

The recipient of many industry awards, Mr. Aikman is pictured here with his son, James W. Aikman when the ASHA honored the senior Aikman with the 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award.

No matter what Jim Aikman chose to devote his life to, he was a huge success. His charisma, his voice, his belief in himself and his belief in the product he was selling at the time made him a legend in the business and American Saddlebred worlds that will never be replicated. Thank goodness it was the American Saddlebred that in the end won out over the G.V. Aikman Company, a multi-million dollar food service equipment company.

We lost our great friend and leader on June 29, 2020, surrounded by family and friends at his side. Mr. Aikman was 91.

“His visions were big,” said longtime friend Dawn Kendrick who worked with Aikman on many projects over the years, including several of his world’s champion weanlings and yearlings. “He was passionate, forward thinking, never

looked back. He would say to me, ‘What are we going to do next?’ Then he would say, ‘You’re going to tell me I’m crazy, then we’re going to figure out how to do it.’ He would wear you down and you would eventually say ‘yes.’

“Jim was a successful businessman. He was always the person who was going to do something different. He had great belief in himself and was obsessed in the best way just like when he moved the American Saddlebred Horse Association to the Kentucky Horse Park.”

“He always looked for a better way,” echoed another longtime friend and fellow Hoosier, Bob Ruxer.

He was an innovator, psychologist, and team player who believed in people and himself.”

Born January 23, 1929, the only son of George Vincent Aikman and Marcella Lucille Smith Aikman, he moved with the family from

Washington, Indiana, to Indianapolis during the Great Depression. His maternal grandparents lived there and ran a livery stable. The relationship he built with his grandfather led to a love of horses and the Indianapolis area, both of which greatly benefitted due to his lifelong commitment to them.

His grandfather got “Little Jimmy” riding lessons at the 300-stall Bonham Stables and by the time he was in the third grade he had his first horse, an unregistered gelding that did five gaits, setting off a fascination with the American Saddlebred.

As the Aikman family business was thriving they bought a 71-acre farm in 1940 with a falling down house and barn and named it Hide-A-Way Farms as it was way out in the country. The late Dorothy Thomas wasn’t too far down the road and she was instrumental in the equine



In 1942, “Little Jimmy” showed his first performance horse and later that year won his first Futurity class.



Good friend Bob Mannix asked Aikman to take Janet Sage to Madison Square Garden for the 1949 NHS Good Hands Finals. He coached her from the sidelines to win the Finals and they were later pictured celebrating at the Waldorf Astoria.



Hide-A-Way Farms was a busy place over the years. In this picture, Aikman (far right) welcomed Jean McLean Davis, Ray Stump and Joan Robinson (Hill).

education of Little Jimmy, teaching him to ride and post and later on, inseminate mares. Thomas was well known for her success with the stallion Indiana Ace, eventually selling him to George Gwinn.

Aikman won his first futurity class in 1942 with a colt his parents had purchased named Mr. Christopher. “He had a head as big as that barrel, and three or four white legs,” recalled Aikman in a 2004 Horse World interview. “I showed him and won the Indiana Futurity when it was held in an open field somewhere north of Indy. He became our head stallion.”

In 1945, Aikman’s father purchased the last daughter of Society Rex and she became the foundation mare for Hide-A-Way Farms, producing Hide-A-Way’s Laura Belle and Just Plain Jane, with mother and daughters becoming Broodmare Hall of Fame matrons. The younger Aikman made his first trip to the Kentucky State Fair Horse Show in 1948 and won his first “world’s championship” although it wasn’t called the World’s Championship Horse Show at the time. He had sold his filly to Garland Bradshaw and left the big leagues wondering, ‘Who was that kid?’

That kid had to return to high school and graduate. Then, he and close friend Oz Mutz were off to Indiana University where Aikman wanted to study for a career in veterinary medicine. In his sophomore year he was informed that all the slots in the Veterinary Medicine School were filled. With that he dropped out and returned to the horse business, opening his own training

stable on the north side of Indianapolis. His first customer turned out to be his first wife. At night he would go to the family farm where he cleaned stalls and worked with the family horses. It was during that time that the first noted stallion came to stand at Hide-A-Way Farms, Floyd Schofner’s Cameo Kirby.

