

## McLain Ward & Lee McKeever join the ranks of steamed hay believers

By Kim Miller  
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“We are incredibly happy to have added the Haygain hay steamer to our program,” says Olympic and World Equestrian Games gold medal show jumper McLain Ward. Steamed hay is scientifically proven to rid hay of 98% of dust, mold, fungus and bacteria that is found in even top-quality hay. That’s why McLain’s Castle Hill Farm team sought it out earlier this summer to help Contagious, the horse with which McLain was selected to represent the U.S. for the Pan American Games.

A relatively new horse in McLain’s string, Contagious was performing at his peak – winning the \$208,200 Upperville Classic CSI-4\* in early June – even while having some respiratory challenges.

“He always had a little trouble getting his breath,” explains Lee McKeever, McLain’s stable manager of 31 years and the FEI’s 2018 Groom of the Year. “Since getting the steamed hay, his breathing improved a lot: I’d say within five days of starting on it.”

“We quickly noticed an increase in the quality of our horses’ breathing, especially in those with respiratory problems,” concurs McLain.

Contagious subsequently sustained a minor injury that prevented him and McLain from going to the Pan Am Games, but not before determining that steamed hay was a big help. That’s true for many horses, even top performers, because respiratory conditions are surprisingly prevalent and often without any clear symptoms. Research published last fall in the *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine* reported that 88% of 700-plus active sporthorses participating in a three-year study had some degree of Inflammatory Airway Disease, aka “Equine Asthma.”



As with fellow top horsemen and hay steamers including Beezie Madden and Margie Engle, the frequently-traveling Castle Hill crew appreciates Haygain's ability to produce consistently clean hay. "It's so great for everyday use because when you are traveling a lot, you never know the quality of hay you're going to get," Lee explains. "At shows, for example, it can be dusty. We try to keep everything for the horses as regular as possible, and the steaming helps keep the hay the same quality."

Protecting the horse's vulnerable airway and lungs and helping horses with pre-existing respiratory conditions are the concerns for which Haygain was developed. McLain and Lee already see some of its additional benefits. "We've noticed the hay is easier to chew and digest, which is always a concern for the older horses," says the rider of the retired horses living out their lives at his beautiful farm in Brewster, New York. And, Lee notices that some of the stable's picky eaters are becoming enthusiastic eaters when given steamed hay.

It's also easy to use, even in Castle Hill's large program. With a current horse head count of between 25 and 35, the barn awakes to their full-bale steamer going two-rounds in the morning, then settles later in the day with another two rounds. A half-bale model suitable for the show circuit will soon keep the competition stars on their normal diet every day. "You just fill the boiler with water and plug it in," explains Lee of the steamer's easy incorporation into daily stable management.

McLain Ward is one of the world's most successful show jumpers and most revered horsemen. His many Olympic, World Equestrian Games and World Cup accomplishments tell one part of his story. His horsemanship is best described in his own words about his horses:

"We owe them our lives. They give us so much and they ask for only basic kindness in return. I believe horses and humans have a connection that draws us to each other. I believe in their own way they know we need them and they are pleased to be our partner whether it be in work or sport. We need to remember to never take this privilege of working and living with horses for granted. To never lose our appreciation for what they have given us throughout the history of time and to be sure that their relevance in our society does not fade away. This is our greatest responsibility as equestrians."