



Melissa and Gerald Allebach with Bentley

Photo credit: Photographs provided by Windermere's Farm

Windermere Farm – an interview with Melissa and Gerald Allebach

“We never breed a mare to a stallion unless he is at least as good as - or better than - his own sire.”

Meet the best of the best—this is our introductory motto to the following interview with Melissa and Gerald Allebach, the owners of Windermere Farm in Spring Mills, Pennsylvania. Passion, expertise, and strict selection, whereby only the best horses are used for breeding, have made Windermere an icon of Percheron breeding.

Supreme World Champions Windermere's Deidra and Windermere North American Maid (Moos) are just two of the outstanding breeding legends that have established the legendary reputation of Windermere Percheron. It was just a few weeks ago, Windermere's Cleopatra caused quite a stir when she was named breed champion at the Classic Series Final.

It seems as if the Allebach family can produce champions on an assembly line, but behind these great successes is a family clan that has passed on its extensive breeding knowledge through generations, trains the horses with great expertise and discipline, and works together as a team with the precision of a Swiss watch. Abraham and Mary Allebach laid the foundation in 1962. Today, Gerald and Melissa Allebach and their son Abraham continue the

family tradition. In an exclusive interview with Gentle Giants & Country Life owner Birgit Huegli-Herrmann, Melissa and Gerald Allebach provide insight into everyday life at Windermere Farm and their breeding philosophy.

Melissa and Gerald, Windermere First of all, congratulations on the tremendous success of Windermere's Cleopatra at the Classic Series Final in September. Your stud farm has been home to particularly outstanding Percherons for more than 60 years. What was the reason for deciding to breed Percherons?

Thank you very much! Over the years, we bred both Percherons and Clydesdales, but we preferred Percherons because of their athleticism, toughness, and versatility. They make excellent all round horses — great for driving, pleasure, and showing — and are very efficient breeders. For our farm's needs, Percherons simply fit better.

Could you please briefly introduce our readers to your family to the tasks that each family member performs at Windermere Farm?

The three of us who run Windermere are Gerald and Melissa Allebach, and our 25-year-old son, Abraham. On a typical day, we meet at the barns and start feeding — Gerald handles outside feeding, Melissa manages the inside barn and foals, and Abraham takes care of the other barn. We then meet in the office to plan the day's tasks. Abraham does most of the shoeing and helps with training, Melissa manages our social media and trains horses, and Gerald is our do-it person: stalls, customers, field work, and anything else that needs doing. We all share responsibility for

training and getting horses ready for hitch and halter classes. We work well as a team and enjoy what we do.

You have many excellent horses at Windermere Farm and can draw from a large gene pool. What are the main criteria for you when pairing a stallion with a particular mare?

Our breeding philosophy is simple and focused. We never breed a mare to a stallion unless he is at least as good as — or better than — his own sire. We favor linebreeding to proven, exceptional ancestors to reinforce desired traits. For example, many of our young horses have Windermere's North American Maid (MOOSE) as a grandsire on both the sire and dam side, and much of our stock traces back at least twice to Black Home Duke, the first Percheron to have shipped semen in North America and once owned by our farm. All of our mares are the best daughters of their own mothers and excel in conformation, performance, attitude, and trainability. Above all, our stallions must be magnificent — strong conformation, correct movement, good temperament, and proven performance.

How many stallions, brood mares, and young horses do you currently have?

This season, we're standing three stallions for breeding — they cover our own mares and are also available to customers. We'll also be offering a couple of junior stallions this season and next, and a few weanling stallions are coming up through the barn. Overall, we typically have around 70 head at Windermere Farms, including broodmares, youngstock, and stallions, all managed with the same attention to quality and temperament.



Windermere North American Maid (Moose) — Supreme World Champion (2010).



Bentley, the best son that Moose produced. He has been crowned Jr. World Champion, 3X National Champion, and 2X All-American.

How many foals do you breed on average per year?

On average, we foal between 20 and 25 foals each year. Next year we're planning to increase that to around 30.

How do you select which foals from a particular year will be sold and which will become future Windermere show horses?

Normally, we retain our top 4–5 foals each year. In addition, we always keep the best daughter from each mare to preserve our family lines. That way, we maintain strong maternal families while also selecting the most stylish, correct foals for future Windermere show and breeding stock.

Good horses should fetch a fair price that allows the breeder to continue breeding. May I ask what the minimum investment is for a buyer to purchase a Windermere foal?

Most of our foals sell for around US\$10,000. Occasionally, an exceptional foal will fetch a significantly higher price, but the average is about US\$10,000.

Windermere Farm successfully exhibits horses of all ages at shows. When does Windermere Farm start training the foals, and how is it structured?

We start gentle, consistent handling early to make foals and young horses comfortable with everything they'll meet in the show ring. Typically, we tie them, take them to the wash rack for a bath and possibly a clip, trim their feet, and administer routine worming and care. Melissa does most of the grooming and prep work. We expose them to regular handling so they learn to stand, lead, and tolerate grooming, clipping, and tacking — all the basics that make them useful around the farm and ready for shows.

Is there a difference between the training of your stallions and that of your mares, and if so, what is it?

