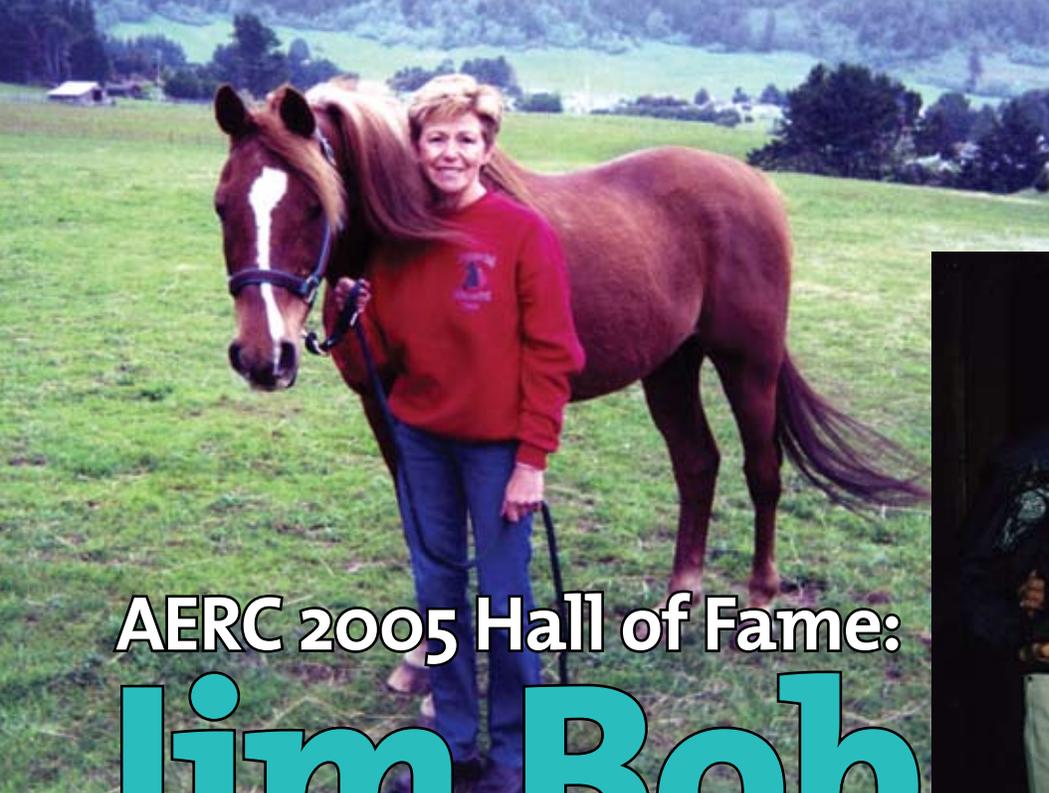


Joyce Sousa's Jim Bob is the first horse to be honored with both AERC's Pard'ners Award and Hall of Fame



Left: Jim Bob and Joyce at home (photo by Dennis Sousa). Here: Dennis and Joyce Sousa holding their Hall of Fame painting by AERC sponsor Carol Saucedo at the 2006 AERC Convention awards banquet (photo: Bill Gore).

AERC 2005 Hall of Fame: **Jim Bob**

BY GENIE STEWART-SPEARS

The 2005 Hall of Fame horse is Jim Bob, an unregistered Arabian gelding, owned by Joyce Sousa of Hydesville, California. Jim Bob is the only horse in the history of AERC to be honored with both the Hall of Fame and the Pard'ners Awards (2001).

With 18 years of competition, Jim Bob has 8,802 career miles. He has started 44 and completed 37 one-day 100s. Of those, he topped 27 times with nine first places.

In 1987, it was sheer luck that the 5-year-old gelding didn't go to slaughter when he went through an auction in northern California with a foot injury. Fortunately, it was concealed with dirt.

Californians Shirley and Jim Scott bought him, along with several other horses. The Scotts discovered the injury, doctored it for several months, and then Shirley started him the following year in endurance.

(Jim Bob was left with a five-inch scar on his coronary band that makes the bulb grow out misshapen. In addition, the hoof continually grows out with a crack. Egg bar shoes are used on his back feet in order to stabilize the old injury, but the injury has never been a problem.)

