

A Living History

By David Spradlin

An interview with Mr K.H. Risner, taken at his home near West Liberty, KY on Jan. 11, 2005.

Mr Risner and his family are some of the pioneers of the Mountain Pleasure Horse History. He has been involved in the breeding and training of many great horses, past and present. There is no way to measure the impact that people like he and his father have had on the Mountain Pleasure Horse. I thank him for inviting me into his home and sharing some of his knowledge with me.

DS- Mr Risner, Have you always lived in this area?

KHR- Yes, I was raised in Wolfe County and Morgan County. I was born in 1945.

DS- Have you been around horses all your life?

KHR- Yes, Dad bought me a (Jasper Jones) Bucky Horse when I was 6 years old in 1951 and I've not been out since.

DS- Was your father a horseman?

KHR- Yes, of course he grew up in the time where they used them, not to play with like we do now. He was a horseman. He loved horses and cattle. About a year before he died, someone stole the last mare he had. She was a mare you could put anyone on, it came a storm one night and somebody stole her.

DS- Was he a farmer?

KHR- Yeah, he farmed a lot. He also taught schools and was principal of schools.

DS- Did he trade horses a lot in those days?

KHR- No, dad didn't trade a lot. He usually just found a horse that suited him or if he raised it he had a tendency to keep it. He never owned a lot of horses. He usually kept from 5-10. A lot of the time if it was a good horse he would keep it for a good period of time.

DS- How did you use your

horses back then?

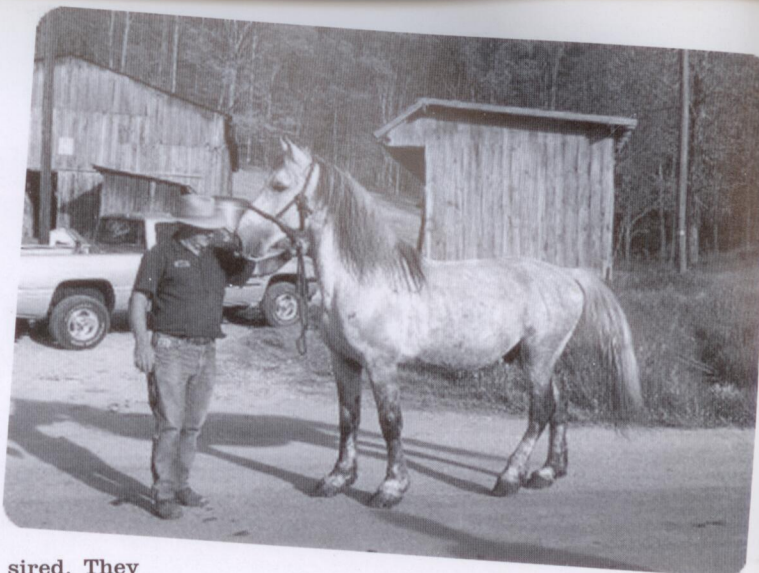
KHR- We showed quite a bit and we trail rode a lot too. We rode all the time. We worked them and did a lot of farm work with them. I turned ground with them, disc ground with them, mowed hills, mowed hay, raked hay, cultivated gardens, tobacco, ya know we did it all with horses. I was young and we didn't have a tractor and we did a lot of riding.

DS- So the old Mountain horses had a lot of versatility?

KHR- Yeah, they still do. I broke a colt this year. He'll be two in May. I broke him to ride. I rode him two or three times, and just took him and hooked him. He just walked off like an old mule that had been worked 10 years. Worked him four or five times, put him in a cart and he just was a beautiful workhorse. When you work him now, he is a beautiful workhorse.

DS- What are some of the older horses that you saw when you were growing up, and does any of them stand out?

