

The [Horse Breeders and Owners Conference](#) is excited to present Frank Merrill as a speaker.

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From [America's Horse](#)

As Frank Merrill thumbed through the pages of the May 1969 Western Horseman, his eyes stopped on a small picture of a man in a cardigan sweater



posing a red dun mare. The mare gave him goose bumps. “Miss Jim 45, shown by Matlock Rose, Grand Champion Mare of the Houston Livestock Show,” it read.

A 20-year-old Michigan State student and aspiring Quarter Horse showman, Merrill knew Rose by reputation and knew he lived in Gainesville, Texas. He decided to give him a call.

“Mr. Rose,” he began, “You don’t know me, but I’m Frank Merrill of Fremont, Michigan, and I’ve just seen this picture of you and Miss Jim 45. I’d like to know if she’s for sale.”

“Are you sitting down?” Rose asked. “Because we want quite a bit of money for her.”

How much?” Merrill quietly asked.

“Thirty thousand dollars,” Rose replied.

“Mr. Rose, I’m coming out west after school gets out in June,” Merrill said. “I may not buy her, but I’d sure like to see a \$30,000 mare.”

When June rolled around, Merrill and a friend loaded their gear in a truck and two-horse trailer and headed for Texas. They stopped at several places along the way, pricing mares – the best they saw were only \$15,000. At Joe Kirk Fulton's ranch in Texas, Merrill saw the mare currently leading the high-point halter standings, and he asked her showman, Wayne Pooley, how she'd stack up against Miss Jim 45. "In all honesty," Pooley said, "this mare couldn't even warm her up."

Two weeks after his trip began, Merrill arrived in Gainesville, looked up George Tyler and Matlock Rose, who owned Miss Jim 45, and asked to see her. Rose ordered a hired hand, Leo Huff, to bring her out. "All Leo got out of the stall was her head and neck," Merrill said. "I knew I had to have her."

After asking if she could ride – at which time Huff threw a saddle and hackamore on her, and showed Merrill the prettiest trot and canter he'd ever seen – Merrill offered Tyler \$20,000 for Miss Jim 45. "Son, that's the best offer I've had today, but I believe I'll turn it down," Tyler said.

The very next morning, Merrill obligingly paid \$25,000 for Miss Jim 45.

A 1966 red dun mare by Jim Harlan out of the Waggoner Ranch mare Miss Paulo 45, Miss Jim 45 was bred by James Nance of Oklahoma City. As a yearling and 2-year-old, Nance showed her to the Oklahoma high-point filly title for her ages, before selling her to Tyler and Rose in early February 1969. By the time Tyler and Rose sold her to Frank Merrill, Miss Jim 45 had been shown 69 times, with 65 firsts, three seconds and a third.

"After I bought her," Merrill said, "I asked Matlock, 'Mr. Rose, isn't a lot of this mare's success due to the fact that you're showing her and know all the judges and they respect you?'"

"He said, 'Son, anyone could lead this mare into the ring and do just as well as me.' That was exactly right. All I ever did was lead this mare into a class. Judges just about had to use her."

Tyler added his two cents worth.

"I got a mini-clinic from The Master," Merrill said of George Tyler's lesson. "He showed me how to set her and get her ears up. He gave me three pieces of advice. First, he said, 'Either be the first horse in the class with this mare, or the last, because inevitably, the judge is going to compare everything he has seen with this mare. Give him a good impression.' Second, he told me, 'You're going to have to hide this mare until right before a class. If people see her, they're liable to pull their mares out of the class.'"

"Finally, Mr. George said, 'A mare like this, you show in a plain leather halter. For the idiots out there, put a brass nameplate on the side that says 'Miss Jim 45.'"

Armed with this knowledge and a simple halter, Merrill showed Miss Jim 45 throughout the summer of '69, giving horsemen nervous fits in his home state of Michigan. When the Chicago

International Livestock Exposition rolled around, the self-proclaimed “kid from the sticks” and the already famous red dun mare were in line as Jack Kyle judged. Kyle casually glanced at the mare, placed her first in the 3-year-old mares and grand champion of the show. “Afterwards,” Merrill said, “Jack walked up to me and said, ‘Son, I don’t know who you are, but you’ve got the greatest mare I’ve ever laid eyes on.’ ”

Praise from master horsemen kept Merrill daydreaming, so he enlisted the help of veteran showman Stretch Bradley of Ohio and set out in 1970 to win the high-point halter title. Throughout 1970, Bradley and Merrill showed the fabulous mare at the biggest shows, against the stiffest competition. Their journey took them 120,000 miles, to 153 shows. Their record: 139 firsts, 12 seconds a third and a fifth, and grand champion mare at every show but 16. “We had a hot rod El Camino and a two-horse trailer,” Merrill recalled. “We’d get so many trophies, we’d stop at gas stations and give first-place trophies to kids. We kept all the grands.”

At the end of the year, Miss Jim 45 had earned 436 points, more halter points than any mare had ever earned in AQHA showing. (AQHA Champion Magnolia Gay holds the record for most halter points – 941 – earned by a mare in the open division. However, Miss Jim 45 still holds the record for most halter points earned in one year in open showing.)

More than 30 years after Miss Jim 45’s high-point campaign, old-time horsemen still stretch their memories trying to find comparisons to the great red dun. Over the years, Al Dunning, Matlock Rose, Larry Sullivant, Jerry Wells, Jack Brainard, Jack Kyle, Harold Hudspeth and the late George Tyler and Stretch Bradley have attested to her greatness. Many consider her the greatest halter mare that ever lived, and those who never saw her, ask for descriptions.

“All the time, people come up to me at horse shows and ask, ‘Could you tell me about Miss Jim 45?’ ” Merrill said.

“She was the prettiest red dun mare you ever saw,” Merrill said. “She had tiger stripes down her legs and back. She had the kindest eyes, pretty little ears and a sharply chiseled head with nice flare to her nostrils. A real pretty, feminine head.

“She had the prettiest neck,” he continued, “which came perfectly out of her shoulder. A really slender neck, feminine and trim in the throatlatch. During the time I showed her, it was in vogue to roach manes, so the majority of the time, she was shown roach. She had a perfectly sloped shoulder, a pronounced wither, nice depth to her heart, a short back and a long, bulging croup.

“Her V was so sharp, and her forearm so well-conformed in how it tapered into her knees, well, you couldn’t stand her up anyway but straight. Her stifle wasn’t overdone, but just right, and her gaskin was as big as you could make it. It was all natural, though – balanced, but not overdone. Even with all her expression of muscle, she could really move – prettiest little trot and canter you ever saw.”

And in a voice so soft and musing he seemed to have gone into a trance, Merrill thought a moment and added, “Everything Miss Jim 45 did, she did pretty.”

Miss Jim 45 only had one foal, a colt by Boston Mac named Mr Colt 45. He was never shown in halter, but had seven race starts. Miss Jim 45 died in 1994. She was inducted into the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame in 2000.