

Old Time Memories,

Old Time Mountain Horses

by Fran Ogren from original interviews by Dave Spradlin



A Mountain horse stallion who anybody could ride, the very gentle GOBEL, in the 1940s with Carl Brooks' youngest sister, Lorene, in the front and their cousin who lived close by, Andy Stamper.

With a traceable past of over 160 years, the history of the Mountain Pleasure Horse is also the history of the people who developed the breed.

As Mike Spradlin, current president of the Mountain Pleasure Horse Association observed, the character of the horse owes to the character of the people who created it. "The people in the generations past are largely responsible for shaping today's horses," he notes. "People in all breeds talk about how their horses were derived, but in most cases, and certainly in the mountain horses, it was to necessitate the lives of the people."

We are fortunate to have the words and feelings of some of the old-timers in the Mountain Horse Breed preserved for us, thanks to David Spradlin, who conducted interviews that he so graciously shares with us here.

Just southwest of Lexington, Kentucky you'll still find people who are rich in the memories of the beginnings of this versatile breed. Here are some of their stories.

Carl Brooks

WOLF COUNTY'S CARL BROOKS SAYS HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH THE HORSES STARTED AT BIRTH. HIS FATHER, GRANDFATHER AND GREAT-grandfather were some of the first settlers in that area where this horse played such an important role. "When I was a boy, if you went any place you either walked or rode a horse. Nobody had a car, and there weren't any roads, anyway."

They also used the horses to hunt fox and do their farming. Carl, now 85 years old, remembers his father having the horses (Mountain Pleasure Horses). Mostly he worked them, but rode them, too. "After I found out what a saddle horse was, that was the kind I liked. It's a much better ride."

The Brooks' didn't do much trading, mostly raising horses for their own use. The stallion Carl kept for breeding was 'a yellow horse, with a black mane and tail'. He liked the white mane and tail, but they were hard to find back then. Seems that both the palomino and the buckskin were just called yellow horses back then, with comments on mane color.

That stallion, GOBEL, sired a lot of pretty palominos. Carl owned him about 10 years and kept records on him from 1942 to 1952 when he was retired. As many as 60 mares a year were bred to Gobel. And if bred to a sorrel mare, you would just be sure to get a palomino foal. He even threw yellow foals when bred to dark mares and gray mares. "People would come for miles around to breed to that horse. I just charged \$25."

GOBEL was sired by a yellow horse called GOLDUST, out of a sorrel mare owned by Bob Sallie, who was "the first person I knew who had a yellow horse around here," Carl remembered.

"GOBEL was the best workhorse ever was," said Carl. "I worked him all the time. I would be working him here, plowing or something and someone would come and bring a mare to be bred and I would just take the harness off and breed the mare then put the harness back on and go back to working him."

I think you break your horses by breeding them correctly.

K.H. Risner

GOBEL was the only stud around then, which is why he bred so many mares. He was about 15 hands, and the only stud Carl ever kept. Carl raised him from a colt and he was "a sensible kind of horse. Never any trou-

ble to break to ride or work. Anybody could ride him, he was very gentle."

When asked if he kept a lot of horses, Carl said, no, five are about as many as he kept at one time. He never showed, but he loved to ride. And like everyone in the area was and still is, Carl Brooks is into horses.

K.H. Risner

CARL LIVED A LONG DAY'S RIDE from West Liberty, Kentucky, home to Mr. K. H. Risner, his cousin.

Mr. Risner, who has lived in Wolf County and Morgan County all his 60 years, got a (Jasper Jones) Bucky Horse when he was six years old and hasn't been without one since. His father was also a horseman, having grown up in a time when they used them. He farmed, among other things, and the horses were work horses, as well as saddle horses.

K. H.'s family showed the horses quite a bit, did a lot of trail riding and did a lot of farm work with them. The horses turned ground, would disc the ground, mowed hills, mowed hay, raked, cultivated gardens, tobacco, just about everything that needed doing was done with these horses. The Mountain Horses were nothing if not versatile!

