

The Quarter Horse world lost one of its legends on January 5, 2008 when the extraordinary horseman Matlock Rose passed away. Competing in the time when both cowboys and their horses did everything, Rose had very strong ties to the Foundation Quarter Horse. Among the great Foundation Quarter Horses he competed on were 100% stallions Jessie James, Peppy San, and Peponita.

Rose was one of the great horsemen of his era, mentioned in the same breath as Don Dodge and Buster Welch. These men, at their prime, did not just dominate one showing discipline; they won everything. At a Quarter Horse show during the late 1960's Matlock Rose won a halter class in the morning and followed that up by winning the roping and cutting. In today's era of specialization for both horses and horsemen there is a tendency to pigeon hole people by saying, "He's a great cutter!" or "He's one of the best halter horse producers out there today." Rose could not be pigeon holed, he was a horseman in the original sense of the word.



Matlock Rose and Jessie James
photo courtesy of the James Cathey Heritage collection

Matlock Rose

A Legend Passes

A Cowboy

Berry Matlock Rose was born August 12, 1924 in Frisco, TX. He was the fourth child but the first son of Sam and Pauline Rose. Like many young men of that day Sam was a farmer/rancher and horses were a way of life back then, not a luxury item. Sam took Matlock up on the saddle in front of him whenever he was riding and taught his son the basics of horsemanship when he bought him a pony called Midget. Horses were also the mode of transportation in that day and young Matlock and his sisters drove to school in a horse and buggy. Sam Rose died in 1940 and in 1942 Matlock joined the Navy to help support his family. He served for two years on the USS Idaho during World War II where he took part in seven major battles.

Rose returned in 1945, worked two jobs, and trained horses in the evenings after work. A year later Matlock went to Arlington, TX to apply for a job on the Three D's Ranch owned by the legendary Waggoner family. The ranch covered 3000 acres and the stockyard was a major thoroughfare for cattle shipping from west and south Texas. This meant that there was a lot of work with cattle and horses – many of both species extremely wild – and Rose

Other photos courtesy of NCHA & AQHA

gained valuable experience that he would use to great effect in the show arena. It was at the Waggoner Ranch that he first crossed paths with that great 100% Foundation stallion Jessie James.

Waggoners bought Jessie James as a two year old and he had been passed through several riders at the Three D's before Matlock started riding him. In true Foundation style Jessie James had been used for everything from roping to bulldogging. The buckskin stallion had some damage to his mouth so Matlock rode and showed him in 'a little old rope noseband'. Rose roped on Jessie James and thought he had so much cow he would try him in the cutting pen. The horse was a natural cutter and Rose is quoted as saying he could spin faster than any other horse he had ridden.

Jessie James had a distinctive cutting style – 'snake-like' – his head and neck extended with his ears pinned so flat against his head that they almost disappeared and so low to the ground it seemed his legs were swallowed up by the dirt. In those days cutters rode without holding onto the saddle horn and to see Jessie and Matlock at work was quite a sight.

Matlock not only rode Jessie James but also his stablemate at the Three D's, Poco Bueno. Riding horses of this caliber got Rose

noticed and he was offered a training job by Lester Goodson of Houston, TX.

While Rose was at Goodson's J Three Ranch he gave the cutting world a hint of things to come when he took Buster Waggoner, a stallion bought from Three D's, to a cutting in Breckenridge, TX. He is quoted as saying, "That was the best cutting I ever won." And no one would disagree. That day Matlock and Buster Waggoner beat a Cutting Who's Who - Pine Johnson on Poco Bueno, World Champion mare Housekeeper and Robert Corbett, and Phil Williams with both Jessie James and Skeeter.

In those days it was pretty tough to make a living training so Matlock roped on the weekends at jackpot events to make ends meet. Rose continued to train and calf rope but Goodson was more interested in the racing game and sold off his show horses.

The World Champion

Around this time Matlock got a job offer from Ben Fussell of Eagle Lake, TX who had recently purchased Jessie James. Fussell dangled Jessie James in front of Rose and said he would like to see Jessie James and Rose go after the NCHA World Championship.

Matlock agreed and he and Jessie James hit the road winning at the prestigious Denver Stock show right off the bat. Throughout the year they were pushed hard by Skeeter and Phil Williams. Williams and Skeeter attended more cuttings and just beat them out so Matlock had to settle for the Reserve Championship. The

people who saw Jessie James cut will never forget his style and for years his image was used as part of the NCHA logo.

