

Leon Roberts

By Ann Bullard

The Saddle Horse world lost a good friend when Arthur "Leon" Roberts passed away on Saturday, October 24, 2015. For more than 60 years, he and his wife Chris Rousseau Roberts owned and operated Leon Roberts Stables in Covington and, earlier, in St. Rose, LA. He had retired from active competition in 2009, after showing his My King Heir at Baton Rouge.

Leon and Chris were married for 65 years. Even before that time, both were active with and influential in the Saddle Horse business. Today, their grandson, Kendall Blue and long-time trainer friend, Tommy Benton, operate as Fleur De Lis Farm in a renovated facility on the site of Roberts Stable.

Leon was a horseman, born and bred. The son of the late Ara Elizabeth Seaton and the late Wallis Roberts and grandson of the late George Roberts was born in Clinton, MO. For 20 years, his Missouri grandfather stood Arletha's Easter Cloud. His father, Wallis, and brother, the late George Roberts, settled in Dallas and Houston, Texas, respectively, where they had successful Saddle Horse businesses. Father and sons often competed against one another on the Southwest Circuit.

Near the beginning of World War II, Leon left the Missouri farm and moved to New Orleans, where he served in the Mounted Coast Guard. After completing his



My King Heir was the last horse Leon showed. The gelding remains a popular mount for many of the Fleur de Lis riders.

service, he worked for the Frank J. Matthew family of Stonewall Farm just outside New Orleans. Later, he and Chris opened Leon Roberts Stable just north of Kenner, LA. It would remain their headquarters until they moved 'north of the lake' to Covington, LA.

If Louisiana weren't already on the Saddle Horse 'national map,' Leon and Chris helped put her there. Early on, Leon and the late Dr. Charles L. Brown's Rockland Beau's performances against the great Lady Carrigan and the late Frank Bradshaw remained topics of discussion. The bay horse could rack and trot with the best. When the parade division was at its height, Leon and Chris moved Strutaway into that division. The two won more than 100 championships during their career.

But those only were a few of their career highlights in the professional ranks. Perhaps their greatest contributions came through the young riders they taught and encouraged. He and Chris combined their talents to teach such young riders as the late Nick McGowin with CH Monte Stonewall and Peggy Higgins aboard CH Stonewall's Sound Of Music. Few who stood on the rail in the early 1960s can forget the picture of the chestnut mare with Leon or Peggy in the irons as they racked and trotted to many championships.

If it whinnied, Leon could work it – and work it well. Highland Shamrock, Miss Nan King, Palmetto Princess, Shoe Shine Girl, Anne Howe, Tasty Tart, It's My Prerogative, Madame Cheval, Hytone King, Gallant Barrymore, Stonewall Extra Special ... the list goes on. Five-Gaited, Three-Gaited, Pleasure, Equitation, Roadster or Hackney Pony, it made no difference. Leon's teams always were forces to be reckoned with. For Leon, it was more than a profession, it was a 24-hour-a-day passion.

Whether it was a one-night show in small towns such as Thibodeaux or Folsom, LA, or major shows on the Southwest Circuit, Baton Rouge and Montgomery and on to Kentucky, Leon, Chris and their clients not only were there but contending for top prizes. If they weren't showing, they were cheering on friends, or showing off their dancing skills at the many outstanding parties that were part of any area show. When the industry changed and New Orleans and Baton Rouge no longer were major events on the show circuit, they threw their time and energies into helping keep the sport they loved alive in the Southwest.

As long as he was physically able, Leon went to the barn and watched 'his horses.' He never lost his love for the sport or the American Saddlebred. His two all-time favorites: Stonewall's Sound of Music, who won three Reserve World's Championships and countless titles throughout the country with Peggy Higgins, and Gayle Jones' Elegant Assets. At the time of his death, Leon owned Elegant Assets' son, My King Heir, who has been shown successfully by Leon, his daughter, Connie, and numerous clients.

He is survived by his wife, Chris, daughter, Connie Blue, sister, Bonnie Louise Perry, grandson, Kendall Blue, granddaughter, Addie Koch Marriott and great grandchildren Faith Jolie and Eli Marriott. He was preceded in death by his daughter, Cynthia Roberts Koch, his parents and brother, George.

Leon excelled as a horse trainer. He also excelled as a human being, one rarely too busy to offer advice, encouragement or a smile to those stopping to chat or seeking his counsel. He will be missed.

Family and friends gathered for a memorial service on November 3. Memorial gifts may be made to the UPHA (United Professional Horsemen's Association) Dewey Henderson Benevolent Fund, 4059 Iron Works Parkway, Ste. 2, Lexington, KY 40511 (www.uphaonline.com).



Leon and Chris enlivened every show they attended. Not only were their horses and riders very competitive, they were a great addition to the many horse show parties. They are pictured at the 1959 Nacogdoches, TX, show. Eight-year-old Connie Roberts (Blue inset) already was winning equitation classes.



The late Nick McGowin got his start with Roberts Stables. Nick and CH Monte Stonewall were dominate in Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited competition in the early 1960s. As an adult, Nick had a successful Saddlebred training operation in Alabama and Tennessee.



Rockland Beau and Leon challenged the best of the best five-gaited horses in the 1950s.