The Korean War caused another pause in the equine pursuits of the eager young man. It was however, during this time that he received one of his most cherished honors, the American Spirit Medal of Honor. His Air Force travels sent him to California where he also found horses. A transfer to Louisiana found him later at Texas horse shows where he eventually was introduced to Joan Robinson [Hill]. They became friends and dated until, as the story goes, her father, Ash Robinson, told the young Aikman to “never come back to Texas.” That relationship would rekindle at another time.

Following his service to his country, Aikman returned to the family business, while continuing to enjoy horses on the side. The famed stallion Evening Cloud was the next to stand at Hide-A-Way Farms. During this time Aikman also saw a beautiful colt out of CH Dixiana’s Spring Cheer (BHF) at Joan Light’s Callner’s Farm. The beauty of this colt spurred him to make a deal for half interest in Spring Cheer and when she was bred to world’s grand champion CH Valley View Supreme, she produced a colt named Hide-A-Way’s Firefly Supreme who would become an iconic sire for the farm.

From 1967 through ’71, Firefly Supreme was

the number one ranked Futurity Sire. His dam, CH Dixiana’s Spring Cheer (BHF) had later also been bred to Genius Bourbon King, producing a filly named Hide-A-Way’s Curtain Call. When she was later bred to Denmark’s Bourbon Genius, Hide-A-Way’s Wild Country was produced and he stepped into the role of head sire following the death of Firefly Supreme.

Wild Country produced several top Futurity and performance stars, including world’s champions of champions Hide-A-Way’s Ruff Country, CH Wild Temper, and Tickle, Tunes, And Typhoons, among others.

A tragic barn fire ended the life of Wild Country. However, also among his success stories was a daughter named Memorable Molly. When bred to Blackberry Winter because of the Stonewall King influence, she produced the multi-titled, multi-division world’s champion of champions, CH Blackberry Delight.

This long and successful era as a horseman and breeder earned Aikman quite a reputation. He was a showman supreme with his Futurity entries clearly separating themselves from the rest. Twenty-some world’s champions were crowned under his tutelage, including the likes of Hide-A-Way’s Ruff Country, CH Watch Me Dance, The Country Executive, Haute Cappuccino, and Hide-A-Way’s Starting Over.

“His love for Futurity colts and technique of showing, along with his willingness to share his knowledge can be seen in everybody showing colts today,” said Smith Lilly. “He could do more on a loose rein than anyone I’ve ever seen. They



Showing world's champion weanlings and yearlings was a way of life for Aikman. In 1980, he presented Country Executive to an undefeated season, including Louisville.



Aikman was extremely proud of Hide-A-Way's Firefly Supreme, a stallion he raised and trained and would go on to be the number one sire of Futurity Champions for several years.

looked like they were turned loose in a field, never constrained, but I can't get mine to do that. He would share how he did it, but I can't do it like he did."

"We met in the '60s when we were showing colts at Ruxer Farm," said Bob Ruxer. "He could dominate whenever he wanted to. He knew what it took. Uncle Alvin [Ruxer] told us, 'If you can't beat him, for Pete's sake learn what he does.' He could entertain the crowd with an in hand colt like no one else and that's what it was about, entertaining. He loved to win, but he wanted to see the breed win as well."

"He thought like a horse," added Bret Day who won the first ever All-American Cup with Momette. "When he showed a colt he never prohibited it. He took his time to figure out how the colt could feel like it was turned loose."

Dawn Kendrick was one of the inner circle who was privileged to see his magic up close and personal.

"I helped him with a lot of the colts, not that he needed my help," said Kendrick. "His process was to spend five to 10 minutes at a time, four or five times a day. He said they only had so much attention span at that age and didn't want to tire them or bore them. Jim had the dedication to go back in those stalls several times a day. He was very quiet and patient. He was as patient with colts as he was impatient with people."