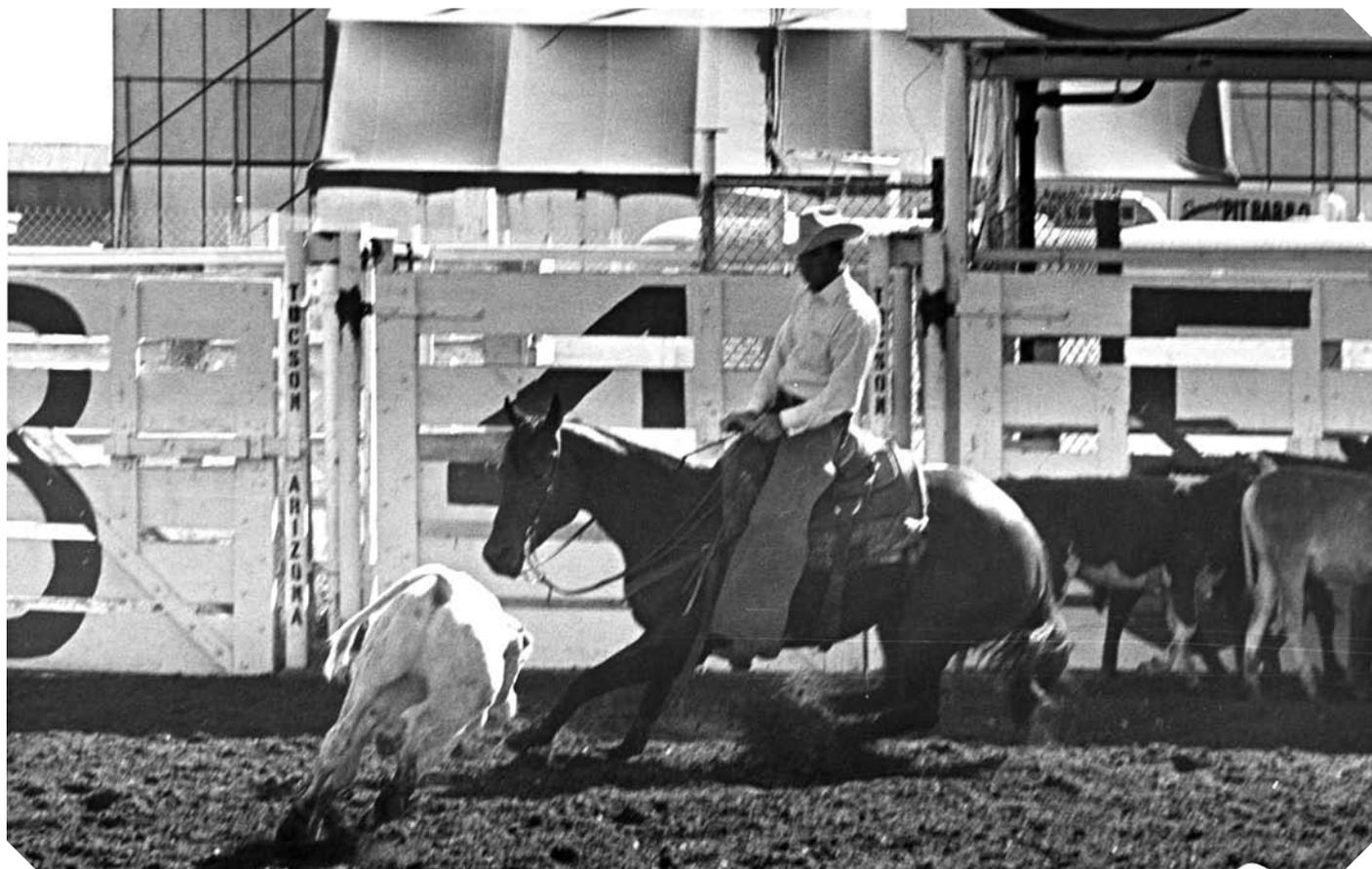
Rose moved on to work for B F Phillips, Jr who owned both Steel Bars and Ed Echols. Matlock showed Steel Bars at halter to win the 1957 AQHA High Point Stallion award. He then left Phillips to work as general manager of horse operations at Pinehurst Stables owned by Edgar Brown III and located just outside Houston. He worked for Brown until 1959 and then went to work for G B Howell. Howell had made his fortune in the oil business and was setting up a large breeding and training facility. In 1957 he had purchased a son of Leo called Leo San, and was quoted in the *Quarter Horse Journal* as saying, "I was looking for a sire that could raise a cutter, a reiner, or a halter horse."

Matlock had a great eye for a horse and recommended that Howell buy a mare called Peppy Belle and Howell who liked Old Sorrel bloodlines on both sides of the pedigree bought the mare for \$1600. The mare was bred to Leo San and the resulting offspring proved what a good cross it was - it was a colt called Peppy San.

