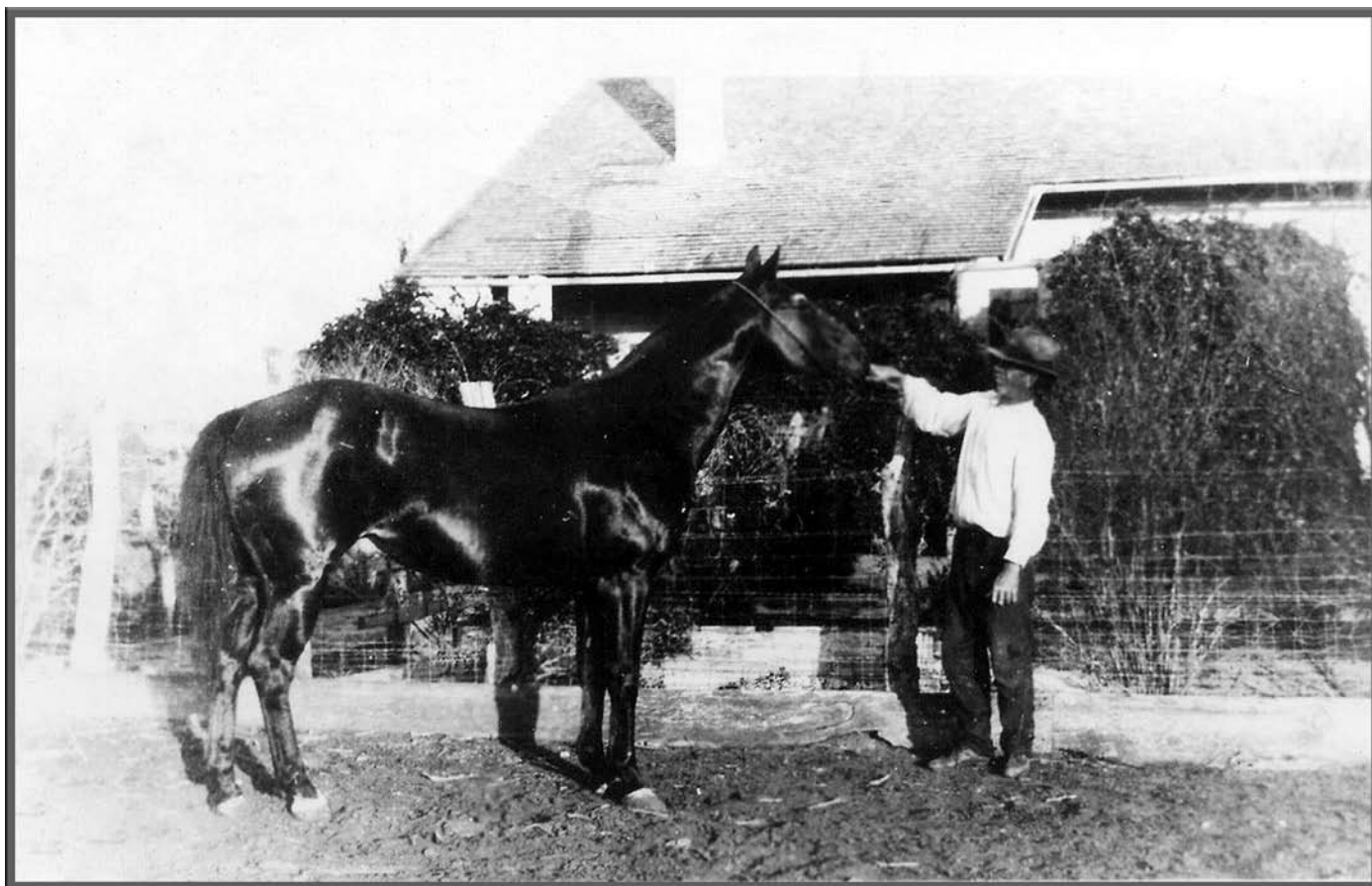


LITTLE JOE

This tough little son of Traveler founded an entire dynasty of Quarter Horses.

by Frank Holmes



Little Joe, shown here in his prime with owner, Ott Adams at the halter, ranks as one of the most-influential sires in the history of the Quarter Horse breed. *Courtesy American Quarter Horse Museum & Heritage Center, Amarillo, Texas*

Traveler, the great mystery horse who rose to prominence in turn of the century east Texas, has been credited for having founded one of the first great families of foundation Quarter Horses. And history has proven him to be worthy of such recognition.

