

## It's Never Too Late

If you sometimes wonder if you are getting too old to be riding or driving your horse, or maybe you are thinking about giving up on horses completely, just look around at the people who are really enjoying themselves at the horse shows.

You may have seen Charlie Jones, who is a consistent champion in the road horse division with his horse, Mr's Bones. What you may not guess at first is that Charlie is 71 years young, and was away from horses for decades before returning to the show ring.

Charlie had ridden for many years, and his father and brother both trained Saddlebreds, but Charlie had stopped showing horses in 1972, and didn't really miss it. When he lost his beloved wife, Charlie found himself at loose ends. "I just didn't quite know what to do with myself after my wife died," he told me. "When she passed away, I didn't know what way to go or what to do."

Charlie strikes me as a friendly, gregarious person, but it sounds as if depression was getting the best of him. He admits he needed exercise, but he also needed friends. Now that he has gotten back into the horse show world, he had plenty to do, and lots of friends to talk with, including a very special equine friend.

Getting back into horses was not an intentional move for Charlie. "It was just something that popped up," he said. "I

hadn't touched a horse in at least three years."

At that time, about three years ago, he was in the shavings business and delivered bedding to horse shows, so he was still in touch with the show world in a limited way. "Everybody seemed to be having a good time. I missed that," he said.

Charlie happened across an old acquaintance, Jan Lukens, and began talking with her about the horse shows. He ran into



Mr's Bones and Charlie Jones at the 2009 UPHA/American Royal.

photo by Avis

her at several events, and eventually, she suggested Charlie show a pleasure horse, and he did at Harrisburg, but pleasure was not his speed. "I said, 'I'm tired of saying whoa. I want to go!' he said. "I said I want to get a road horse. I might as well have said I was going to get a Harley."

"Go" is the main word for roadsters, and it fits for Charlie, who last drove a road horse in 1959. Two years ago, he found Mr's Bones, who at one point had spent time in the killers pen before an Amish buyer fattened him up and resold him. "He probably had a rough life before he got to me. He knew nothing about eating candy or carrots or apples," Charlie said.

Mr's Bones ended up at Waterford Farm in Lebanon, Penn., just a few miles from Charlie's home in Jonestown, around the time that Charlie was looking for a horse in Kentucky and Tennessee. After failing to find what he wanted, Charlie looked closer to home, and with the support of friend and farrier Larry Bender, bought Mr's Bones.

Lukens does not normally take roadsters, but she was willing to try the horse for Charlie, so Mr's Bones was moved to her barn "He was there about three days when she said 'this isn't a bad horse,'" Charlie recalls.

Even though he had been out of the show ring for 40 years, Charlie's years of experience with horses was not forgotten. "It came back very naturally," he said. "I think I brought a little bit of 40 years ago back into the ring."

Mr's Bones has turned out to be a star. His first show with Charlie was in Tampa, Fla., where they placed second in their first class, then went on to win the amateur qualifier and the amateur stake.

Since then, they have kept getting better and better. Mr's Bones has a long list of wins in amateur and open stakes all across the east and south, and is a repeat World Champion for 2008 and 2009 at the Kentucky State Fair. The pair are the winners of the inaugural Equine Services Roadster Cup, and as of this writing, they were leading the 2009 USEF standings for the National Championship in the roadster horse division.

Even better than his stellar show record is the good Mr's Bones has done for Charlie. "It brought me out of a funky mood," he said. "Not only is he a nice show horse, he's a great companion."

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