

the road, where a horse in their teens is ancient. By the time any of the rescues fish them out of the kill pens, their hearts are often broken, but their bodies most generally are. Our breed is resilient. Many come back from this life, to go on and have another, if they are lucky, with a sport, or lesson home. These horses are also game, with the blood of the mighty behind them who carried soldiers into war, and have won Championships for their owners. They try and please, because it is bred into them.

I went to a farm to see a couple of horses that an Amish man had for sale. They were very well bred, and in great order. One, named Harlem's Strictly Business, who was by a World's Champion, out of a mare by a World's Grand Champion, would have suited a friend of mine, but she wasn't ready to buy. Some years later, he wound up at a rescue. He came there after being what the Amish called a "sixty mile horse". Yes, he was pulling a buggy for sixty miles some days. I looked hard at the pictures, and recognized him, broken down, but still with that look in his eye he had when I first met him. The rescue was getting ready to euthanize him, because they didn't know what else to do with him. I contacted a friend who was a trainer in Kentucky, and asked if she would take him, if we could get him to her. She agreed. Under her care and with her love, he blossomed. Before she retired him, he taught some people how to ride a five gaited horse. I had serious regrets that I had not been able to home him several years earlier, but it just isn't always possible. We need more awareness of what these horses can do, and more people within the breed who are willing to care enough to find them the right fit. Just because the industry has been dumping these horses off for all of these years doesn't make it right, humane, or proactive for the breed.

One year at the ASHA convention, I was standing in line for a drink at the annual American Saddlebred Museum party. The two gentlemen in front of me were discussing a horse. I recognized one of them. "I just don't understand," he said, "He was such a pretty colt, and seemed talented. I own the mare, and she is awfully nice. The trainer said he just wasn't going to make the show ring." The other gentleman asked his breeding, and where the colt was. "The first gentleman said, "I don't know where he is. The trainer sold him." I then realized that they were talking about the black colt, Virtuoso, who I had just photographed and placed on the internet, hoping for a home. The name of the owner/breeder on his papers was the gentleman in front of me. I said, "I know where he is. He is standing in an Amish barn in Pennsylvania, and I am trying to find him a sport home." They seemed embarrassed; not wanting to comment on the reality of where the horse was. I am awfully glad I was able to find that nice colt a home.

I have spoken at the ASHA convention three times, each time giving a power point presentation, and trying to show people how similar our horses are to the best European Warmbloods. Our horses are built uphill, they are naturally forward and balanced, and they are born with a desire to please their people.

However, they are generally easier to sit on, have better impulsion, and are more affordable. In 2012, the then chair of the Sport Horse Committee, who was proactively working to educate the ownership, and grow the market, asked me to speak again. Oddly enough, I was extremely ill, but I wasn't aware of exactly how bad that was, at that time. I went to Lexington, and gave a presentation that was well received, I thought. After this, I was asked to join the Sport Horse Committee, again, which I was thrilled to do, given the energy that the Chair was bringing to the group. I stayed on the committee until the death of my stallion, Borealis, in mid-2013. I found that I just didn't have the heart to continue.

As with anything else that you are selling, it comes down to marketing. Breeders need support to know where to advertise, and how to present their horse in a manner that is acceptable to the sport horse crowd. There are both trainers and individuals who are supportive of this within the breed, but it needs to grow. The ASHA needs to support the diversity of the breed in a real way, showing the breeders exactly how to best market their horses. The trainers, in many cases, don't know how to present a horse to the sport horse market, and also are so entrenched in the easy way out- calling the Brokers- that change has been incredibly slow. However, with fewer than 1000 horses registered for 2015, the dire reality of the situation is black and white. If we do not have markets for each and every American Saddlebred that is born, the breeders cannot continue to breed. Dozens of major breeding operations have fallen by the wayside, or scaled back substantially, in the past decade. And this isn't a new problem. The following Editorial was written by William Thompson, and published in 1978 in Saddle and Bridle magazine, on the occasion of the American Saddle Horse Breeders Association, which we used to just call "the Breeder's Office", officially becoming a membership organization:

An Editorial

The Last Stockholder's Meeting

April 25, 1978

LOUISVILLE, KY. Long past due, interested breeders of American Saddlebred horses gathered to hear what the American Saddlebred Breeders Association had to say about many pressing issues concerning the future of the breed. The annual luncheon has previously been a social affair attended by perhaps two dozen persons, with a standard stockholders meeting followed by a luncheon. For the past several decades, everything has been status quo, with a reading of the minutes, an accounting of new registrations, a report of films distributed and then re-election of the usual directors.