Peppy San - 100% Foundation - was one of the first horses Matlock trained when he went to work for Howell. He liked the sorrel colt with the star on his forehead and thought that he had the conformation and ability to be a great cow horse and a sire. He and Peppy San competed in the first NCHA Futurity where they won the go round and finished second in the finals.

Despite the success of Peppy San in the cutting pen Howell was mainly interested in halter horses and Matlock Rose maintained a steady stream of winners while he was head of operations. From

Matlock Rose cutting in classic style on Moira Girl. Photo credit: Louise L Serpa



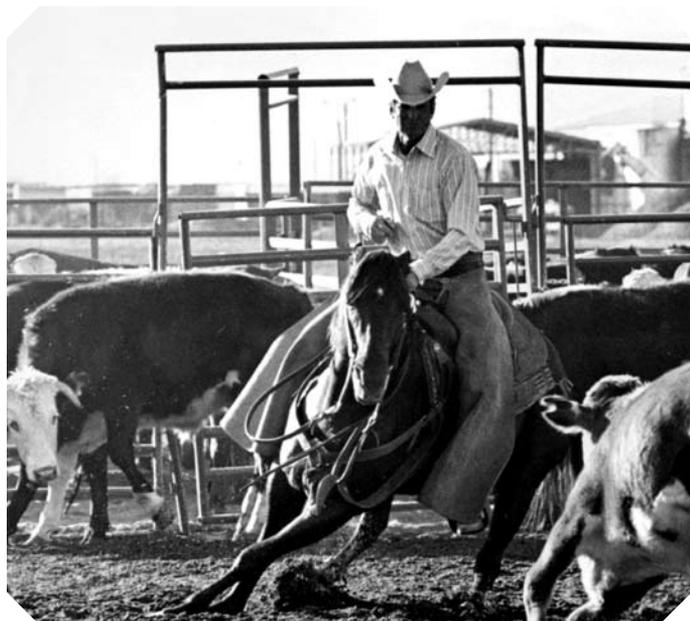
1959 to 1963 Howell's horses never did worse than 3rd place in 66 get-of-sire classes. Not only was Rose hard to beat in the performance classes, he was equally tough when he was holding the lead shank. Well-known Texas Quarter Horse breeder Frank Perkins

price tags were steep. They remained partners until Tyler's death nearly 20 years later.

One of their first purchases was a 100% Foundation mare called Stardust Desire. The mare was a six year old when they bought her, had shown under several riders without a lot of success and was perhaps a little jaded. She and Matlock clicked right away and it was due to Rose's extraordinary ability to figure out what it took to get the best out of a horse. He said he put up with more from this mare than any other horse but letting her have her way about a few little things did the trick. Perkins says Matlock got along with difficult horses because he knew how to get their respect. Stardust Desire and Matlock were picking up winner's checks in no time. They won at the Cow Palace and NCHA World Finals in Nevada.

At the same time Rose showed another 100% Foundation mare called Christmas Four. She was second at the 1965 NCHA Futurity and not long after that Matlock and Tyler bought her. Christmas Four did not have any outstanding cutting bloodlines, just a

Rose and his horses made it look easy
Left: Matlock on Chunkys Monkey
Below: A latter day photo



met Rose in 1953 and the two men maintained a close friendship until Matlock's death. "He knew a real horse. He could look at a young horse and tell right away, he didn't have to see it grown. A good horseman can do that." Perkins says about Matlock's ability to pick a winning halter horse.

Howell dispersed his show horses in 1963 and that included Peppy San. The stallion was sold to a Canadian called C N 'Chunky' Woodward. Woodward had an interest in cutting horses and it was through Matlock's friend Don Dodge that he acquired Peppy San. Woodward's Douglas Lake Cattle Co raised their own ranch horses and after purchasing Peppy San they turned him out to pasture breed their mares. During this time Peppy San was shown very little.

With the dispersal of the Howell show string Matlock moved on but this time he did not go to work for someone else. He and George Tyler set up their own business. Tyler was a well known trainer and judge and the two men advertised in the *Quarter Horse Journal* with the slogan, 'Our horses are broke, and we are too.' Rose and Tyler never had a horse that wasn't for sale and the



lot of natural ability. Frank Perkins comments on Matlock's understanding that bloodlines don't always equal performance, "As a breeder myself, I respected him so much because he never followed breeding trends. He picked his horses from bloodlines that nobody'd heard of and made champions out of them." Perkins goes on to say, "He set the trends for the cutting horse, roping horse and show. horses in general because he made so many of them famous."