KHR- Well, I guess the horse that stands out more than any horse was the horse that Merle McGuire had that he called Rocky. He was by the Bucky horse that they call Jones' Bucky. Rocky was the horse that sired Goldfinger and Little's Silver. He was about 15 hands, a dark palomino and had daps on him. Beautiful arched neck, beautiful tail carriage and he had a real natural running walk. Merle rode him in the running walk all the time and showed him a great deal and won a whole lot on him. Probably of all the mountain horses if I could just go back and pick out one I would probably pick the Rocky horse. Another horse that was very outstanding was the Silver horse that was the brother to Goldfinger that Rocky



sired. They showed him quite a bit and won a great deal on. He was excellent, now he did the run walk too. Those horses didn't rack they showed them in the running walk. Head shaking horses and they just glided with them and did it natural.

DS- Did Merle McGuire use or show Rocky a lot?

KHR- He showed him at West Liberty. He lived at Malone, which was close to West Liberty and just about every show we had at West Liberty, he would be there with him. The other shows I went to, I didn't see him too much. So I don't know if Merle showed him anywhere else or just took him there because it was local.

DS- His sire the Jones Bucky horse, Was he raised around here?

KHR- He was foaled at Frozen Creek in Breathitt County. A man by the name of Bill Dunn owned him. My father bought Bucky when he was 9 months old and brought him into Morgan County, over next to Magoffin County where my father lived. He kept him and broke him to ride and broke him to work. We did all kinds of work with him. He kept him a while and then sold him to one of my uncles. He then sold him to another one of my uncles and then dad bought him back. He eventually sold him to Jasper Jones and Jasper kept him until he passed away. He kept him until, I think he was almost 31 when he passed away.

An interesting point about Bucky was when he was a three year old, daddy bred him to 85 mares in six weeks. I went through the old book and he bred him to five mares in one day, the most he'd ever bred him. He

stood for 29 years, the oldest stallion in our area. They brought mares from Elliott, Rowan, Magoffin, Breathitt, Wolfe counties, everywhere over to Adale to breed to him. He had a big impact on the mountain pleasure horses.

DS- What kind of stud fee did they charge?

KHR- When dad had him, he bred him for \$5.

DS- Did anyone keep track of the conception rate on him?

KHR- Well, the only comment I ever heard dad say was the day he bred him to 5 mares. He said the last mare he bred him to had a beautiful golden palomino filly. He didn't say anything about the others, he just said that about the last mare he bred.

DS- What color was Bucky?

KHR- When he was young, now of course I am taking my father's word for this because he had already sold the horse when I saw him, Bucky was a golden palomino. My mother said he was just like a piece of gold with a snow white mane and tail at a 2 and 3 year old. Then he turned in to a real dark rattlesnake body color and his mane and tail got really dark. Now some of these old horses, like the old Moon horse of Paul's, he turned chestnut. Bucky didn't do that, he went to deep rattlesnake color and still had daps all over him and his mane and tail had a lot of black in it.

DS- It's odd they turn colors like that isn't it?

KHR- Yeah, but a lot them do.

DS- Did people breed for color back then?

KHR- They bred for the horse because they were us-

Continued on Page 31



pretty good horse.

DS-So your mother used him by herself?

KHR-Oh yeah, that was her riding horse when she had him. That was the horse she used. My mother and father both were school teachers and mother said she rode him to the school where she taught for one year and she would put him in a stall in a barn near the school. In the evening, she would catch him up, put the saddle on him and ride him back

home. She would ride him about 15 miles each way.

ing them.

But they also bred for color because I know when I was a little boy when someone would have a fold they would use different terminology to describe the color than we use today. They would say that they've got a yellow colt and the first question would be, does it have a black mane and tail or white mane and tail. They called both the buckskin and the palomino horse yellow. At that time they wanted them to have a white mane and tail. So they did breed a lot for color.

DS-How big was he?

KHR-Bucky was 15 hands and when he was real fat he would have weighted close to 1200 pounds.

DS-Was he a good workhorse?

