a 50-50 split between performance and confirmation, which means "how well the horse is put together," said Ms Bartliff, who's an amateur rider and Dancer's trainer as well as owner.

"I certainly hoped he'd do well," Ms Bartliff said, referring to the July 17 and 18 event. "He won last year, and it's more challenging to try to defend your title."

Dancer is a 10-year-old gelding and has had enough drama in his life to rival any soap star.

Ms Bartliff bought Dancer when he was two years old from a woman who

owned the farm where she had taken horseback riding lessons as a child in New Jersey.

A breeder had declared bankruptcy, and the farm owner was left with a horse she didn't really want.

"I bought him with my dad and then I bought my dad out," Ms Bartliff said, adding her parents got into horses when she began taking lessons as a child.

To say Dancer was temperamental is an understatement, Ms Bartliff said. When she attempted to show him for the first time, she couldn't get him into the trailer.

And she had to pay a veterinarian to clip his nails, after Dancer made it clear he wasn't going to allow his owner to do the deed.

"He was very difficult," Ms Bartliff recalled.

At the tender age of five, Dancer was involved in a barn fire the first night after he was sent to a trainer in Peterborough.

Fortunately, a woman travelling on the highway noticed the barn fire and quickly alerted the trainer. All the horses were freed in time — Dancer took off in his fright and was later found — although a litter of puppies perished.

"He went from a bankruptcy baby to having behavioural problems to (being in) a barn fire," Ms Bartliff said.

At one point, Ms Bartliff said she decided enough was enough. Dancer had overstayed his welcome.

"I tried to give him away, but no one • see HORSE on page 17

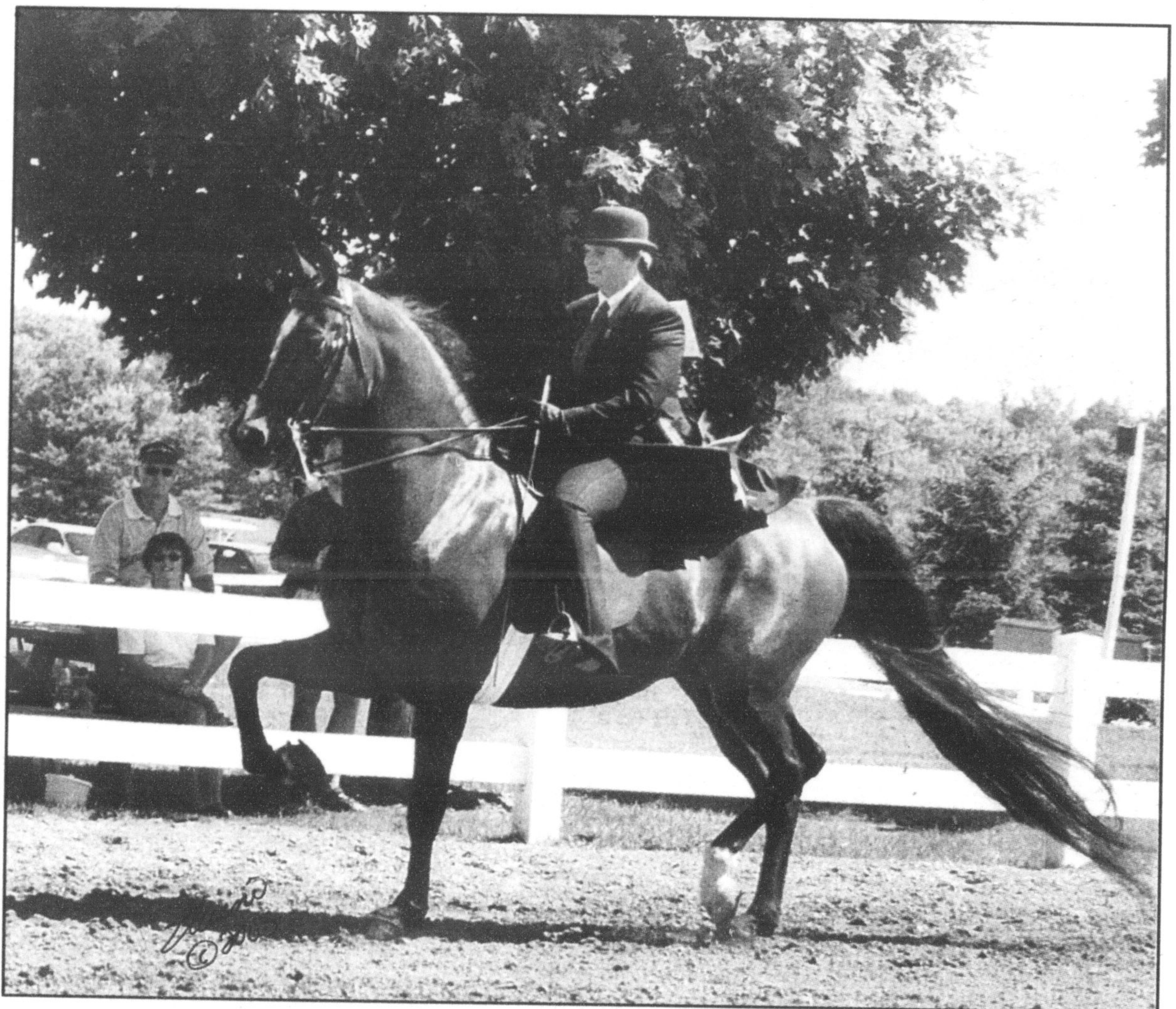


Photo courtesy of SHOOT photographic

Ten-year-old gelding Dance of the Century struts his stuff as owner and trainer Christine Bartliff looks poised and relaxed. Dancer recently placed first in the Classic Pleasure Saddle category at the Ontario Morgan Horse Championship Classic in Palgrave, Ont.

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