Upon a closer look, however, another slant to the story becomes apparent.

Due to the fact the most of Traveler's sons were gelded for use as race, ranch and polo horses, had it not been for one pair of full brothers, the entire line could have easily died on the vine.

King (Possum), the older of the two, went on to found a noteworthy line of race and working horses in Arizona and the Far West. Little Joe, the younger brother, went on to found a dynasty.

The region of southeast Texas in which both King (Possum) and Little Joe were born was one of the absolute cradles of the American Quarter Horse. This was, after all, the land in which Shiloh and Steel Dust had raced against each other, and in which the Shiloh son Old Billy had established the famous south Texas strain of horses that bore his name.

And this was the area where, dating back to before the turn of the century, such legendary breeders as Dow and Will Shely, George

Clegg, and Ott Adams had been actively engaged in breeding some of the best horses in the land.

Little Joe was foaled in 1904 on the Palo Huerco Ranch of Dow and Will Shely, located near Alice, Texas. The Shely brothers had been in the horse breeding business since 1890.

In or around 1903, they purchased Traveler to serve as their third and final herd sire. As has often been chronicled, Traveler was a stallion of unknown breeding who arrived in Texas sometime in the 1890s. Used as a scraper-pulling work horse for a time, he went on to gain immortality as a racehorse and sire.

The Shely brothers were Traveler's last owners and, for them, he sired Little Joe and King (Possum). Both stallions were out of the mare known as Jenny.

Unlike Traveler, Jenny's breeding was firmly-established and represented some of the most potent "Billy" blood of the day. Sired by Sykes' Rondo and out of May Magnum, she was a full sister to the Shelys' first herd sire, Blue Eyes.

Notably small as a foal and a yearling, Little Joe was kept by Dow Shely at his home in San Antonio. There, he was spotted by George Clegg of Alice, Texas.

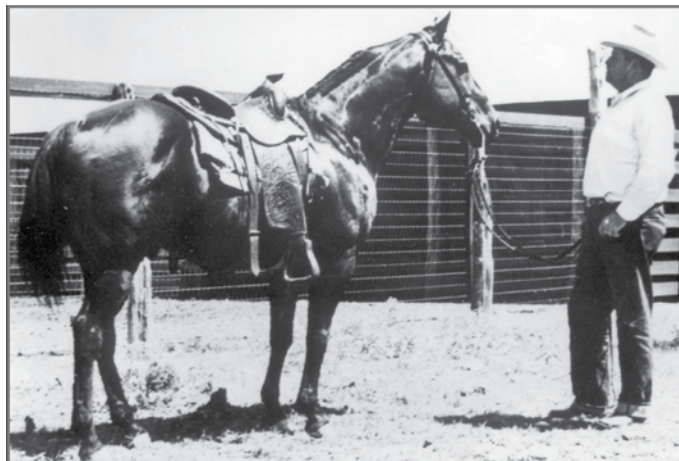
Clegg had begun his horse breeding program several years earlier with a son of Sykes' Rondo named Lane's Little Rondo. In 1907, he would add a young son of Peter McCue named Hickory Bill to his program. (Hickory Bill would go on to sire Old Sorrel, the cornerstone stallion of the famed King Ranch horse Quarter Horse program.)

In Little Joe, Clegg was sure he saw a promising runner. He promptly purchased the colt from the Shelys for \$250 and shipped him by rail to his ranch near Alice.