There's no fundamental difference in how we train stallions and mares — we train all our horses the same, focusing on steady, consistent groundwork, handling, and manners. The main distinction is timing: we start driving stallions about six to 18 months earlier than mares, so they're comfortable and well handled before they reach three years of age and enter the breeding program.

On the subject of grazing. How much grazing time do your horses get? Is there a special diet for your show horses?

Our horses graze by age groups — foals with their dams, yearlings together, two-year-olds together, broodmares together, etc. They have free choice access to pasture and water, with hay and grain provided as needed when grazing is sparse. For show horses in the off-season, we feed a higher protein, higher fat ration plus top quality hay; those horses may be stalled most of the time and brought out for training and short turnout sessions.

In the USA, great importance is attached to the gait of horses. Do you have a special training method that helps to develop maximum movement?

There's no special training that creates a horse's gait — gait is directly related to correct conformation and overall balance. Movement is largely a gift of good breeding; training maintains and refines it, but it can't manufacture it.

Carriage competitions are very popular in the USA. Which horses does Windermere Farms present during the show season in front of the carriage?

For the upcoming 2026 season, we will have a stellar lineup of 15 horses; the top 12 will make the cut to perform in the cart through the eight-horse hitch. The horses are: Windermere's Cha Cha, Windermere's Cleopatra, Windermere's Esmeralda, Kong, Locust Creek Willow, Windermere's Paisley, Embassy Zonie, Windermere's Layla, Windermere's Rooster, Windermere's Turbo, Windermere's Midnight Rider, Windermere's Clark, Windermere's Hilda, and Windermere's Prada.

Considering the size of the USA and the large number of shows, it must be a huge logistical challenge to get your horses to all the shows. Do you transport your horses yourself? How many people are there in the Windermere team that look after the horses before and during the shows?

We haul our own horses to most shows. We run a semi and nine horse trailer that carries tack, equipment, wagon, and cart, plus a second truck and a five-horse trailer. At home, the three of us - Gerald, Melissa, and Abraham - do all the prep. At shows, we usually hire extra help for feeding, watering, stall work, and final grooming so everyone can focus on getting the horses ready for the ring.

Do you use foreign genetics for your stud? If so, from which areas and what positive influence do you hope to gain? If not, why do you refrain?

We do not use foreign Percheron bloodlines. Windermere Farms has spent generations developing long-necked, athletic, sound Percherons within North America, and our registry spans more than 150 years. That proven type, consistency, and adaptation to North American conditions are the qualities we prioritize, and we see no benefit in introducing outside genetics that could dilute the characteristics we've carefully preserved.



Hammer (Abraham) trains Windermere's Percy Piper (DOB 5/22/2025) - sired by Walkerbrae Sniper and out of a daughter of Bentley, Mount Olivet Cassie



Melissa, who is a highly successful driver, and her beloved husband Gerald.



Gerald with National Champion Stallion 2025 Legendary Road (Liberty Road x Honor by Windermere's Mastermen)



Melissa is driving Windermere's Cha Cha, a daughter of the legendary Forest Grove Amy's Areba.

You have bred so many fantastic horses. Are there still one or two horses that you have grown even more fond of than the others?
 Yes — absolutely. Sometimes it's even hard to comprehend all the amazing horses that have come through our barn, but a few that are especially close to our hearts are: Windermere's North American Maid (Moose), Windermere's Deidre (DEIDRA), Windermere's Charisma, Windermere's Isabella, Windermere's Cha Cha, Bentley, Windermere's Tailor Made, Forest Grove Amy's Areba, Windermere's Desire, and Windermere's ZULY.

Which mare and which stallion do you consider to be the best horses that Windermere has bred over the years?
 Our best stallion is Windermere's North American Maid (Moose). Our best mare is Windermere's ZULY.

Where do you see Windermere Farms in 10 years?
 With God's guidance, we will be doing exactly what we do now,



Windermere's Cleopatra was crowned the breed champion at the Classic Series Final

but on an even grander scale. We believe God will open doors and provide opportunities to catapult our breeding program and showing to a whole new level

Thank you so much for the interview, Melissa and Gerald.

Windermere Farms' top 10 successes in the past 60 years

- Windermere's Deidra**
Junior World Champion (2006).
- Windermere's Glamour Girl**
Reserve Junior World Champion (2006).
- Blue Ribbon Farms Prince**
World Champion Stallion (2006).
- Windermere's Deidra**
Supreme World Champion (2008).
- Windermere's Inferno**
World Champion Stallion (2008).
- Windermere North American Maid (Moose)**
Supreme World Champion (2010).
- Andersen's Bentley**
Junior World Champion (2014); six-time All-American and two-time National Champion.
- Walker Brae Sniper**
Senior World Champion (2022)
- Forest Grove Amy's Areba and Windermere's Desire**
Three-time World Champion Team Driving



Melissa and Gerald Allebach with Windermere's Turbo



Almost 40 years ago, Abe and Mary Allebach, founders of Windermere Farms with Duke, crowned the Res Grand Champion stallion. Duke's grandson, Windermere's Comanchero, will be exhibiting at the World Show in Saint Paul, Minnesota 2026.



Full brothers Windermere's Turbo and Windermere's Zain. Sired by Bentley and out of Windermere's Markie Maid. Grand and Res Grand Champion Stallions at the Big E in Springfield, Massachusetts presented by Abraham Allebach (left) and his father Gerald Allebach.