

One Of The Brightest Stars Liberation Starbrite

by Bob Funkhouser



This was the last picture taken of the great Liberation Starbrite last year at the age of 27.

"If I was told I could only have one horse, she would be that one," stated Rick Lane when looking back on the life of the great Liberation Starbrite, whom the Morgan breed lost on April 28. Old age finally caught up with the popular world champion who was last owned by Robin Rednor Veghte and managed by Lane. The daughter of Wham Bam Command and Austin Flying Cloud had a profound impact on every person who was ever close to her.

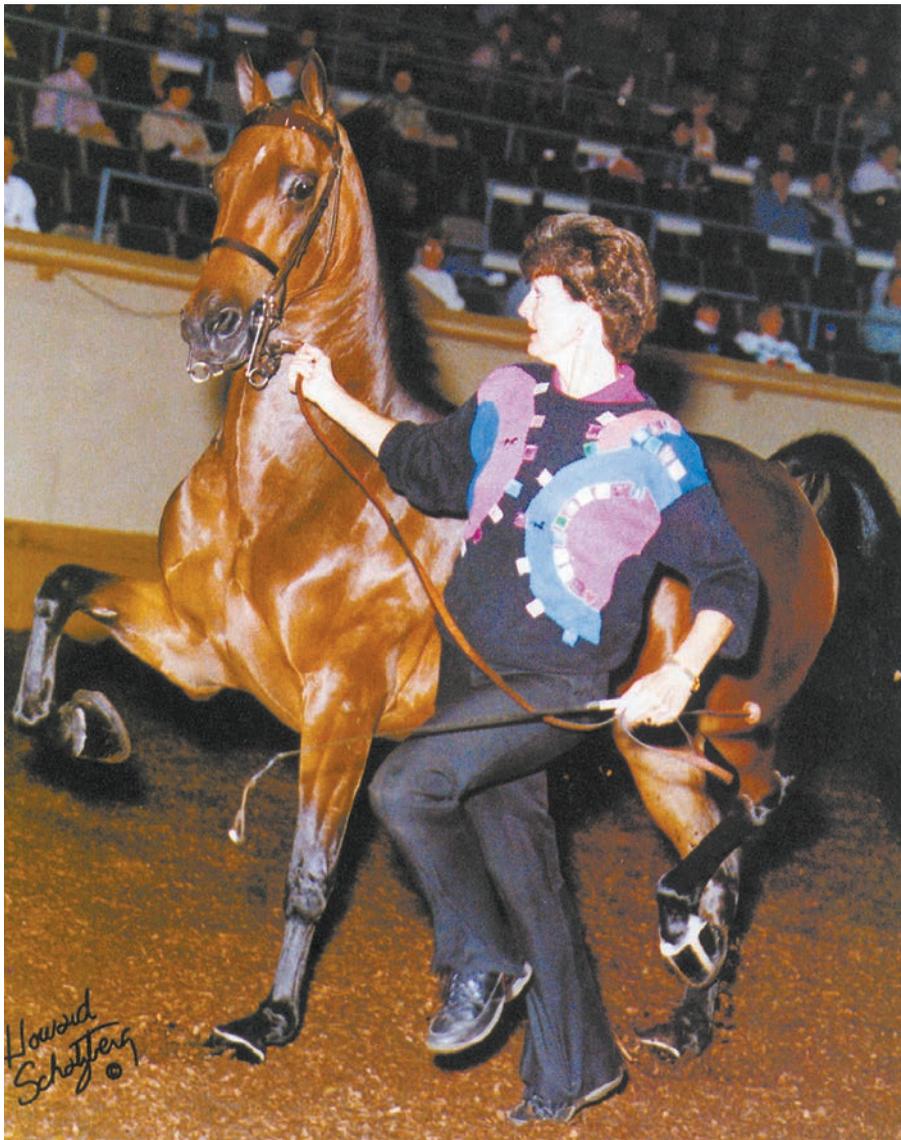
Starbrite was bred by Karen and Cornelius Toner, however, Austin Flying Cloud, a Mad River Sailor daughter, was purchased by Kelli Ross before she foaled the beautiful bay filly who would be named Liberation Starbrite, the first foal to carry the Liberation prefix into the ring for Ross. Starbrite was bred to be a good one as her dam was a park saddle mare shown successfully by Bill Darnley throughout New England in the late '70s and early '80s. Starbrite's sire was the renowned Wham Bam Command who also produced stars like World Champion Stallion Century Free Spirit and World Champion Park Saddle/World Champion Stallion Tug Hill Whamunition.

She carried the traits of royalty early on and her larger than life persona stayed with her until the very end. It was her love of life and showing that stood out with everyone who had her.

"She had so much zest for life, so full of herself. When she was a yearling I would be mowing in the late afternoons on 100 degree days and she would be flagging herself and trotting across the pasture," remembered her longtime trainer Joan Lurie. "The rest of the yearlings were hanging their heads and she was putting on a show. She spent her career blowing her nose and flagging herself.