Breeder, businessman, horseman, Aikman was also the ultimate statesman for the American Saddlebred. For more than 40 years he worked to support and promote the Indiana Futurity as well as the local 4-H breeding

program, which produced the likes of Duke Of Daylight. He served on the ASHA board an amazing 23 years and was President from 1980 through '83. He was instrumental in bringing Supreme Sultan's burial to the Kentucky Horse Park.

"His influence and impact on the American Saddlebred is so multi-faceted," said Smith Lilly. "You won't find anyone who didn't like Mr. Aikman. He always had a positive message, never bringing you down."

"He was such a promoter, so enthusiastic," added Kim Skipton. "One of my first horses was by Firefly Supreme and since we didn't have texts and emails back then he would write me letters saying he was keeping up with me and that he had the dam of my horse and some siblings available. While we built a true friendship, he was always promoting, always trying to sell me a horse."

"Later when he would come to the Museum to film his video series is when he encouraged me to stay with the history of the breed. He was just a great historian himself and he inspired me to continue on that path."

"There are so many things Mr. Aikman did for our breed. He changed the Association from a stock corporation to an open membership organization and was instrumental in moving both the association and the American Saddlebred Museum to the Kentucky Horse Park. He believed they should both stay together. He started the computerization of the registry and he was a big advocate of the Charter Clubs. He believed that supporters on the local level

could get a lot more done than an association."

At a time when most people who have given as much as Mr. Aikman did would have "retired," he rolled up his sleeves and gave the American Saddlebred industry perhaps his greatest gift, the All American Cup. His mission was to put life back into the American Saddlebred breeding industry. Working many hours a day and spending a lot of his own money, he was relentless in selling this concept to breeders and trainers.



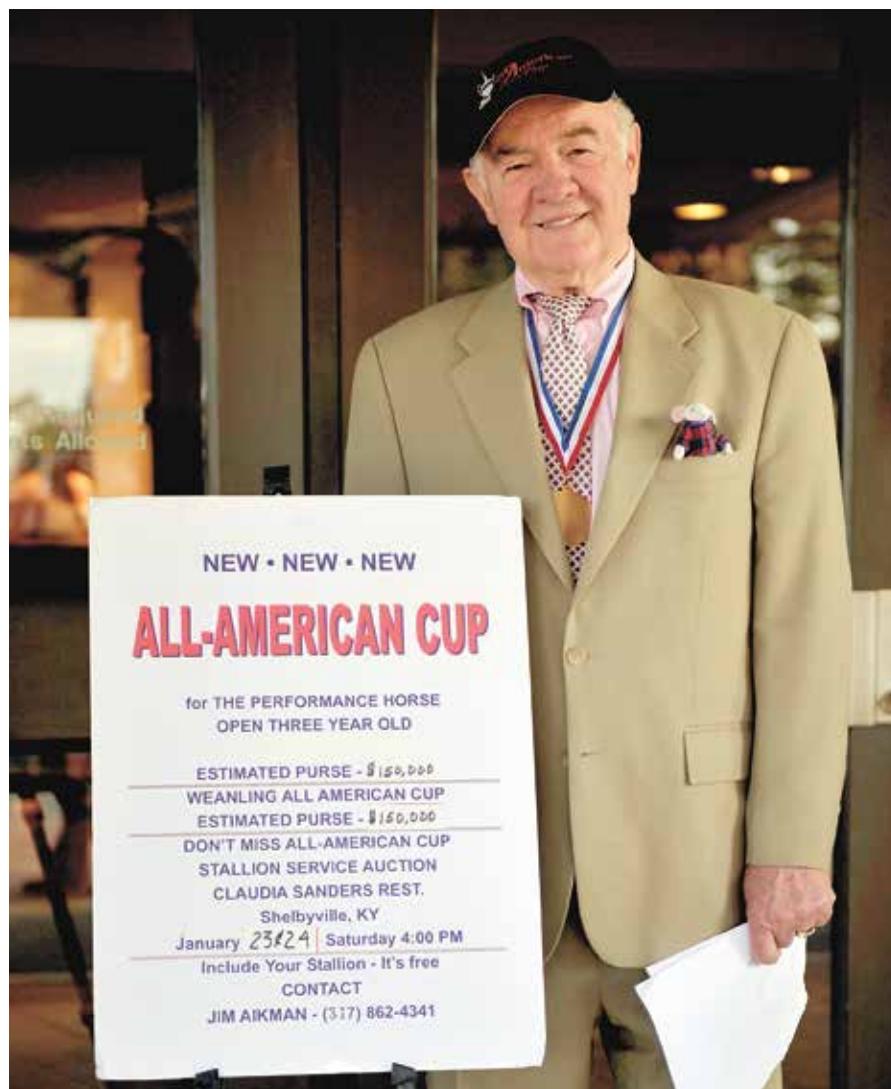
Hide-A-Way's Wild Country was the 1973 ASHA National Three-Year-Old Fine Harness Futurity World's Champion and then went on to a successful career as a sire before he perished in a barn fire.