It was at the World Finals that 'Chunky' Woodward noticed Matlock and Stardust Desire. He offered to provide the backing for Matlock and the mare to make a run at the NCHA World Championship. The pair started 1966 by winning three big shows in a row - Denver, Fort Worth, and Houston - and won the title.

Woodward offered Peppy San to Matlock the following year. Although Peppy San had been out of the spotlight for a couple of years, he and Rose picked up right where they left off. They were in the money 50 out of 52 tries during which Matlock could only remember losing two cows. He took care of Peppy San personally and worked him sparingly at home because the horse was so easy. Along with his NCHA World title Peppy San was also the AQHA High Point stallion. With true Foundation versatility he was also the last NCHA World Champion to be an AQHA Halter Champion. After all this success it was decided that Peppy San should stand with Matlock in Gainesville, TX instead of returning to Canada. The great stallion remained with Rose until he died at age 30.

The Peppy San Legacy

Matlock married Carol Ramsey in the fall of 1968. Carol was from California and a successful competitor in reined cow horse

events. She and Matlock began to build an impressive string of show and breeding horses.

Meanwhile, Stardust Desire and a mare called Bonita Tivio were bred to Peppy San. Stardust Desire had a filly called Peppy's Desire and Bonita Tivio had a colt called Peponita. These two youngsters were born in Canada on 'Chunky' Woodward's ranch. Matlock, who had shown both Stardust Desire and Peppy San, found the qualities of both horses in Peppy's Desire. He and Carol bought the mare from Woodward in 1973.

Carol rode Peppy's Desire to third place in the NCHA Non-Pro World Championship in 1974, and in 1975 both Matlock and Carol campaigned the mare. Peppy's Desire showed her heart by winning both the NCHA Open Championship with Matlock and the Non-Pro Championship with Carol that year.

While Peppy's Desire was with Matlock and Carol, Peponita was in the equally capable hands of Don Dodge. At the time Peponita was owned by Marilyn Day who lived in Scottsdale, AZ and Dodge had not only ridden his dam, Bonita Tivio, but had owned and shown her sire the great Foundation stallion Poco Tivio. Dodge thought that Peponita was better than either his sire or dam.

Matlock Rose had seen Peponita in the cutting pen when he was a turn back rider for Don. He had even shown him for Dodge a couple of times. He liked Peponita a lot and thought he had un-

Two legendary performers Matlock Rose and Peponita



limited potential in the cutting pen. Matlock and Carol bought the stallion from Marilyn Day for \$45,000 in 1976. It was a substantial price to pay in those days but Matlock was pretty sure he had another World Champion in Peponita. "He thought an awful lot of Peponita." Perkins says.

Rose was right. Peponita won the AQHA World Championship in Sr Cutting and the NCHA World title in 1977. His earnings of \$38,695 set a new NCHA record.

Matlock showed mainly around Texas the following year but in 1979 he was ready to take Peponita back out on the road. Always a horseman first he had Peponita checked out by the vet to make sure he could take the stress and strain of hauling and competing. The vet took a full set of x-rays and gave the Foundation stallion a glowing report saying that the x-rays were perfect.

Matlock and Peponita won the 1979 NCHA World Champion-

Zan Parr Bar who Carol had found as a two year old on a buying trip in California. Frank Perkins remembers the first time he saw Zan Parr Bar, "I was at a show and Matlock came in and got me. He was just on his way back from California. He said, 'I want you to come out and see this colt I got.' So I went out and he unloaded this sorrel colt right there on the street. He asked me what I thought of the colt. I said I thought he'd win about everything there was with him. He did too."

A Perfectionist

Matlock Rose set high standards for himself, his horses, and the people who worked for him. If he was dissatisfied with the way his horse worked at the show he would take it back home, work it no matter what time it was, and head back to the show the next



What A Line Up! 1951 in San Antonio
Left to right James Calhoun on Ceaser's Pistol, Andy Hensely on Poco Bueno, Milt Bennett on Poco Tivio, Phil Williams on Skeeter and Matlock Rose on Jessie James.

ship and set another NCHA earnings record that year. The beautiful, black stallion had become the richest cutting horse in the world and the fact that he was 10 years old at the time says a lot about Foundation bloodlines and a lot about Matlock Rose as a horseman.

With that title Matlock Rose won his fifth NCHA World Championship and he had won four of them on different horses. That also says something about Matlock Rose as a horseman.

Throughout their marriage, Matlock and Carol Rose owned some of the greatest names in the Quarter Horse world. Their stallion roster included Peppy San, Peponita, Genuine Doc and

morning.