And they still are. K.H. says, "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 work horse!" That is Versatile with a capital 'V' in any horseman's book, bred right into the breed.



R. T. Little and one of his prized palomino Mountain Horses.

When talking about the older horses K. H. remembered a horse owned by Merle McGuire. The horse was called ROCKY, sire of GOLDFINGER and LITTLE'S SILVER. He was sired by the horse they called JONES' BUCKY. ROCKY wasn't a big horse, standing about 15 hands. He was a dark palomino with 'daps' on him with a beautiful arched neck, beautiful tail carriage and a natural running walk. He was shown a lot and did a lot of winning. K. H. says if he could pick out just one of all the Mountain Horses, that would be the one.

Another that was outstanding was GOLDFINGER's brother, SILVER, that ROCKY sired. He was also shown a lot and also did the running walk. Those horses didn't rack, they showed them in the running walk, and they did it naturally.

ROCKY's sire, the Jones Bucky horse, was foaled at Frozen Creek in Breathitt County. Bill Dunn owned him



GOLDFINGER and R.T. Little (center) in the showing.

and K. H.'s father bought him when he was nine months old. He was broke to ride and work, then was sold to an uncle, then to another uncle, then his dad bought him back. Eventually he was sold to Jasper Jones, who lived just a few miles over the hill. He kept him the rest of his life. He was almost 31 when he passed away.

BUCKY was sired by a palomino they called the Hub Spencer horse. "Every one of us old horse people knew of him (Hub Spencer). He was a big time horse trader, a bluegrass man, but he would come up into 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 '30s and Dad just referred to him as the Hub Spencer horse and I never heard him referred to as anything else. BUCKY was by him and out of a bay mare that they had over in Breathitt

County. She was a heavy set mare, real good running walk mare. He rode her. BUCKY took his conformation from

Bucky had a big impact on the Mountain Horse; when he was a three-year-old he was bred to 85 mares in six weeks! He was bred to five mares in one day, which was the most he was ever bred. He stood at stud for 29 years.

his mother," K.H. recalls. The sire was round bodied and higher headed, a different type than BUCKY.

"BUCKY had a big impact on the Mountain Horse, as when he was a three-year-old he was bred to 85 mares in six weeks! In the old books it shows he was bred to five mares in one day, which was the most he was ever bred. He stood at stud for 29 years, the oldest stallion in our area. When Dad had him, he bred him for \$5.00 a mare."

When young, BUCKY was a gold-

en palomino. "My mother said he was just like a piece of gold with a snow white mane and tail as a two and three-year-old. He turned dark rattlesnake body color and his mane and tail got real dark as he got older, with a lot of black in it. And he still had his daps. He wasn't a big horse, just 15 hands and 1200 pounds when fat. He was a long-bodied horse, small boned and small footed. He had a humongous neck! And he was a work horse. Daddy said when they put him in the wagon, they hauled coal and stuff through the mud, and his neck and shoulders were so strong he was just an excellent wagon horse. My mother tells about carrying eggs to the store during breeding season and meeting people along the road on horses and he would just act like a gelding. Never broke an egg." That's a pretty good horse, and I might add, that's an excellent memory K. H. has as well!

When asked what the best qualities of the Mountain Horse are, K. H. was quick to say usability. "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. I think you break your horses by breeding them correctly." Their nature and usability, important qualities in any horse, are found so often in the Mountain Horse.

When asked what bloodlines he

liked best, K.H. answered the old Bucky stock. "I like their gait, I like their conformation, and most of all, I like their intelligence."

K. H. was a Mountain Pleasure Horse Association Board Member, breeder of Mountain Horses, and was ringmaster at the first Mountain Horse show. He feels the MPHA is moving in the right direction because he believes the horses have continued to improve over the last 13 - 14 years.