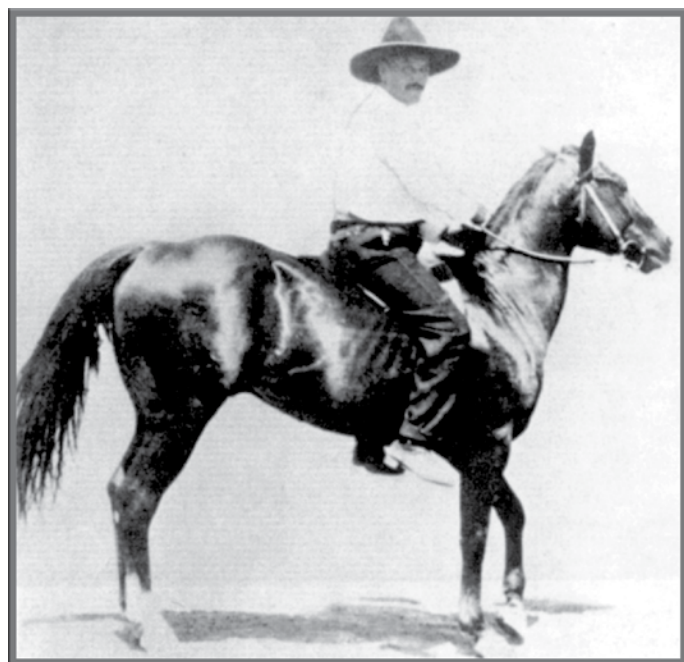
Clegg's avowed plans to turn his new undersized acquisition into a racehorse were reportedly met by a healthy dose of skepticism from family and friends alike. That changed as soon as the colt began his 2-year-old racing campaign.

By this time, Little Joe had grown into a nice looking bay that stood 14.2 hands high and weighed 1050 pounds in racing shape. He had a star and one white rear pastern.

Although the exact number of races he ran has been lost to the ravages of time and poor record keeping, it is known that he raced from his 2-year-old through his 6-year-old year.



King P-234 was a 1932 bay stallion by Zantanon and out of Jabalina, by the Strait Horse. Shown here with owner Jess Hankins of Rocksprings, Tex., King founded a dynasty of his own. *Courtesy Quarter Horse Journal*



Zantanon, the "Mexican Man O' War," was a 1917 sorrel stallion by Little Joe and out of Jeanette, by Billy by Big Jim. Bred by Ott Adams, he did much to enhance the Little Joe line.

A hard-mouthed, hard-headed competitor, Little Joe met and defeated such top runners as Texas Chief, the son of Traveler; Carrie Nation, one of the best daughters of Peter McCue; and Lady S., the Shely-bred daughter of John Crowder. He was also reported to have bested his full brother Possum in several training races.

In his prime, the Clegg-trained racehorse was hand-timed to have run 440 yards in 22 seconds flat, from a 20-foot score. He was only defeated twice.

Joe's first setback came in 1908, in a 4-horse field that included Ace Of Hearts, the top sprinting son of Sykes' Rondo. After false-starting twice—and sprinting the full 440-yard race distance both times—Little Joe got off to a regulation break and was bested by Ace Of Hearts by a nose. Clegg tried on numerous occasions to get a rematch from Ace's owners, but to no avail.

Joe's second defeat came as an aged horse, and then only after he had received an ankle injury while in polo training. Matched against the future Waggoner Ranch sire, Yellow Jacket, at Kyle, Texas, he was beaten and subsequently retired.

In 1910, with Hickory Bill firmly entrenched as his main herd sire, George Clegg sold Little Joe to his friend and neighbor, Ott Adams.

Born in 1969 on a ranch in Llano County, Texas, Ott Adams was several years older than George Clegg. A scant 5 feet in height, Adams had relocated to Alice, Texas, as a young man because he had heard the best horses were being raised there. Although he

was built like a jockey, Adams never cared to train or campaign racehorses. He just wanted to breed them.

In 1904, to kick off his program, the young Texan paid a visit to the nearby Shely brothers. There, he was shown three Traveler colts that were for sale, including Texas Chief and Little Joe.

Adams opted for the more reasonably priced Texas Chief. In time, he became dissatisfied with him—claiming that he had too much size due to his part-draft horse dam—and traded him back to the Shelys for Captain Joe, another Traveler son. Captain Joe also failed to satisfy Adams, so he sold him and purchased Little Joe.

The Ott Adams-Little Joe partnership blossomed and continued on for a period of 16 years. The results of his efforts began making a name for themselves throughout south Texas as both race and breeding animals. And a new generation of local horsemen such as John Dial of Goliad, Tex.; John Almond of

If Little Joe had only sired one horse—Zantanon—his position as one of the all-time great foundation Quarter Horse sires would have been secure.