Here of late, this status quo has been somewhat disturbed with pressure for new breeders of Saddlebreds, who are becoming concerned over the dismally low prices many of their colts are bringing at production sales. Better publicity for the breed has often been a complaint of the breeders going back to 1909. (See Saddle and Bridle, The First President, page 109, April 1978). For decades, the Breeder's Association has registered less than 4000 new Saddlebreds per year, while other breeds have started from nowhere and now register over 50,000 horses per year.

In keeping with the growing concern for the breed, Saddle and Bridle published a March editorial suggesting that the actual breeders go to their stockholder's meeting in Louisville and participate in its future. An estimated 200 people did arrive in Louisville that day and the A.S.H.B.A. welcomed their interest and was prepared to make some history making changes which hopefully will lead the Saddle Horse to a prominent place among favorite breeds in this country. A.S.H.B.A. President Thomas Morton announced proudly that the stockholder membership had increased from 38 new members in 1976 to over 400 new members in 1977. We are proud to say such names as Aikman, Buchanon, Teater, Blessman, Jacobs, Bridgers, Ruxer, Caldwell, Bush, Farris, Wagner, Miller, Jungbluth, Weldon, Scata, Large, Wood, Hedden, Fischer, Chapman, Townsend, Briney, Munford, Strasburger, and many others made the trip to Louisville. Representing the United Professional Horsemen's Association led by President Keith Bartz were such names as Jordan, Walsh, McConnell, Teater, Galbreath, Lavery, Crabtree, Herrman, Boettcher, Graham, Harris and Schroeder.*

Well organized, the Breeder's Association conducted the meeting with a reading of the minutes by Mr. Cronan, a progress report by Mr. Blackwell, a Treasurer's report by Mr. Tway, a publicity report by Mr. Costello, and last but not least, a reading of the passing of members by Mr. Cabe.

The most pressing of issues was held to the last, and that was the matter of bringing the membership up to current times. This was presented by Mr. Stopher who explained a new plan for annual membership instead of a stockholder membership. Under consideration for the past year with legal counsel, at long last this new membership system allows the association to dispense with the voting power of several thousand deceased stockholders by proxy, a chronic problem of the past.

In order to dispose of these deceased stockholder's stock, this unaccounted stock was put up for sale at Public auction. This stock was purchased by the Association and since it is no longer outstanding, a quorum of the remaining stockholders was obtained. The A.S.H.B.A. was then able to amend its Articles

of Incorporation and thereby adopt an annual membership policy, instead of a stockholder's membership. Annual membership dues are to be \$15.00. Hereafter, all stock in the Corporation will be exchanged for one annual membership. At the option of the holder, stock certificates can be redeemed by the association upon payment by the association of \$10 per share.

And so it is, after 87 years of existence with the original bylaws, the A.S.H.B.A. has at long last made a change, perhaps one of the most important changes to be made since its incorporation.

With the amendment to the articles of incorporation made, the Association proceeded with its last Stockholder's Meeting and elected six directors and they were: Helen Crabtree, Cynthia Wood, Chat Nichols, Hugh Richardson, Mrs. William Roth, and Joseph E. Stopher. Not exactly an all-new slate of directors, however, with more and more active breeders appearing on the board, perhaps the American Saddle Horse Breeders Association will catch up with the times.

It is hard to believe that this association has functioned under by-laws written so long ago. With the new annual membership policy, hopefully we will begin to see continued improvements. One improvement that needs immediate attention is Saddlebred publicity and we understand a new committee has been forward to reorganize this important function of the association.

The American Saddlebred Horse Association, as it exists today, is responsible for the stewardship of the breed. It is their responsibility to optimize the opportunities for every single American Saddlebred that is born, and registered with the American Saddlebred Registry, thus supporting the breeders, and ensuring the continuance of the breed. As the Saddle and Bridle piece shows, these issues haven't changed in all of the years since it was written; in fact the circumstances are even more critical.

With the ability to research horses on the ASHA's website, it was possible to give horses who had lost their identity back their names. It was an arduous process, fraught with paperwork and political issues. Horses fell into different categories; there were those whose papers had simply been lost, although I have found that the Amish are meticulous in keeping the papers with a horse, if they receive them. They do not transfer horses within their people, generally. But the actual set of papers will be handed off. There were horses who had been sold without their papers. Many times, this was to make sure that no one would ever be able to successfully identify the horses again. It is extremely frustrating to find a horse, determine who they are, and find that the owners have no interest in giving that horse back their identity.