Ronnie Little

MR. RONNIE LITTLE IS ANOTHER WHO has grown up with the Mountain horse, having lived all of his 71 years in Pomeroyton, Kentucky. His family settled in the area in the early 1800s and he lives on the same farm where he grew up. They farmed with horses and mules until the '50s or later, when tractors became available.

When asked about the record keeping on the horses, Mr. Little said his daddy kept all the records in his head, and had a perfect memory right up until he died. They raised horses for their own use and to sell and trade, as well. His dad had a country store, which gave him the opportunity to see the mares pulling buggies, wagons, and being ridden, with the colts following. He picked out the ones he liked and broke them for the buyers he had.

Palominos he mostly sold to Hub Spencer, the well-known horse trader. "Old man Hub sold one horse in '47, a palomino horse, to this fellow in Springboro, OH, Bob Eaton. Daddy sold him for \$1,000.00, which was a pretty good price back then. That horse's sire was the first palomino I had ever seen. He was owned by a Mr. Ratliff."

That palomino sire was foaled in

1935, just over the hill. He was out of a bay mare and she was by a black horse out of a sorrel mare. The sire was the Bob Nichols horse up above Hazel Green. "I think he was a buckskin or something with a black mane and tail," Ronnie said. Mr. Ratliff sold him in 1945 for \$1,000. Lots of mares were bred to him; he had lots of foals around the country. Mr. Ratliff was never married, and the horses and mules were his life.

When asked when he realized that the Mountain Pleasure Horse was different from other horses, Ronnie replied that **he didn't realize they were different, because they always kept Mountain Pleasure horses!**

After getting out of the service in the mid '50s he got Tennessee Walking Horses and showed them for a while, but kept the Mountain Horses, too. Eventually he only kept the Mountain Pleasure stallions until GOLDFINGER died.

"My favorite horse was probably GOLDFINGER. He was the best going. I had a full brother to him, STERLING SILVER, that was 11 years older than GOLDFINGER. They looked a lot alike and had the same temperament; you could do anything you wanted to

do with them. They passed the trait on." Ronnie said.

"I bought GOLDFINGER from Charlie Short when he was a four-year-old. He was named after a dark palomino Tennessee stallion that won the championship the year GOLDFINGER was born. Before GOLDFINGER I bought DOLLY and SILVER from Charlie. They were full brother and sister to GOLDFINGER, only older. Their sire was ROCKY, by OLD BUCKY and their mother was OLD BESS. I also bought her from Charlie, then when she got older I gave her to Charlie's daughter. That's when they bred her back to ROCKY and got GOLDFINGER." BESS was a good saddle horse who you could put the kids on, plow with, put her in the tobacco patch or garden or mow with her.