Zantanon was a 1917 sorrel stallion by Little Joe and out of Jeanette by Billy by Big Jim. After a successful racing career in Mexico, he went on to sire such breeding stalwarts as King P-234, San Siemon, Ed Echols, Zandy, Chico, and Zantanon, Jr.

These stallions, in turn, contributed such paragons as Poco Bueno, Royal King, Hank H., King's Pistol, Bras d'Or, Joe Barrett, Black Hawk, Parker's Trouble, and a host of others to the breed.

And these horses and their descendants went on to sire such champions as Poco Tivio, Poco Dell, Poco Pine, Leo San, Peppy San, and Mr. San Peppy.

So, simply by virtue of siring Zantanon, Little Joe carved a permanent niche for himself in Quarter Horse breeding lore. But, the truth of the matter was, he sired a number of other significant horses as well.

Little Joe sired Joe Moore, a 1927 bay stallion out of Della Moore. Unraced himself, this legendary Ott Adams-bred horse went on to sire the likes of Monita, the 1951 AQHA Co-Champion Quarter Running Horse, and Stella Moore, the 1952 AQHA Champion Quarter Running Mare.

Through such sons as Pay Day, Hobo, Joe Less and Lee Moore, Joe Moore became the patriarch of a line that numbers among its members such world champion runners as Black Easter Bunny, Bunny's Bar Maid, Miss Pitapat and No Butt.

On the show horse side of the tree, Joe Moore's descendants include Zippo Pine Bar, Two Eyed Jack, and Te N' Te.

Little Joe also sired Old Poco Bueno (the maternal grandsire of Poco Bueno P-3044), Gotch, Cotton Eyed Joe, Grano De Oro, Joe Abb, Joe Traveler, and Tobin Joe—all of whom made noteworthy contributions to the AQHA's foundation gene pool.

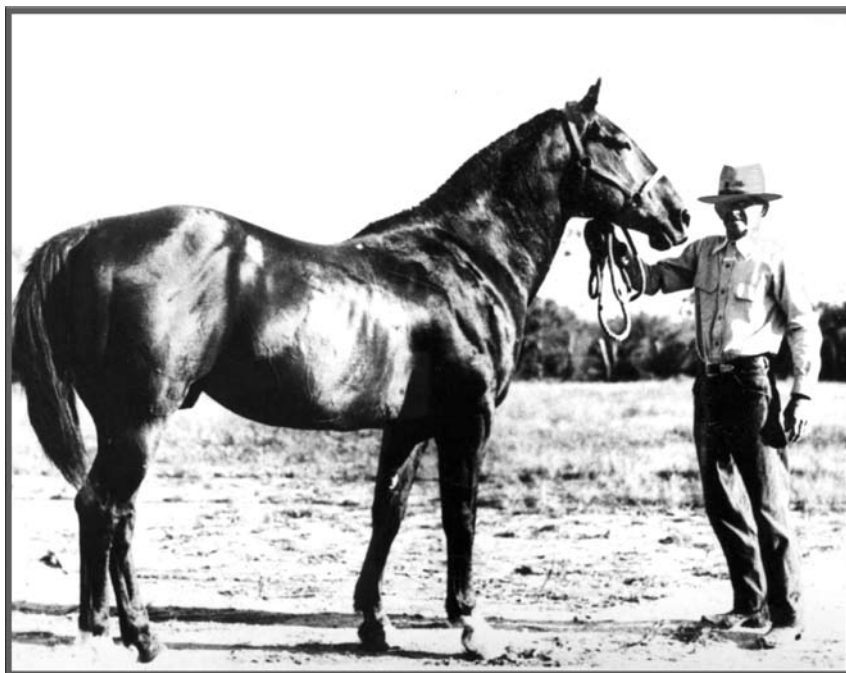
Little Joe's daughters also did their part in making sure that the family tree flourished.

Leading the way was Escoba, a 1924 brown mare out of Black Mabel.

The cornerstone mare of the Lowell Hankins breeding program of Rocksprings, Texas, Escoba was the dam of, among others, Miss Alice, a 4-time AQHA Champion producer; and Diamond Bob, the 1949 AQHA Champion Quarter Running Stallion.