"I have been blessed to have had some pretty special horses in my life – Morgans and Saddlebreds – but she is by far my all-time favorite. I loved that mare. Every day of her life she pleased me.

"There are two particular times that I remember that just characterize her attitude. The first time I ever rode her off the farm we took her to



Joan Lurie first presented Liberation Starbrite to win the World Champion Mare and World Champion Junior Mare titles as a two-year-old.



As a three-year-old Star would win two park saddle world titles with Joan Lurie. They would win the four-year-old world championship the next year.

Indiana Morgan to work. I got on her and was quietly walking her to the ring and just wanted to go easy. When I get there Bruce Ekstrom and Paul Stephan were working something and they shook a bag whip. This mare stuck her neck up in the air, blew her nose and put her tail up over her back. The braid of her tail hit the back of my head. She paraded around that ring and kept her tail curled over her back the whole time.

"The other time that stands out to me was when I was showing her at New England and it was pouring so we had to go in that God-awful dark dungeon where there is nothing to look at or entertain one. We go in and she did her gaits the first way of the ring and we were okay but when we reversed I stopped her by the end door and she looked out and saw something, blew her nose and strutted the entire second way of the ring in that dark place. No horse lights up there."

Lurie and "Star" were indeed a most memorable team. In 1990, they made their first trip to the coliseum in Oklahoma City and returned to Kentucky with titles that included World Champion Mare, World Champion Junior Mare, World Champion Futurity Two-Year-Old Mare and Grand National Champion Two-Year-Old Mare.

The next year she wore leather and collected two more world titles: World Champion Futurity Three-Year-Old Park Saddle and World Champion Three-Year-Old Park Saddle. The grand mare only got stronger, adding the 1992 World Champion Four-Year-Old Park Saddle and Grand National Champion Four-Year-Old Park Saddle Mare and Gelding honors to her untainted record.

In the fall of 1993, Star would have a new owner, Tony Lee of Shingle Branch Farm. They too developed a special bond and finished their first season as Amateur Park Harness Reserve World Champions behind HVK Daring Genius. The next year she was not right the week of Oklahoma and the decision was made not to show her. Reunited with Joan Lurie, Lee and Star would return in '96 with gusto and were a part of two remarkable classes. In the amateur mare & gelding qualifier, Lee and Star finished reserve to the legendary MKS Destiny's Echo, driven by Lisa Howa.

In the championship round, however, it was a different story. They brought the perfect combination of show horse and ringmanship to the coliseum that night and wore the roses of World Champion Amateur Park Harness defeating the likes of Cedar Creek Pazazz, Arboria Top Gun, Plantation Show Biz, Liberation Instant Replay and Salem Command, among others. That was also one of Lurie's favorite memories of the mare.

"I had some nice wins with her but the greatest joy she ever brought me was watching that mare and Tony [Lee] come back and put on a clinic in that championship. No disrespect, but they made the others look like just horses. She fired and Tony drove her so perfectly."

Lee and Star had three memorable seasons together, resulting in an Amateur Park Harness World Championship and reserve world championship in the two times they showed at Oklahoma.

"Some of us are lucky enough to come across that once-in-a-lifetime horse. I have been very fortunate to have come across more than one, but none that has made an impact on my love of the Morgan horse like Liberation

Starbrite," said Lee. "Her effortless talent and charisma are something I will always remember. It was almost as if you were gliding across the clouds to drive her.

"And, to love her was easy as she always knew she was special and demanded the love and attention she knew she deserved. Yes, she was a spoiled diva from the minute I owned her. Selling her was the hardest thing I ever did in the horse business but as luck would have it, I was double blessed with the gift of Astronomicallee allowing me to continue to carry on the remarkable stamp this one-in-a-lifetime mare has given our breed. I can see her now, gliding across the clouds with that effortless and elegant trot and her tail flowing in the wind. Thank you Star for giving us all something special."

Lee wanted Liberation Starbrite as a show horse and a broodmare but had not been successful with embryos by the time he had a serious inquiry from a prospective buyer.

"I made that a condition," explained Lee. "I would only sell her if I got a foal. I liked French (Futurity French Command) and that was easy for them to do so I agreed."

Them were Rick Lane and Martha Morse. Morse's grand mare JW Charity had died from colic and she had instructed Lane to buy the best mare in the country.

"I called Joan [Lurie] in April of '97 and much to my surprise they called me back with a price," said Lane. "After I choked a little I called Marty and told her. She asked me what I thought and we bought her. A week later Marty passed away."

Morse had left her horses to Lane and he kept Star in training with Lurie who took her to Oklahoma in 1997 and won the Ladies Park

Harness World Championship for Star's new owner.

"I loved this mare so much," said Lane. "If you were around her you knew you were in the presence of greatness! When we started breeding her if the foal had bad qualities I said that was from the sire. All the good qualities came from Star. I fell in love with her when Joan [Lurie] led her into the ring at Oklahoma in her first class as a two-year-old. She came to the ring as a superstar. I coveted her since that moment."