He rarely trusted anyone else to haul his horses and he took exceptional care of them when they traveled. His horses wore wraps when they hauled which Matlock put on himself. On a long journey Rose would stop every 300 miles or so, unload and unwrap all the horses, walk them out and then re-wrap and re-load. He knew the pressure that a show horse was under and was quoted as saying, "Nothing takes more out of a horse than hauling."

He was equally particular about the ground he would show his horses on. He knew that if the arena footing wasn't good then the risk of hurting the horse was greater than the winner's check. He

understood that a good horse would do whatever he was asked no matter what the conditions and that it was the rider's job to protect him.

Matlock Rose was not only a great horse trainer, he was a great teacher. Always economical with his advice, he had the gift of saying what the rider needed to do at the exact time he needed to do it. He was generous with his help; often refusing to take payment for the help he gave. Riders who trained with Rose say that he never missed anything and that it seemed as though he had eyes in the back of his head. Matlock had his back turned, talking to some friends, when a rider started to lope her horse. Without even looking at her he called out, "You're on the wrong lead!" The girl was indeed on the wrong lead and was amazed that he had known without even looking. She said, "Isn't that incredible! He can tell just by listening!" Rose chuckled to his friends and explained his omniscience, "She's always on the wrong lead!"

He loved horse trading and he and Perkins did a lot of deals back and forth. It was through Matlock that Frank found his AQHA Champion Mr Sun O Lena. "I had been looking for a son of Doc O'Lena for about 11 years and I'd just been up to Oklahoma to look at a couple. I didn't like either one of them and on the way back home I stopped to visit Matlock." Frank recounts. "He was coming back from the barn and he asked me, 'What are you doin' up here cowboy?' I told him about the horses I'd been looking at. He said, 'You didn't like them did you?' I said no. He told me, 'I've got the best sonofabuck that Doc O'Lena ever sired in my barn.'" The two men went back to the barn to look at Mr Sun Olena. The stallion was a little shaggy but it only took Perkins one circle around the horse. Rose asked, "This is what you want isn't it?" Mr Sun O Lena went on to earn \$37,306.78 in NCHA in addition to his AQHA Championship and has sired numerous NCHA and AQHA performers.

Matlock had been raised to give his honest opinion and that didn't always sit well with people. He didn't believe in stringing a client along, telling them that with a few more months training their horse would be a world beater just to get more money out of them. If the horse was good enough he told them so and if it wasn't he told them that too and he didn't sugar coat it. This quality might not have been appreciated by some but to those who wanted to learn from the master, it was invaluable.

Frank Perkins remembers, "Matlock kept a perfect barn and he kept all his horses in halter shape. He worked his horses when

they were fresh, he didn't lope them to death before he went out to cut a cow." Perkins recalls seeing countless bridles in Matlock's tack room and every one spotless and hung up perfectly. He says, "Matlock did things his way; that was his trademark. And it worked."

A Legend

There was a dispersal sale in 1983 when Matlock and Carol Rose divorced. 105 horses were to be sold and everyone who was anyone in the Quarter Horse world made plans to be there. The sale

horses were something to see but the highlight of the sale was when Matlock rode into the arena on the 25 year old Peppy San before the sale. They worked a few cows and then Rose reached down and took the bridle off Peppy San. The two legends cut without the bridle and there weren't too many dry eyes watching. Frank Perkins was there to see that and says, "He loved that horse."

Matlock Rose won numerous other championships in other Quarter Horse events. In 1976 he showed Mr Impressive to the AQHA Champion Two Year Old Stallion title and the following year won the AQHA Western Pleasure Stallion Championship with him. He showed Zan Parr Bar to both his AQHA Three Year Old Stallion and AQHA Hi Point awards in 1977 and then won the AQHA World Champion Aged Stallion



with the great horse in 1978. So he was winning championships in AQHA halter at the same time he was winning cutting championships in NCHA.

He continued to train riders and win cuttings, winning the 1996 Legends Cutting in Belton, TX. The riders who trained with him learned more than they ever dreamed and if he demanded perfection and long hours from them he demanded it of himself as well. He could do more with one of his penetrating stares than other trainers could do with a thousand words.

Matlock Rose could and did do everything. He could fit a halter horse, handle a breeding stallion, pick out a future performance or halter star, rope a calf, train a pleasure horse **or** a cutter and train the rider. He could do it all and do it better than nearly anyone else of his day. He was truly a horseman and a legend. 🐎

For more on Matlock Rose read *Matlock Rose - The Horseman* by Sally Harrison