KHR-Excellent work horse. Dad broke him when he was a two year old, broke him with another two year old stallion, a blue roan horse. He broke him turning ground over on Wheel Rim. They've got some pretty nice bottoms over there and he just put the two young studs together and went to turning ground and he did about 30 acres with them. That's the way he broke them both. And dad said he never put the harness on a better workhorse. Bucky was, just as I said when fat he weighed 1200 lbs. and just 15 hands, so that gives you an idea that he was a long bodied horse and he was pretty wide. But he didn't have a big foot or he wasn't big boned. He was a small boned and small-footed horse. He had a humpous neck. Daddy said when he put him in the wagon, they hauled coal and stuff through the mud and he said his neck and shoulders were so strong that he was just an excellent wagon horse. But he said he was good for anything. And I've heard my mother tell different times about carrying eggs to the store on Bucky during breeding season and meeting people along the road on horses and he would act just like he was a gelding. Said he never broke an egg. That's a

A Living History

DS-So what do you think is one of the best qualities of the Mountain Pleasure Horse?

KHR-Well, to me the usability of the Mountain Horse. If you want to ride them, if you want to work them, if you want to put a child on them, you can. They are the simplest things on earth to break. You don't have to spend any time breaking them. Several of my horses that I have now, the first time I ride them, I would take them to the woods and ride them and then come back and ride them up and down the black top road for the first time. So, I would say their nature and usability is their best quality.

DS-How do you like to start a young horse?

KHR-I handle my young horses before they are old enough to ride. By the time they get old enough to ride, I have already driven them several times. I have them to where you can rein them. I teach them to start and stop before I ever get on them. By the time they get old enough to ride, I generally ease the saddle on them, step up on them and go to riding. I've never had one to buck, I never had one to rear and I've never had one to try to run away with me. I fool with them from the time they are young. I have a colt now that is eight months old and if he is laying out in the barn or anywhere I can go straddle him and he won't get up. Well, it obvious that when he is old enough to ride he is not going

to do any damage to you. I think you break your horses by breeding them correctly. To me, that's when you do your breaking, when you do your breeding. If they are bred the right way you won't have much trouble when you start training them. If there not, I don't care how you go about training them, you will have some problems.

DS-Any particular bloodline that you like better than others?

KHR-Yes. Yes sir there is. I like the old Bucky stock, the old Jasper Jones stock. I try to get as close to that as I can possibly get. I like their gait, I like their conformation and most of all, I like their intelligence.

Another unusual thing about Bucky, which distinguishes him from any other stallions that I've known, is that they bred him to a lot of work stock mares, trotting mares. Dad guaranteed the colt to saddle or he gave the stud fee back. He said he hardly ever had to give a stud fee back. One of the best saddle horses

I ever owned was by Bucky and out of a mustang mare. Excellent workhorse and one of the best saddle horses I ever put a saddle on. Of course his mother could not do anything but trot. She had 3 foals by Bucky and every one of them was real good saddle horses. I've never known another horse that could do that to that degree. Breed a trotting mare to Bucky and 99 times out of 100 you would get a saddle horse.

DS-He passed it on didn't he!

KHR- Yes. He did.

DS-What line of horse do they cross well with?

KHR-I have had four of that stock of horses that I crossed on the Cables Rex stock. The Cable horse tends to put more size on his horse, more legs under them and a little bit more of an elegant looking horse. I like that cross.

DS-You said the Bucky horse came from Breathitt Co. originally, do you know anything about his background?

KHR-He was by a palomino horse they called the Hub Spencer horse. Now every one of us old horse people knew of him, he was a big time horse trader. He was a bluegrass man but he would come up in the mountains. He would buy hundreds of horses and ship them to middle Tennessee and everywhere. He had a palomino horse at that time, this was in the 30's and dad just referred to him as the Hub Spencer horse and I never heard him referred to him as anything else, Bucky was by him and out of a bay mare that they had over in Breathitt Co. Daddy said she was a heavy set mare, a real good running walk mare. He rode her. Bucky took his conformation more from his mother. He said the Hub Spencer horse was round bodied and higher headed, you know a different type horse than Bucky.

DS-Then Hub could have possibly got that horse right here in the mountains.

