

The Loss Of An Icon MR.'S BONES

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

“Mr.’s Bones and Charlie Jones” was a phrase heard often from announcers at the largest shows from 2008 through 2019 as the iconic team prepared to make yet another victory pass. Officially retired at the 2021 World’s Championship Horse Show, the Standardbred son of Crown Gesture GB and Slate Run Rosebud went to horse heaven this past month due to complications from colic, leaving behind an extremely grateful owner and trainer as well as a legion of fans.

An unknown driver and unknown horse came out of nowhere with a trainer who wasn’t known for road horses and they went on an unbelievable journey, creating a lot of interest in the roadster division. People wanted to see Bones!

Jan Lukens was that trainer. One of the longtime greats of the Northeast and Jones had met one another after both lost their longtime mates and one thing led to another and before you know it, she suggested the former horseman, get back in the business.

“Charlie picked a road horse because I didn’t have any in my barn; he would have his own division,” said Lukens in CH Mr.’s Bones’ Year In Review dedication

story. “He knew that wouldn’t interfere with any of the customers. That’s just the type of guy Charlie is.”

Jones looked at a lot of horses and ended up with one that was 15 minutes from his back yard. Bones had had a rough life as a young horse and was reportedly purchased for a few hundred dollars by an Amish guy who fattened him up and put him through the Pennsylvania sale where he brought \$6,500.

His new owner put him in training with Kerry Holahan and his brothers Tim and Patrick. They eventually took Bones to Penn National to show him to a few people and on the advice of the late blacksmith, Larry Bender, Charlie Jones was one of them.

“I really liked him when I drove him,” said Jones. “I thought to myself, ‘Either this is a nice horse or I’m really stupid’ because lots of trainers walked right past him and didn’t give him a second look. Larry [Bender] had also seen him under saddle and told me if I wanted a nice horse I should buy him, so I did.”

Lukens wasn’t totally sold on her new project when the roadster arrived. After four or five days she started seeing what Jones had seen the prospect.

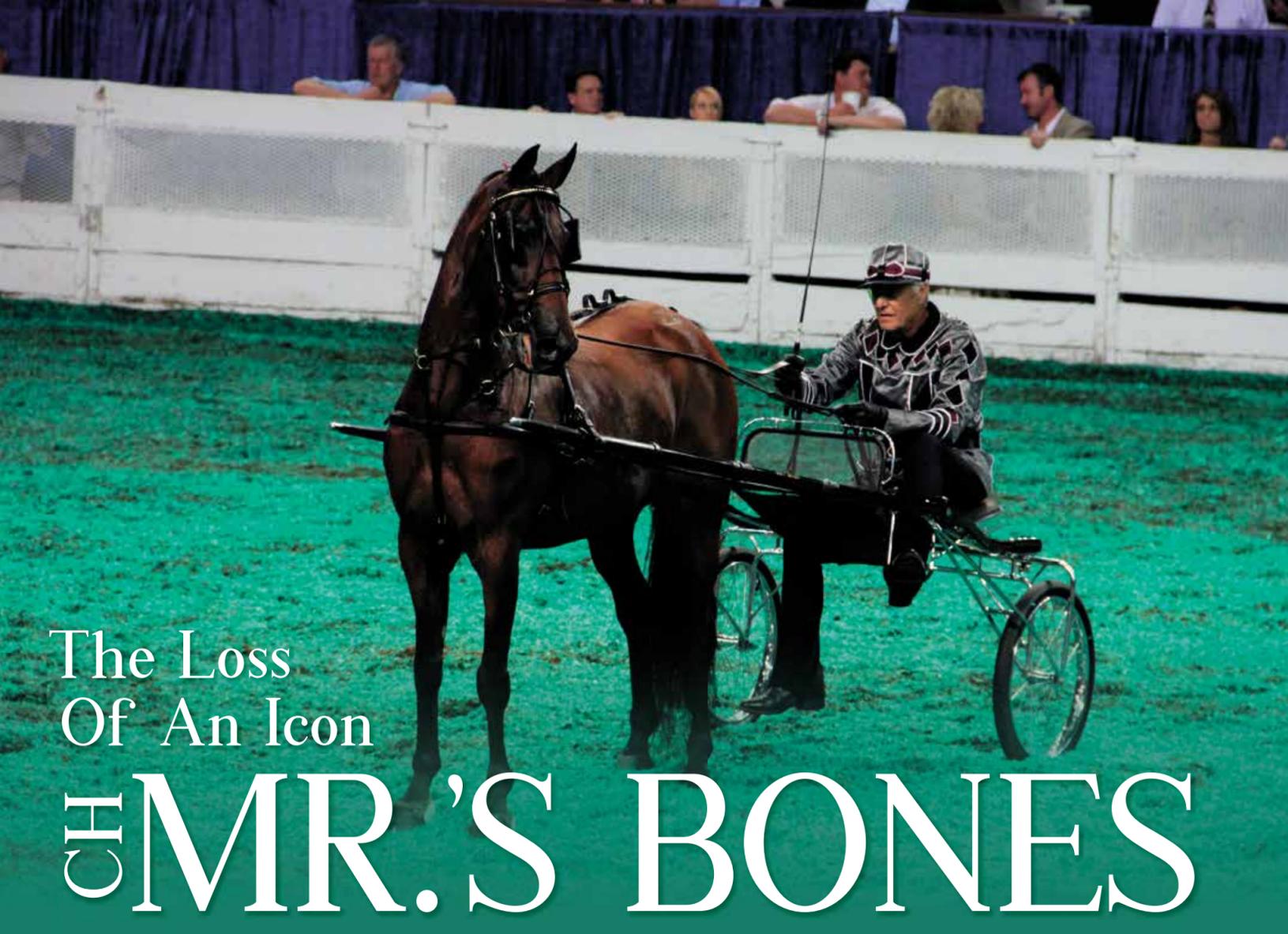
“I had to teach him to give in his bridle and bend his neck to trot the turns. He just got better and better,” said Lukens.

