

San Francisco's Famous Cow Palace Honors...

Sheila Varian



Above: Nan Walden presents a floral "V" to Kristy Gillot, accepting on behalf of Angela Alvarez, Sheila's beloved Farm Manager.



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The same stadium that has borne witness to legends such as the Beatles, John F. Kennedy, the Rolling Stones, Martin Luther King Jr., Elvis Presley, and so many others, paid tribute to a well-known Arabian horse legend. In a special tribute on Saturday, October 14, 2023, during a special "Women of Rodeo" evening, the historic Cow Palace honored the late Sheila Varian – along with her gritty, talented Arabian mare, Ronteza – as the first woman to win the World Reined Cow Horse Championships in 1961.

The tribute opened with a narrated video walking viewers through that remarkable weekend in 1961, as the young high school teacher competed on her Arabian mare against the best professional cowboys of the day to ultimately "win the world" against all odds.

Scan to view videos from the celebration



Sheila Varian Tribute



Special Performance

Five decorated Varian-bred champions from Dick and Nan Walden's Rancho Soñado Arabians (Tucson, AZ) then entered the ring in a special performance, representing the quality and versatility of the Varian Arabian:



Picante Jullyen V+
(Jullyen El Jamaal x Precious V+)
ridden by Lane LeClair
(Reining National Champion)



Renegade Mac V++
(Maclintock V x Ravvens Skylark)
ridden by Shea Johnson
(Show Hack National Champion)



Romance V+++//
(Maclintock V x Ravvens Skylark)
ridden by Griffin Alexander
(Sport Horse Reserve National Champion)



May Flower RS
(Monticello V x Flower Girl V)
ridden by James Fehr
(Sport Horse National Top Ten JTR)



Pandoras Seekret V
(The Seeker V x Pretty Pauline V)
shown in hand by Raeann Haley
(Sport Horse National Top Ten In-Hand)

"Dick and I bought our first horse from Sheila in 2003, Kay Pasa V," said Nan Walden. "My Quarter Horse-loving husband was immediately won over by her horsemanship and her horses. It was an honor for us to pay tribute to Sheila by showcasing a group of our National and Scottsdale Champion Arabians that are winning across a wide array of disciplines from trail and ranch riding to show hack and dressage, to reining and cow work."

A beautiful floral display representing the Varian V was presented by Nan Walden to Kristy Gillot, who accepted on behalf of Varian Arabians and the Varian family in attendance, concluding the special tribute.

Special thanks to Nan and Dick Walden and the Rancho Soñado Arabians team for bringing horses and adding additional magic to the evening. Thanks also to the Allison Keaney, CEO of the Cow Palace, for making the tribute possible.

It was an unforgettable evening honoring one of the Arabian breed's brightest guiding lights, Sheila Varian.

Long live the V!