Jim Aikman the statesman was responsible for so many positive changes in the American Saddlebred world, including breaking ground at the Kentucky Horse Park for the new site of the American Saddlebred Museum. He was joined that day by Judy Werner, Keith Bartz, Roz Harris, and Dr. Simon Fredricks.



CH Blackberry Delight won the Indiana Futurity as a weanling, defeating the filly that had won at Louisville just a few weeks earlier. Aikman had them both.



The greatest promoter ever, Mr. Aikman lived and breathed the All American Cup as it became a mainstay of the industry.

In 1996, the inaugural All American Yearling Breeders Stake awarded \$86,000 in prize money to the best of 67 yearlings showing at the All-American Horse Classic. This idea then morphed into All American Cup, which presented its first big class for weanlings in 2003 with fees from an annual stallion service auction funding the program.

“Initially we had no thoughts of classes for three-year-olds,” said Aikman in an earlier Horse World interview. “The next year, Carl Fischer wondered what we were going to do for the performance horse. I didn’t think there would be enough money raised to have a performance division, but Fischer suggested we just split it. It turns out there was. Funds for the three-year-old class go into the bank, drawing interest from the day of the auction until the class is held.”

“I can honestly say I was in the right place at the right time to win the first weanling class with Mosette,” said Bret Day. “She won over \$70,000 first place money and through that and other Futurity and Sweepstakes prizes became one of the all-time winners of prize money in this industry.

“Mr. Aikman came from the business world and he knew the horse business wasn’t like the

real world. He was relentless in promoting and moving this program forward. He knew the only way to do it was to work your ass off at it. I hope the younger trainers in our industry today will embrace this program and carry it into the future. I’m going to miss his smiling face and wisdom. He wouldn’t push it on you, but if you asked he loved to share.”

Share he did and we (the American Saddlebred community) were the recipients of his enormous heart. One of his few regrets was not spending enough time with his children, son James W. Aikman, a composer of classical and popular music, and a daughter, Jennifer Thomas-Adams who was a Rhodes Scholar candidate. He did his darndest to make up for lost time in their adult lives.

How he juggled it all is still a mystery. He made each of us feel important and urged us to be a part of the solution. One thing in life he detested was the phrase, “we ought-ta.” He didn’t care for suggestions, he wanted to be associated with doers and doing was something he did for the American Saddlebred his entire life.

“The Saddlebred world will never have another individual that was a bigger breeder, exhibitor, supporter, and INNOVATOR, than

Jim,” said Steve Kildow, another great friend from the Indiana show scene. “His support of the All-American Horse Classic was outstanding. He will be missed by all of us that enjoy the Saddlebred.”

John Hale is another person who played a great role in Mr. Aikman’s life, becoming like a step son to him. He was a constant companion and took great care of him in his later years.

“I’ve been around him since I was six-years-old,” said Hale. “He was a workaholic, so dedicated.

“If there was someone coming to the farm to look at a foal or a mare and he was tied up with business I would go out and meet the people. I’ll never forget his standard line was, ‘This is one of the best we’ve ever had on the farm. He never misled and said it was ‘the best,’ it was always ‘one of the best.’ The fact was, HE was the best!

“We always said he would be selling until he took his last breath.”