



Bill Wise and CH Surefire were Five-Gaited World's Grand Champions for two consecutive years.

BILL WISE

Turns 90

ASHA Names The Sweepstakes Program After Him

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

William D. “Bill” Wise, or Daddy Bill as most of us close to him call him, has been a horseman’s horseman since he was a child. He carried that talent and persona through decades as a top professional and even into his retirement years he finds ways to tinker with a colt or two, in addition to helping both individuals and associations with the wisdom that comes with a lifetime spent in the business.

To recognize Daddy Bill’s 90th birthday, the board of the American Saddlebred Horse and Breeders Association, along with the Registry Council and Sweepstakes Committee, unanimously voted to rename the Sweepstakes program the Bill Wise American Saddlebred Sweepstakes program in honor of the man who created the program more than 40 years ago which has since paid out more than \$3 million.

“At the time we weren’t breeding as many horses and the Futurity program was costly with a lot of different fees so I wanted to develop a program that would financially reward the breeding and developing of young horses,” said Wise. “I talked to June Cronan and he said, ‘Good luck, let me know how I can help you.’

“We got the Sweepstakes launched and within a year or two we were registering a couple thousand more foals a year. People were really involved and I’m happy to have seen it continue to expand to the two and four-year-olds. Moving the four-year-olds to Louisville was the best move as everyone is there.”

Giving back is something Daddy Bill has done in a number of ways. Besides authoring the Sweepstakes Program, he mentored four aspiring horsemen who went on to be Presidents of associations. Dave Patton (UPHA), Randy Harper (UPHA), Jim Harrell (UPHA), and Bob Funkhouser (ASHA) all apprenticed under the 2003 UPHA Tom Moore Hall of Fame inductee and later went on to hold those offices. Other horsemen who learned some of their lessons from the World’s Championship Horse Show Hall of Fame inductee include the late Randy Tabor, Ed Millet, and Tommy Biederman.

Wise started making a name for himself before he was even a teenager, taking two ponies and a harness mare to Lexington Junior League for Joe Meighan of Knoxville. He won the Five-Gaited Pony Championship and qualifier with Happy Landing, the Three-Gaited Pony Reserve Championship with Heart Of Denmark, and directed Meighan’s daughter to second and third place finishes with Shamrock’s Banshee in the amateur harness division. At the age of 14, Wise won his first Five-Gaited Championship aboard a black mare at Knoxville. Wise spent many years teaching other young horsemen as he appreciated the lessons he received from the likes of Goode Watkins, Maddox Whitley, Christian Barham, and his idol, the legendary Lee Roby.

Daddy Bill will forever be known as the man who pulled it all together for CH Surefire to win the World’s Grand Champion Five-Gaited titles in 1973 and ’74, as well as the reserve world’s grand championship in ’75. Additionally, he had a long list of stars throughout his career, including Private Stock, Sea Angel, Earth, Angel, Charlotte Stonewall, Calcutta, Mr. Society, Wild Irish, The Rebel, Patent Leather Kid, Enchantment, You Are Love, and Supreme Fortune.

When he purchase the famed Gwinn Island Stock Farm, Danville, Kentucky, in 1972, he hung a sign announcing the opening of Valhalla Farm. The likes of Starheart’s Sensation, King’s Starheart, Count To Ten, Lucky Commander, Gay Kilarney, Wild Rose, Olympic Flame, Antico, Easy Pickins, Flight Time Julia, Trouble Bubble, Ace’s Captain Bernard, Valhalla’s Black Angel, Spirit Of Valhalla, Valhallalujah, and Hollywood Insider all made the Valhalla show string a force, no matter where they went.

He developed and showed The Benefactor to a three-year-old fine harness world’s championship and that colt went to the west coast where he was a sensation for Barbara Beamer for years. He took The Benefactor’s full sister, Finisterre’s Gift Of Love, who was a very average gaited mare at the time and trimmed her, sold her, and she went on to (4) World’s Grand Champion Three-Gaited titles with Don Harris.

Remember world’s champion of champions CH My Wonder with Nancy-Leigh Fisher and later granddaughter My My Singh? Yes, he was selected by Daddy Bill from 3-T Farm as a prospect and he too went on to title after title.

Today, Daddy Bill still bales hay at his Valhalla Farm and with his wife Chris, enjoys their daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren as well as gardening around the home they’ve known for nearly 50 years.

The legendary training barn may not hold the high dollar show stars and prospects it once did and the fields may not be filled with mares in foal to Yankee Stranger, Colonial Conquest, and Captain McDuffy, but they still hold the memories and legacy of a very valuable chapter in American Saddlebred history.

Happy 90th Birthday Daddy Bill!