

No Ordinary Joe

GERALD KEESLING'S DREAM HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO WIN THE ALL American Futurity (G1). However, when his 11-year-old stallion Mr Joe Im Kool earned the AQHA title of open Supreme Champion, Gerald was ecstatic.

"I think it's awesome," said Gerald, who has bred and raised racing American Quarter Horses since 1976. "I've been at this for a long time, and I never thought I'd have a Supreme Champion during my career of breeding. I was always trying to win the All American Futurity. That was my No. 1 goal and still is, of course. But this is certainly a rewarding situation to be able to develop a champion."

"Joe" is only the 47th horse to earn the elusive honor and join the ranks of Quarter Horse greats Kid Meyers, War Machine, Sir Savannah, He Rocket and Gotum Gone. The last horse to earn an open Supreme Championship was Lucks Easyfanta Boy in 1997.

Gerald knew Joe was something special from the day he was born. The Punta Gorda, Florida, breeder had raised Joe's dam, Madam Duck, a stakes-winning daughter of Duck Dance (TB), and his granddam Miss Tickle. Joe's sire was Royal Quick Dash, the 1991 high money-earning racehorse and champion 2-year-old colt whose foals have earned more than \$17 million.

"He has been a special animal from the beginning," Gerald said. "He was easy to handle, and his looks were very similar to his parents. The parents had all done really good on the racetrack. We had high hopes for him when he was born."

As a 2-year-old, Joe began his racing career under the expert hands of trainer Dwayne Gilbreath. Joe's first start was June 25, 2000, in Ruidoso, New Mexico, where he came in third in a 350-yard maiden race. In July, he entered the Rainbow Futurity (G1) trials but didn't qualify. However, at the All American Futurity (G1) trials in August, he was second behind eighth fastest qualifier Beccas Quick Six.

Joe's time of :21.945 wasn't good enough to put him in the finals, but he did race in the consolation, finishing sixth and outrunning 2001 division champion Stoli.

"Joe injured himself in that race and had a small shin fracture," Gerald said. "Nothing real serious and it healed perfectly, but we decided to give him some time off before racing him again."

Joe didn't race again until June 2001 when he returned to Ruidoso and won a 400-yard maiden. But at the Rainbow Derby (G1) trials in July, his time of :22.249 was not good enough to qualify for the finals. He raced in a couple of allowance races that summer and won his All American Congress Derby (G3) trial with a time of :21.874 in October (this race can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIazCROIR_U). However, a slow break at the Congress finals cost him, and he finished seventh.

Gerald continued racing Joe lightly as a 4-year-old, with the stallion receiving his highest

AQHA's newest open Supreme Champion exemplifies the athleticism and spirit of the American Quarter Horse.

By Tonya Ratliff-Garrison

Photos by Cappy Jackson

Mr Joe Im Kool is only the 47th horse to earn an open AQHA Supreme Championship.

speed index of 98 on September 1, 2002, in a 330-yard race at Arapahoe Park in Denver. Joe was retired from racing in October 2002. Out of 14 starts, he had two wins, three seconds and one third and had lifetime earnings of \$29,786.

"We didn't want to destroy him running him on the race-tracks," Gerald said. "We had plans to do other things with him."

Gerald let Joe have some time off and then in 2006 started showing him in halter. Between 2006 and 2007, Joe won 15 of his 16 halter classes, earning 17.5 points and one of nine classes in performance halter, earning 6.5 points.

Joe was then sent to AQHA Pro Horseman Andrey Ferreir in Pompano Beach, Florida, for reining training. Joe quickly picked up on the discipline and in 2007 won four of his 11 classes and earned 9.5 points.

Roping was next, and Ted Chancey in Dover, Florida, was Joe's trainer. In late 2008 and earlier this year, Joe earned the last of the points he needed for the open Supreme Champion title with a half-point in heading and 22.5 points in heeling.

"Going for Supreme Champion wasn't our first intent," Gerald said. "Our first intent was to see what other talent he had and if he could be as useful as possible other than racing. We do that with all of our racehorses. Then as he developed to be so well-managed, so well-handled, we put him in training for reining and the other aspects. Then as we got close and he only needed so many points more for a Supreme Champion, then of course we pursued it."

Joe earned all of his show points at Florida shows with Florida trainers.

"The Florida Quarter Horse Association is really strong, and especially now with all the big winter meets and all of the people all over the country coming to Florida to show, it's quite a competitive turnout for the Quarter Horse shows, especially for the performance horses."

Joe's performance career is far from over. Gerald plans to continue showing the stallion and maybe even get him qualified for the AQHA World Championship Show.

"A lot of horses, especially racehorses, don't have a very good life later in life unless they are really great or unless they are really still doing something," Gerald said. "They can't determine their destiny. We can ours. All we can do is help them along the way. That's our greatest ambition. That's what we'd really like to see for Joe is the longevity for him being able to perform and have a good long, useful life."

SUPREME CHAMPION REQUIREMENTS

1. Two official speed index ratings of 90 or higher (AAA).
 2. A total of 40 points in halter and performance classes at five or more AQHA shows under five or more different AQHA judges or in races recognized by AQHA.
- A. Halter – At least 15 points must be earned in halter, with eight points minimum earned during or after the horse's 2-year-old year. The horse must also earn at least two grand championships under different judges, with at least one earned during or after the horse's 2-year-old year.
- B. Performance – At least 20 points must be earned in performance event or races. At least eight of the 20 points earned in one or more of these events: reining, working cow horse, western pleasure, western riding, jumping, green working hunter, working hunter, hunter hack and hunter under saddle.

At least eight of the 20 points earned in one or more of these events: tie-down roping, dally team roping-heading, dally team roping-heeling and cutting.



And passing on Joe's athletic ability and gentle nature is also a goal. The stallion is being offered to outside mares and currently has five racing-age foals on the ground. Gerald is excited to see how they will do on the racetrack.

"We're just now starting to race train them so we'll have one this year that hopefully we will get to a race with," Gerald said.

And maybe one of Joe's babies will help Gerald achieve that big dream – winning the All American. 🐾

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Shown in heading and heeling, Joe earned most of his roping points in heeling.



Gerald Keesling bred and raised Joe as well as Joe's dam and granddam. Gerald's girlfriend, Paulette Stoudt, also helps Gerald manage Sandy Cay Farm.