A thousand-dollar horse

After several competitions, Shirley found Jim Bob was a bit more exuberant than desired, having unseated her—with a resulting fractured arm. A few months earlier, Joyce Sousa had seen Jim Bob at a

ride and told the Scotts if they ever wanted to sell him, she wanted him. Thus, without further discussion or examination, for \$1,000 Jim Bob became part of the Sousa family when he was 6 years old.

"He was wild when I got him," said Joyce of the 15.2-hand, 940-pound gelding, "a real gusto horse! He'd toss his head and pull on the reins wanting to go."

Nevertheless, Joyce says she has never been afraid of him and that he is a fun horse to ride. "He is gentle as a lamb but when you get on his back in a competition, this is a horse that totally loves to go fast. He thinks he should be first. There are people like this, and there are horses like this. It is their personality. He likes being number one and having a pack behind him. But, boy, don't let them try to pass him. He'll just go faster!

"Believe me," she said, "I've cussed him out because he needed cussing. I never took the Lord's name in vain, but I have raised my voice and said, 'Damn you, Jim!'

"He gets so wound up that sometimes I have to make flying mounts! I've been known to be hanging only half on while he's going like crazy down the trail. I got really good at hanging on like a monkey on his back. And, he is still that way," she added.

At home, though, in the Sousa's pasture, Jim Bob is the lowest in the pecking order. He walks away if horses even lay their ears back at him. Joyce recalled one exception: "Jim decided he was going to be a new mare's protector and mentor. We had an-

other gelding that challenged him for that right. Those two fought so hard, Jim Bob had to be taken to the vet. Although he got a big cut on his leg that required stitches, he won the fight and the mare!

"I'll never forget," mused Joyce about the Jim Bob's gentle nature, "when a doe and fawn came into the pasture at feeding time. That little fawn went underneath Jim, facing forward between his front legs, and was eating out of the grain pan with him. Jim never moved until the fawn finished and moved out from underneath him."

A rock-steady mount

Joyce also talked about how rock-steady Jim Bob is on the trail. An encounter with a bear came to mind. She was riding in the pitch-black night along a steep mountain trail when a bear came crashing down the hill about 25 feet in front of her and Jim Bob. "Jim stopped, and I thought he was going to bolt. I grabbed on to his mane, and I didn't say a word. He held his breath, I swear, for two or three minutes. Then the bear continued down into the canyon. Jim let out a big sigh and started walking down the trail again.

"On the other hand," she laughed, "riding him along the beach we came upon what looked like a log that turned out to be a seal. It barked at Jim! He jumped about 15 feet to the side and then he circled it. He wasn't going to run away from it, he was trying to

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figure out what it was by circling it. To this day, if he sees a black log, he studies it and makes a wide berth around it! He's not sure if it is a barking log or not."

A one-person horse

Jim doesn't have the personality to be a mentor horse. "First off, Jim Bob is still a handful to ride," Joyce stated. "But most importantly, a horse is like a cup of coffee—very personal. My horse knows every move I make and how to compensate for those movements. He doesn't have to think about anything but the trail because he knows by my voice and body language what I want." Jim is like those horses, said Joyce, that "bond to their rider and work better with that person and that keeps them safer."

At 24, not ready for retirement

Joyce bought two horses, one six years ago and another one more recently, to take Jim's place on the trail. "That just hasn't happened. Jim is not ready to quit!" she laughed.

Jim Bob is 24 years old now. Joyce still takes him to rides but just to finish. Some years back, Joyce says riders were making her feel guilty about continuing to compete on him. Some felt that he needed to retire. So in 2002, when Jim Bob was 22 years old, and after he tied for first place with Sousa's son-in-law's horse in a 100-miler, she retired him—but only temporarily.

"We didn't put a saddle on him for nearly a year, but it caused him to fall into a deep state of depression," she said. "As a geriatric nurse, I am very aware of symptoms of depression, unhappiness and worthlessness. I saw this come over Jim. He would watch sadly when we took horses off to ride, and he would stay off by himself a lot. I told my husband that I didn't care what people said, I was not going to make this wonderful horse miserable by not riding him. He did not want to be retired. He loves camping, and he loves going.

"But," she added, "I don't go fast on him anymore. The 50-milers are not any effort for him and I let him pick the pace. I could be riding some younger horses, but I owe this to Jim for all that he has given me."

Joyce had these final words to share: "When God gives you a gift, recognize it, treasure it and treat it as God would want you to treat it. There is such a special connection between some horses and riders. I have that with Jim. He has filled a part of my life with such joy and happiness."