

THE

North America's Horse Show Magazine • December 2020 • Published Since 2003

PLAID HORSE

COVER STORY:

Leigh Nanda

Wins Both WIHS & NAL
Children's Jumper Finals



Photo © Andrew Ryback Photography

\$5.99 (ISSN 2573-9409)
theplaidhorse.com

That Magic Click

WORDS Rennie Dyball

PHOTOS Jump Media, Shawn McMillen Photography, Andrew Ryback Photography





Leigh Nanda
and El Casper won
both the NAL & the
WIHS Children's Jumper
Finals—after just a
few months of
showing together

Leigh Nanda was fairly new to horse showing when she got El Casper, a 13-year-old, 16.1h Hanoverian gelding.

Nanda, 15, rode Casper at home for only a couple of weeks before stepping into the ring with him. The pair started winning right away in the 1.10M jumpers. Their success continued throughout the summer and early fall—Nanda's first real show season after just a handful of shows in

2018 and 2019—and then they wrapped up the fall with two major wins: The NAL Children's Jumper Finals, and the Washington International Children's Jumper Finals.

Their trainer, Lance Williamson, was hardly surprised.

"He told my dad at one point that if I get the right horse, we'll win the country," says Nanda. "And he stayed true to his word! Everything with Casper happened so fast. I was just at the right place at the right time and I am so lucky to have such a great partnership with him."

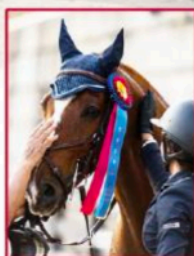
"Casper is a cautious, careful horse that draws his courage more from his rider," says Williamson. "He hits the sweet spot galloping, and he's super smooth, huge-strided, and adjustable. He loves the mental support Leigh gives him, and together they exude confidence."

Nanda believes she's just as well-matched with her trainer as she is with her horse. "I can always trust Lance. When I go into the show ring and we have a plan, I know if I stick to it and do what I'm supposed to, it'll work out," she says. "He creates a fun environment in the barn and we're always joking around. He's taught me how to be somebody I want to be and am proud of, both in and out of the barn."



Nanda started riding with Williamson at Lance Williamson Stables in Gurnee, IL, in 2018 after starting out in a couple of lesson programs at local barns. "Once I got to Lance's," she says, "everything took off."

She dabbled in the low children's hunters just briefly before starting to show one of Williamson's jumpers. Nanda says she loves the discipline because "you can never get bored of it—you're always in competition with yourself." She showed Williamson's Aarhus in the low children's jumpers and then the highs ("He taught me a ton") before trying Casper in Florida and ultimately purchasing him.



"I went into the show ring and it just all fell into place," says Nanda. "We worked well together from the beginning. He's really my type of ride. He's less hot and takes a bit more leg to get him going. A big part of my ride on him is creating impulsion and getting him packaged up and bottled up, so that he jumps high over the jumps and not flat over the jumps."

It may have felt like things just fell into place, but if you ask Williamson, Nanda's work ethic has a lot to do with her success. "Leigh is a tireless and dedicated rider," he says. "She understands the necessity of incorporating her flatwork into her jumping courses, and she is able to adapt her style to

“I’d really like to thank my grandpa for all the support he gives me. I’m so thankful for that. No one in my family has a history with horses, but they love what I love. My dad is learning as we go.”

~ LEIGH NANDA

compensate for horses’ different inabilities as well as their strengths.”

When Nanda got to the ring with Casper at WIHS, it was the gelding’s turn to impress her. “He went into the stadium for the first time [at Tryon] and was just so game for everything. He’s not spooky per se, but he does look at the jumps sometimes,”

says Nanda. “He’s a great turner, a smooth ride, and deceptively fast. I feel like I’m going really slow on him because he’s got a huge stride. But then we cross the timers and that’s not true at all!”

Showing in such big finals, adds Nanda, “was a little bit scary going into the ring, but I just hoped for the best. Throughout the summer I started

**LEIGH NANDA
& EL CASPER’S
BIG WINS**

- NAL Welcome
- NAL Children’s Jumper Final
- Best Child Jumper Rider at Capital Challenge
- Zone 5 IHJA Champion
- Zone 5 M&S Champion
- Zone 5 HOTY
- Chicago Hits Circuit Champion
- WIHS Children’s Jumper Final





becoming more and more confident. Part of that's just because I feel confident on Casper, but also I think over time, the more and more I ride, and the more exposure I have to shows, the easier it gets."

While Williamson may not have been surprised by the wins, for Nanda, it was a different story. "I was so amazed by all the success that we've had because I really never had that kind of success before," she says.

And she acknowledges the village it takes for any rider to succeed in the ring. "Lance is super important to me and I couldn't have gotten to where I am today without him. But without his wife Lisa, none of this could have happened either! I'm so thankful for her. She's my biggest supporter and is always there for me. She helps everybody stay organized, too. I can't imagine our barn without her." Nanda also credits her school with allowing her to ride and show as much as she does. "Education is

super important to me and my family, and I wouldn't be able to ride as much as I do without the school's support and flexibility. For that, I am grateful."

Looking ahead, Nanda's goal for 2021 is to qualify once more for the NAL and WIHS, this time in the low junior jumpers. After that, she's got her eye on the medium and high juniors. Long term, Nanda says, it would be "so cool to show internationally in the big Grand Prix, like in Versailles and all those cool places. I think it would be really neat to travel and see the world, but from a horse's perspective."

But for now, their first major wins behind them, Nanda and Casper are back home at the barn, working on the basics, and just enjoying each other's company.

"He is so sweet. He's such a character with these really expressive, inquisitive eyes. He's a big puppy dog," says Nanda. "And my favorite animal—ever." ■