Dora Du Mar, an Ott Adams-bred mare out of Julia Crowder, was another top producing daughter of Little Joe. Bred to Billy Sunday, the son of Horace H. (TB) and Carrie Nation that Adams bought to cross on his Little Joe, Dora produced Rialto P-2 in 1923. And Black Annie, an Ott Adams-bred daughter of Little Joe out of Jeanette—the full sister to Zantanon—produced Pancho P-20.

Finally, two more Little Joe daughters—Ada Jones and Vera Grace—made especially significant contributions to the breed.



Joe Moore, a 1927 stallion by Little Joe and out of Della Moore, was Ott Adams' choice to succeed his famous sire. He had a broad and long-lasting influence on the breed. *Courtesy Quarter Horse Journal*

Corpus Christi, Tex.; and Robert Kleberg Jr. of the King Ranch at Kingsville, Tex. began to build up their own programs with horses of Adams' breeding.

In 1926, Little Joe was sold to O. W. Cardwell of Junction, Tex., who kept him for 3 years. In 1929, the 25-year-old stallion was reportedly injured in a breeding accident, and had to be destroyed. A neighbor later claimed that the quick-tempered Cardwell had become angry when the old stallion refused to cover a mare, and shot him.

Adams was on record as stating that he always regretted selling Little Joe. Several years after the horse's death, he had his remains exhumed, transported back to Alice, and re-buried under an ancient locust tree that stood near his front yard gate.

Ada Jones, a 1918 chestnut mare out of Mamie Crowder, was bred by Ott Adams. She was sold by Adams to John Dial, who raced her with considerable success. When she was 16, she was acquired by the King Ranch.

For much of the time period that he owned Ada Jones, John Dial also owned the Thoroughbred stallion Chicaro (TB). In 1929, he mated the two and got a filly named Chicaro's Hallie.

Hallie was registered as a Thoroughbred, with her dam listed as Lady Eloise. But there was never really any doubt about who her real dam was. In his *Foundation Dams of the American Quarter Horse*, Bob Denhardt emphatically states that both Robert Kleberg and George Clegg told him and Helen Michaelis that Hallie's real dam was Ada Jones.

Acquired by the King Ranch and bred to their Thoroughbred stallions, Chicaro's Hallie produced a sprinting Thoroughbred dynasty.

Bred to Livery (TB), Hallie produced a daughter named Bruja. Bruja, in turn, produced several racing daughters including Encantadora (TB), a winner at 2 and holder of a world's record for five furlongs; Haunted (TB), a stakes winner, a holder of a world's record for 4-1/2 furlongs; and Witchbrew (TB) (Mickie), a starter on the short tracks and owner of an official 350 yard time of :18 flat.

Bruja's last great daughter was Woven Web (TB) (Miss Princess). Sired by Bold Venture (TB), Woven Web was the 1946, 1947, and 1948 World Champion Quarter Running Horse.


So, the simple truth here is that Woven Web—one of the most fabled sprinting Thoroughbreds to ever grace the Quarter Horse tracks—was not a Thoroughbred at all. She was a Little Joe-bred Quarter Horse.

Vera Grace, another Ott Adams-bred daughter of Little Joe, was out of Johnny Wilkens (TB), by Horace H. (TB). A bay mare foaled in 1926, she too was registered as a Thoroughbred under the name of Fair Chance (TB).

Like Ada Jones, Vera Grace was acquired from Adams by John Dial. Bred to Chicaro (TB) in 1929, she produced Chicaro Bill in 1930. Chicaro Bill went on to become a AAA-rated racehorse and a tremendous broodmare sire.

The Little Joe story was one of success for the very "get go," and it became even more so with each successive generation.

It would be virtually impossible to try to quantify the over-all impact that Little Joe has had on the Quarter Horse breed. Suffice it to say it was far-reaching, it was positive, and it extended into every nook and cranny of the Quarter Horse world.

And it does so to this every day. 

Frank Holmes has been penning horse-related feature articles and historical books since 1965. As a former staff writer and current contributor for *Western Horseman* magazine, Frank co-authored volumes 2 through 6 of the immensely popular *Quarter Horse Legends* book series. Frank also authored the following historic horse books: *The Hank Wiescamp Story*, *King P-234*, *Wire to Wire* (the Walter Merrick story), *More than Color* (the Appaloosa story) and the Paint Horse book, *Spotted Pride*.

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