Under her direction, Tampa Charity was their first show in 2008. It was there that people started asking, “Who are those two?” Nelson Green was judging and told Jones he had a nice horse. That gave the team the confidence that yes, this could be a nice horse.

The next few shows had their ups and downs but there were enough good moments to keep going forward. They headed south for Lexington Junior League as it was time to test the big boys. That experience didn’t start out exactly as planned.

“In my first amateur class at Lexington we were having a good go but I didn’t hear the announcer say ‘drive on’ so we were fourth,” recalled Jones in that Year In Review dedication. “When I came out Jan asked me why I didn’t step it up and I told her I didn’t hear him. She said there was a novice class the next

△ CH Mr.’s Bones and Charlie Jones became a recognizable team in many arenas, especially Freedom Hall where they ruled the amateur bike division for years.



Together, they won four world’s champion of champions titles and six world’s champion ribbons.



Twice they finished the year at Kansas City as the Amateur Roadster To Bike National Champions to give them back to back Triple Crown titles.

night and we should go in that. I said to her, ‘Why should we go back if we were fourth?’ She said, ‘This time you need to drive.’”

Drive he did, winning the class and then followed that up by showing a third time that week to also win the Amateur Roadster To Bike Championship. At Louisville that year Jones and the five-year-old again did something unheard of. He was qualified for the USTA Classic and that required a qualifying heat to see who would be eligible to come back for the ribbon/money round so that was two classes. He ended up third behind Debbie Foley and Raymond Shively.

However, they did sweep the Amateur Roadster To Bike qualifier and championship for their third and fourth classes of the week. What a story this was! A five-year-old horse went four classes with a driver who hadn’t shown in four decades and they win two world’s titles. The story was far from finished though.

Jones and Bones would sweep Kansas City that year, giving them the Amateur Roadster To Bike Triple Crown with 2008 championships at Lexington, Louisville, and the UPHA/American Royal. In 2009, they would again be Triple Crown winners and at the UPHA Convention

Bones was not only the Amateur Horse Of The Year but also the Overall Road Horse Of The Year.

“The Triple Crown meant a lot to me, however, the UPHA awards meant more to me than anything,” said Jones.

Those first two seasons were just the start of something great. When it was all over, Bones received (6) Overall UPHA Horse Of The Year awards, (7) UPHA Amateur Horse Of The Year honors, (4) World’s Champion of Champions Amateur Roadster To Bike titles, and (6) World’s Champion Amateur Roadster To Bike wins.

The Lukens/Jones team loved going on the road and sharing this great horse with the public. In addition to the above world’s titles they won tricolors and blues from the UPHA/American Royal, Lexington Junior League, Devon, Syracuse International, UPHA 14 Spring Premiere, Tampa, and the Big E.

“He’s just like Charlie; they both enjoy it,” said Jan Lukens of Bones. “He really liked what he was doing,” said Jones. “He had the looks, the manners and he gave a consistent show, staying on the rail where he belonged, but he could go when he needed to. You hit the gate and he was all go, but when the class was over, 10 feet past the out-gate and he came back to a flat walk.”

Many of the fellow Lukens customers (Laurie Behr, Jayne Romano, Bill Schaefer) were fortunate enough to take a drive or ride on Bones at the barn. Paula Percoco showed him under saddle one time and Dr. Brian Garrett from North Carolina got a few shows in under saddle, including winning a reserve world’s championship.

He was a horse who did it all and did everything with lots of personality. He truly was part of the family for Jones and Lukens.

Bones was also admired by others in the industry. Raymond Shively once said of the star, “Mr.’s Bones is a really, really nice horse. He’s probably the nicest amateur horse since Shane. He’s such a good trotting horse.”

Bones was like a character out of book. The little bay horse showed a lot of courage all through his life and when he met Charlie Jones his life changed for the better. The two connected on a level reserved only for them. You could envision Bones going in the house and laying down beside Charlie in the recliner at night.

“He was an unbelievable horse,” said Jones looking back on their time together. “I just got in the cart, hollered a little bit and acted like I knew what I was doing. He made me look like a star but it was all him. He knew to change gaits when he heard the announcer.

“I’ve never seen a horse have as many friends as Bones had. People asked to see him at all the shows, especially Louisville.”

“Bones brought me back to the horse business in style. I’ll never forget him for that.”



Lexington Junior League was the site of their first major championship.