KHR-Yeah. That's where he bought most of his horses. He sold a lot of mountain horses to other places, Hub

A Living History

Schedule

Continued

mountain horses to other places, Hub did.

DS-Did you ever meet Hub?

KHR-Yeah, I sold him a palomino stallion, when I was 22 years old. I had a 16-hand palomino stallion that I had just broke. I don't know how Hub ever heard of him but he came up to my house one day about dark and introduced himself. I had always heard of him but had never met him. He was getting way up in years then, he told me what he was there for and I just rode my horse down the lane and back and priced him at \$350, which I thought was a wild price and he paid me for him and loaded him up and said I like your horse.

DS-He made a living by hauling these mountain horses out of here, didn't he?

KHR-Yes, he did and a good living. But he liked a good horse. This horse I sold him was a beautiful animal.

DS-Was he by the old Bucky horse?

KHR-He was a grandson of Bucky.

DS-Did you know Jasper Jones personally?

KHR-Yes, he lived just a few miles over the hill in Adale.

DS- How long did he have the Bucky horse?

KHR- He kept Bucky about 25 years. He kept him until he died. I had one of the last foals from the old horse. He was a sorrel horse. I kept him a long time. Bucky sired colts after he was 30 years old. I wouldn't have any idea how many colts the horse sired. He stood for 29 years.

DS-As a previous MPHA Board Member, and a breeder of Mountain Horses, do think the Mountain Pleasure Horse Association is moving in the right direction?

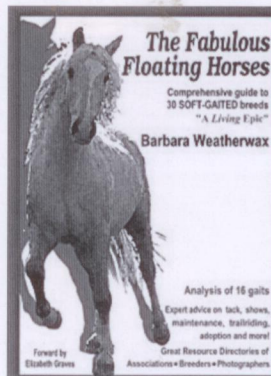
KHR-Yes, I do and the reason I believe that is every year, and I have talked to different people about this and I mentioned it briefly while ago, the horses have improved so much over the last

13-14 years. I was the ring master at the first mountain show they had, had it down at Morehead in the inside pavilion and to compare the horses that were at that show to what they have now, they have come a long way. So I believe that the association is doing all right because of the improvement of the horses. And I think that is the most important thing. I think that should come before the marketing and all these other things.

I hope everybody enjoys reading these interviews as much as I enjoy doing them. Once again I thank Mr Risner for sharing his knowledge of the history of the Mountain Pleasure Horse with us.

Send any questions or comments to david@spradli realestate.com

March 11-12 Al Prewitt Memorial Fletcher, NC
April 7-10, Equine Affaire, Columbus, OH
April 15-16 UMH Spring Premiere Morehead, KY
April 29 Wolfe County Basketball Boosters, Campton, KY
June 4 Stidham Memorial Stanton, KY
June 17-18 UMH Summer Celebration Murfreesboro, TN
July 1 Owingsville Lions Club Owingsville, KY
August 5-7 Ky Horse Park/Breed Weekend Lexington, KY
Aug. 15-20 UMH World Show Harrodsburg, KY
Sept. 10 MPH World Championship Owingsville, KY
Sept. 23-25 Northeast Gaited Horse Show Dillsburg, PA



Celebrate the soft-gaited horse!

18 pages on the Mountain Pleasure Horses

\$49.⁹⁵ plus \$5.⁹⁵ shipping

Order your copy by:
phone: (775)849-0676
fax: (775) 849-3162
mail: Markwin Press
P.O. Box 19898
Reno, NV 89711
on the web:

www.thefabulousfloatinghorses.com

MOUNTAIN PLEASURE HORSE ASSOCIATION

Membership Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Membership \$25.00 Lifetime \$500 New Renewal

For More Information Write To:

MOUNTAIN PLEASURE HORSE ASSOCIATION

PO Box 505

Irvine, KY 40336

(606) 723-6551

www.mtn-pleasure-horse.org

Circle here if you do not wish your name to be given out on membership list