

75 YEARS — SOME MEMORIES OF THE

Tampa Horse Show

As a first time exhibitor in the late 1940s, and having served on the board and as chairman in the 1980s, Jean Johnson, has long been associated with the Tampa Charity Horse Show. She and her daughter Becky (Johnson) Baron are Tampa natives and familiar faces in and out of the ring. Each have attended and/or shown at the Tampa show nearly every year beginning from early childhood. Furthermore, each has competed there in nearly every Saddlebred division from 10 and under equitation to amateur five-gaited. For this mother and daughter, the show is very special, and reflecting on this year's 75th Anniversary, brings back many fond and everlasting memories. Thinking back, some of their favorite ones were when they started showing there together in the late 1970s.

An event rich in tradition, this prestigious show boasted an amazing atmosphere and drew world class competitors from across the country. It was also an exciting social event at the same time and the Tampa Yacht Club grounds made for a beautiful and unique



The grooms class following the Sunday brunch at the Tampa Yacht Club.

backdrop. For those who never attended back then, there was nothing quite like it. For those who did, they will undoubtedly have many a story to tell (some more colorful than others) about what some would call Tampa's glory days.



Jean Johnson and Galahad's Gold Mine at the Tampa Charity Horse Show.



Jimmy Robertson winning the road horse under saddle class (ca. 1979). Becky Johnson and Honey Craven presenting.



Mary Gaylord McClean receiving the first place ribbon in the roadster pony division (ca. 1987) at Tampa. (photos by H. Leon Sargent)



John Shea winning the harness pony championship in 1983. The Boots & Saddles Club is in the background.

Becky describes the exhilaration she felt watching these larger than life champions through the eyes of a child who had never experienced a big time horse show. To her, a horse crazy girl who loved to ride and study all things Saddlebred, the show was nothing short of pure magic.

Seeing the old photos from that era is so surreal. These huge, powerful, glorious creatures and their expert riders were celebrities to me, watching them fly down the straightaway, up close and in person was something I will never forget.

Nor will she forget the very fancy brown ribbon (yes, out of eight) that she was awarded there her first year, the brown ribbon

that was almost as big as she was, the brown ribbon she still has to this day

Jean also remembers the amazing performances and heated contests between what were some of the top dogs of the industry. Besides the horses themselves, the crowd at Tampa was both knowledgeable and vocal, adding to the energetic atmosphere.

She also recalls the wonderful parties put on by the show and by various stables during the week. The Friday night exhibitors party was always a fun, lavish affair and the (formal and informal) post performance barn soirees were down home and delightful. These folks knew how to celebrate and to throw a heck of a party!

One of their favorite things about the old show would definitely have to be the events on Sunday, the final day of the show. Prior to championship classes, the famous Sunday brunch was held at the Yacht Club and it was not to be missed. There was just something so pleasant about sitting down for a delicious breakfast to socialize with your friends and fellow competitors before hitting the show ring. The ladies not riding would dress up in their finest spring outfits, as if it were derby day truly lovely.

Following the brunch everyone strolled outside for the grooms class, a tradition started in the 1950s. Held right there on the front lawn of the Club, it was a sight to see. Horses and ponies stood gleaming in the mid-morning sun, poised on the manicured lawn surrounded by spring flowers. It was here that the hard working grooms proudly showcased and were rewarded for their outstanding efforts. Back at the show grounds (directly across the street), the event concluded with the final performances crowning the official grand champions.

Fast forward about 30 years, yes some things have changed, but one thing is for certain: the friendly, fun and relaxed atmosphere as well as that horse show magic continues to go strong here in Florida. Jean and Becky congratulate all who are associated with this wonderful show and are very excited about the anniversary celebration!

Under the direction of Pam Roush of Avalon Stables, Jean will continue showing her beloved Galahad's Gold Mine, only this year she will be driving her many times western pleasure champion. They have been together for 13 years now and are undeniably a favorite here in Florida and where ever they go. Becky, their biggest fan, will, as usual, be on the rail and perhaps next year, in the ring again herself.

These ladies are very grateful for the many kind and supportive friends they have made over the years. They also feel truly blessed to have had these experiences and opportunities as mother and daughter in this grand business of show horses!

Submitted by Jean Johnson