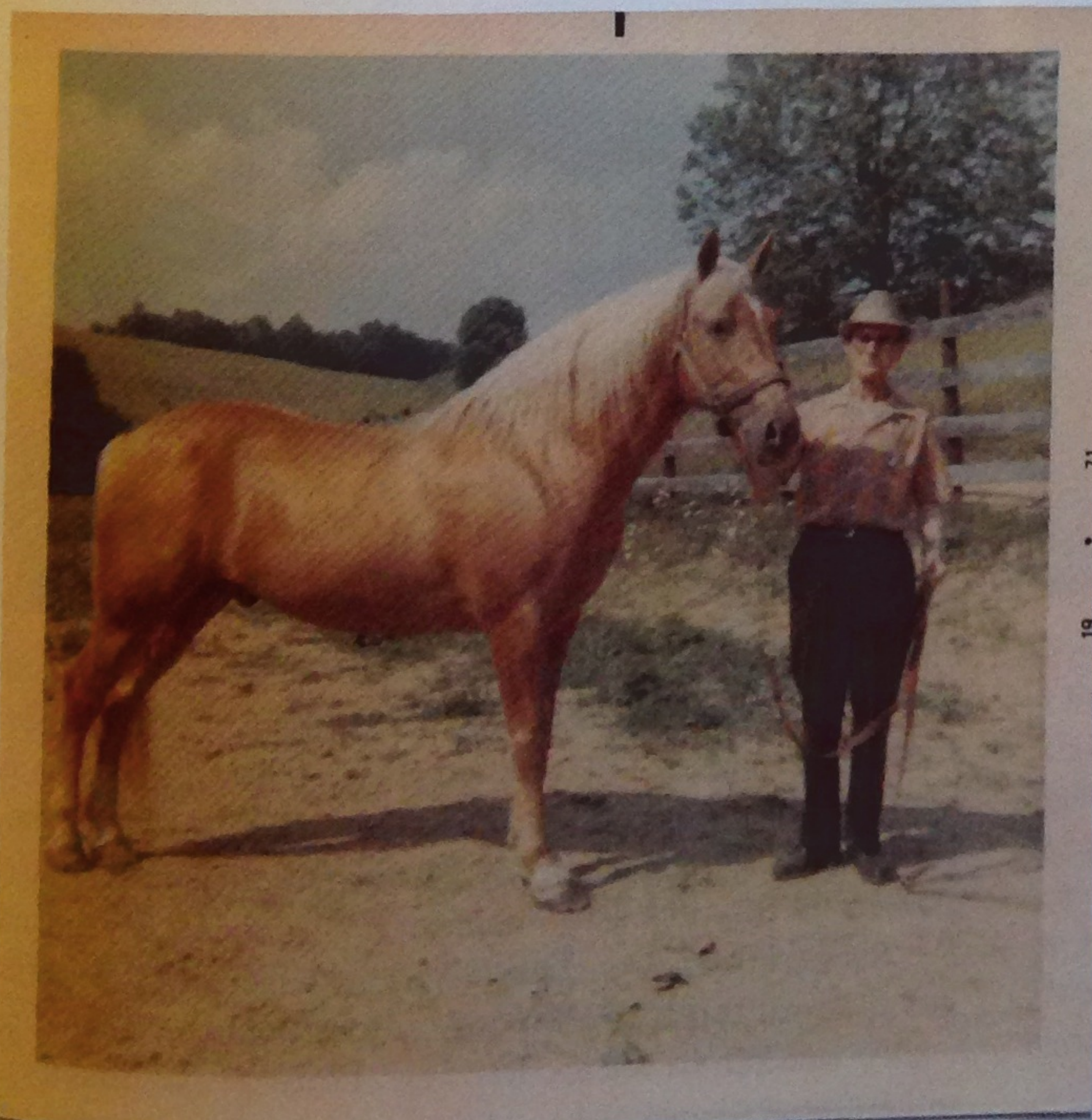
Ronnie didn't register any horses with the MPHA at first, but after friends Paul Stamper and the Prewitt brothers started registering, so did Ronnie.

Says Ronnie, "I don't think we ever got the advertising out like we should have. Back when I served on the board we didn't have the funds to do it with, but we kept our own thing and had the first blood typing and all that and a lot of people didn't know what it was all about."

A lot of people still don't know what it is all about. How many people do you think know that Roy Rogers' horse, TRIGGER, was a Mountain Pleasure Horse?

The Mountain Pleasure horse is still a well-kept secret, in spite of being one of the first gaited horses developed in America. The Mountain Pleasure Horse has been carefully bred for over 160 traceable years along the original Kentucky Mountain bloodlines. Some of the early horses contributed to several other gaited breeds, such as the Rocky Mountain Horse, American Saddlebred Horse and the Tennessee Walking Horse.

The lives of many people from eastern Kentucky seem to be very intertwined, with their memories overlapping and some of the same horses going into and out of their lives. All brought together from a love of a very special horse, the Mountain Pleasure Horse.



LITTLE'S SILVER and R.T. Little