Liberation Starbrite will not only be remembered as a show horse supreme, she has also left us with some remarkable get. She produced several nice show horses like Supernova, MEM Taser, Evil Ways, MEM Bacardi and MEM Have You Ever, but it was her three stallion sons that really represented the queen and have passed her heritage on to countless show ring stars.

First there was Liberation First Star (by Century Free Spirit). He was the Four-Year-Old Park Saddle World Champion with Joan Lurie and the 1999 Park Saddle World Champion with Scott Thacker. As a sire he gave us world champions Treble's First Take, As Predicted GCH, BKC Valiant Star, Star Of Midnight, MEM Ultimate Star, KJM Five Star, AWS Fruition, MCS Bandini, Graycliff Miss Liberty GCH, Graycliff Jack Star GCH, Harlan's Star Material GCH, Narragansett Bay GCH, Stardavari and SPR Music By Starlight, among others.

Previously mentioned Astronomicallee (by Futurity French Command) has been a prolific producer for Tony Lee. He has sired the likes of world titleholders Cedar Creek Flambeau GCH, Ledyard's Lucky Lucas GCH, Love Her Madly, Cingate Starry Night, Merriehill Roxie Hart CH, Centaurus Rising, Who Do You Love, Cingate

Lucky Star and RWJ Ancora, among others. One of Astronomicallee's top sons, Get Busy, is the sire of the 2015 sensation Get Smart who won the Ladies Park Saddle World Championship as a three-year-old. She is out of a Liberation First Star daughter, which puts Liberation Starbrite on both sides of her pedigree. As Rick Lane noted, "that is why Get Smart is so awesome."

Also part of the trio of outstanding sires out of Liberation Starbrite is Liberation First Star's full brother, Aljaks Double Whammy. He is most noted for being the sire of WSG Wham-O, Aljaks Miss Wham I Am, Aljaks Miss Ladeeda, Morgan Valley Apollo GCH, CBMF Double Down and Atwood Cincinnatus.

There was one final chapter to the Star story. In 2000, Lane sold her to Robin Rednor Veghte and Robert Veghte for Robin to show. The great mare would make one more Oklahoma appearance and she made it a good one, winning the World Champion Ladies Park Harness honors with Veghte, defeating the likes of Arboria's Victor's Pride, Cabot French Kiss, Med-E-Oka French Riviera and RWF Victorious, among others.

"That was supposed to have been Marty [Morse]," reflected Lane. "I always thought Star was the ultimate ladies horse and I wanted to see her do that. That's why I sold her to Robin."

"Winning that class was the most exciting day of my life," exclaimed Robin Rednor Veghte. "We loved her so much. Robert and I had had Mendonhall for a while but I really didn't have a lot that I could show. When we moved to Rick [Lane] he said, I'm going to take some of these horses off your hands and sell you Starbrite. I was looking for a horse that would accept me as the novice that I am. He didn't really need to sell her



Jeannie and Jeanne Lee, and Joan Lurie gazed at the beautiful Liberation First Star after her world champion performance with Tony Lee. The mare captured the hearts of both Lurie and the Lee family.



Tony Lee and Liberation Starbrite wore the roses as the World Champion Amateur Park Harness team in 1996.



Liberation Starbrite was the dam of several top horses, including three outstanding stallion sons: (l – r) Liberation First, Aljaks Double Whammy and Astronomicallee.

but he did. That was the biggest gift of my life, Rick selling her to me.

“Rick is my best friend in the world and he had so much patience with me. We practiced and practiced. She was tolerant to a point and then it was like, ‘would you get with it?’ After the first class at Oklahoma they told me I needed to cluck more and go a little faster. In the line up of the championship Rick isn’t talking to me and I’m thinking I’ve really screwed up. Then the announcer says, ‘the stars are shining brightly, the winner is Liberation Starbrite.’ I stood up in the buggy and screamed. Rick looked at me and said, ‘sit down and drive.’ I couldn’t believe it and tried to soak it all in. In the winner’s circle he told me to concentrate and cluck like crazy.

“After we had won the harness class at Oklahoma I was riding her at home and I lost one stirrup and then the other. Just when I thought I was going to fall off she stopped in her tracks and turned her head to look at me.

“It was indeed an honor and privilege to own this horse. When I was around her I felt like I was in the presence of royalty. She was a far better horse than I will ever be a person. I was so in awe of her.”

From the yearling in the pasture flagging herself on 100 degree days to the aged mare taking care of her novice rider, Liberation Starbrite was an exceptional individual every step of the way. She never let down her trainers. She inspired her owners to love the Morgan Horse. Her progeny have excelled in the show ring and the breeding shed.

“She was a perfect horse who did things so special and that made her even more perfect.”

Those were the closing and fitting words of Joan Lurie.



Robin Rednor Veghte wrote the last chapter in the show ring career of Liberation Starbrite. They made the victory pass as the World Champion Ladies Park Harness team in 2000.