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Driftwood

AQHA # 0002833
Bay Stallion
1932 ~ 1960

AQHA Hall of Fame ~
2006

Article from AQHA Hall Of Fame

Breeder: Mr. Childress
Silverton, Texas
Owner: Catherine &
Channing Peake
Lompoc, California



Known as Speedy during his rodeoing days, Driftwood left an indelible mark on the using horse world of the southwest and west coast. Foaled in 1932 near Silverton, Texas, the bay stallion was bred by a Mr. Childress (known locally as "Old Man" Childress).

At the time Driftwood was foaled, there was no American Quarter Horse Association and breeding records were often loosely kept. Many breeders, especially if they were racing their horses, preferred that the breeding of their horses not be known. It was easier to match a horse that way, especially if a horse was by a known sire of speed.

During those early match-racing years, there were no starting gates. Instead, horses were flagged off the starting line in what were called lap-and-tap starts. "Lap" meant that the horses had to lap each other when they came up to the starting line. In other words, if the horses were in a straight line, the starter, who was standing either to the right or left of them, could only see the entire body of the horse closest to him. When the horses were "lapped" like this, the starter "tapped" them off. If they weren't lapped, he yelled to pull up and try again.

In his book titled *13 Flat*, Willard Porter discussed Driftwood's ability to remain quiet in lap-and-tap starts. Porter quoted an old-timer as saying, "Driftwood never blew. One time, Driftwood was matched against one of the best Lap-and-tap horses in the Sweetwater country for 220 yards. They scored for an hour and a quarter, until both horses were drenched with sweat from the start of so many un-lapped starts. The other horse was high and fretting and obviously tiring. But Drifty was still calm. When they finally broke, Drifty never made a mistake. He broke straight and on top and he won by 2 lengths."

In an article about Driftwood in *Hoofs and Horns*, Willard Porter quoted Ab Nichols' son, Buck, as saying, "Driftwood was 6 or 7 years old when we bought him. He was a race horse, but I broke him to be a rope horse and rodeoed on him. As far as I know, he'd never experienced anything like that before we got him.

"He was a blood bay; not real big and definitely showed his Thoroughbred breeding," continued Nichols. "And he could run! He was also an extremely smooth riding horse with

an easy disposition."

"We didn't keep him more than a couple of years, but we thought a great deal of him. As a matter of fact, we bred a lot of our Clabber mares to him."

Porter's article continued to quote Buck Nichols, "George Cline of Roosevelt, Arizona came to us about buying the horse. We sold him for \$600. The Depression of the 1930s wasn't over yet and that was an unheard-of price for a horse. The Clines like to rope and Driftwood got to look at lots of cattle."

In 1941, when he was 9 years old, Driftwood was sold to Asbury Schell of Tempe, Arizona. Asbury was a tough calf and team roper and a former world champion in the second event. The horse fit in well with that program and before long he was a fixture at the big rodeos across the country. From the Mexican border to Calgary, from California to Madison Square Garden, Driftwood was ridden by some of the top timed-event hands in the business. Schell began calling the horse Speedie (later, the Peakes spelled it Speedy) based on the speed with which he caught cattle and the name caught on with the cowboys.

In those days, most outdoor rodeos were held in large arenas and over a long score. Because of his match-race experience, Speedy broke from the roping box extremely fast and learned to hunt, or track, cattle in the quickest way possible. Ropers of the time still talk about the way that he ate up ducking, dodging calves and steers.

At a rodeo at Payson, Arizona, probably in 1941, the spectacular bay stallion was ridden in every timed event - calf roping, team tying, single steer roping and bulldogging. And he carried his riders into the money in every one of them. Then, he won the stock saddle cow horse race down the length of the arena.

Driftwood was a tough horse. He stood up under the pressure of rodeoing with the long hauls, numerous riders and changes of climate and feed. Even with all the hard use, however, he never lost his good disposition.

Then, early in 1943, his life took a different trail when he was purchased by Channing and Catherine Peake, who owned Rancho Jabali in Lompoc, California. According to Willard Porter the couple had decided to develop a breeding program to produce the best rodeo and ranch horses possible. Although they had the mare power to do it with, they didn't have a stallion. So they began to search for a suitable one. For a year or so it was a difficult hunt. The Peakes weren't in the market for just any stallion. As Porter has written, they wanted one with proven, outstanding roping ability. While they were interested in a horse with the conformation that would enable him to stay sound under hard use, their primary objective was a horse with performance ability, heart and the speed to catch cattle in winning time. And they wanted a prepotent horse who could pass these traits on to his get.

In the spring of 1942 the Peakes went to the Hayward, California rodeo where Schell was competing. They would not only see what the horse looked like, but could judge his performance as a contest mount in both the calf roping and team roping.

The well-balanced, good looking bay stallion lived up to his advance billing. He was alert, had a kind eye and quiet disposition and was the kind of rope horse the Peakes had visualized. Seeing Speedy ended the Peakes' search for a stallion.

There was just one problem. Schell didn't want to sell the horse. He was winning money off him in the rodeo arena and like most ropers, when he had a horse that fit him, he didn't want to give him up. However, Channing and Katy did talk the Arizona cowboy into coming to their ranch for a short visit and breeding Speedy to several of their mares.

When Schell headed back to Tempe, the Peakes asked if they could have the first chance to buy the horse if Schell ever decided to sell him. After he returned home, Asbury did decide to sell Speedy and so informed the Peakes. But later, he changed his mind and hectic correspondence flew back and forth between Arizona and California. Asbury didn't know what to do. He was winning off the horse, but World War II had started and gas rationing was imminent. Rodeos would certainly be limited and it would be hard to travel, anyway. He finally agreed to part with Driftwood.

On March 9, 1943 Channing Peake paid Asbury Schell \$1,500.00 for the stallion. For years, the major rodeos and team ropings in California and Arizona were a showcase of Driftwood offspring. In addition to the foals out of the Hughes mares owned by the Peakes, his most popular crosses came from daughters of Red Man by Joe Hancock and Lucky Blanton. Both were outstanding race and rope horses in their day.

Although Driftwood had been a hard-knocking race horse, few of his get went to the track. The rodeo arena was their destination, although more than one was match raced when the opportunity arose. And usually the Driftwood crossed the finish line first.

While the Driftwood line is now getting thin, there are a few breeders scattered around the country attempting to carry it on. And, when possible, the ropers still like to own the Driftwoods. Even today, a cowboy will occasionally comment that his top horse

goes back to old Speedy. This usually means that he is well-mounted.

From Western Horseman Legends Book Volume 2

Miller Boy	Hobart Horse	Unknown	Unknown
			Unknown
		Unknown	Unknown
	Wylie	Texas Chief 1905 Chestnut	Traveler 1885 Chestnut
			Hallettsville Mare
		JA Mare	Yellow Boy
The Comer Mare	Barlow 1	Lock's Rondo 1880 Chestnut	Whalebone 1868 Chestnut
			Mittie Stephens 1869 Chestnut
		Kentucky TB Mare	Unknown
	TB Mare	Unknown	Unknown
			Unknown
		Unknown	Unknown

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