

Golden Governor

The First Stallion Class Champion of the Celebration Leaves a Legacy of Success

By Josephine Cozean Styron

In 1959 a beautiful palomino stallion named Golden Governor became the first horse to win the Stallion Class at the horse show that would become known as the MFTHBA Annual Fall Show and Celebration. At that time there was no stakes class. The following year “Governor” won the Model Stud Class. Although few people realized it at the time, Golden Governor would stamp many of his



Golden Governor won the 1960 Model Stud Class. Photo courtesy of MFTHBA Hall of Fame

progeny with, not only good looks, but also a killer foxtrot and the ability to succeed at many different endeavors.

“Golden Governor was charismatic. He had a lot of style and personality, and everyone wanted a horse just like that,” said Janet Esther of Lebanon, Missouri, the widow of Dale Esther, the owner and rider of Governor. “He was a high-style horse. He had a smooth gait and a big lope. But his big deal was his foxtrot. People wanted to ride a horse that moved like he did,” said Janet.

Golden Governor, who was bred by Joe McCain, was by Ozark Golden King and was out of Betty Fox. The stallion, born in 1943, was the beautiful golden color that was so popular during that era. Because there was no Fox Trotter registry at that time, he was registered in the Golden Horse Breed Association. But the post-World War II era then was not very kind to horses. People no longer farmed with them and no longer used them for transportation. “Dale rode Golden Governor in parades and the few horse shows there were,” said Janet.

“Dale mainly used Governor for breeding and riding in parades. But Governor was really broke--you could do anything with him. He was a using horse. Mr. McCain had used him on his farm, and Dale rode him after cattle. He could do anything he wanted to on Governor,” said Janet. The beautiful stallion was also so gentle that women and children could ride him.

Golden Governor became known for siring horses that had many of these characteristics. “People just brought whatever mares they had to be bred to him,” said Janet. “He was able to put his foxtrot on a high percentage of colts--even to non Fox Trotter mares. Of all the mares that he bred, at least 90% of them would foxtrot. Governor was prepotent.”

Probably no one in the late 1950’s, while Dale Esther, Joe Hinds, and others were working together to establish what would become the MFTHBA, realized what a legacy the remarkable golden stallion would leave, and for how long it would last. Many of the most accomplished Fox Trotters of today trace back to Gold-

en Governor. Some of these horses are outstanding in the show ring, while others have gone on to achieve acclaim in different venues.

Here are just a few examples: All three 2015 3-Year-Old Futurity winners, Paula Deen (Open Winner), Heza Rock Star (Open-Am Winner), and Sparkling Trax (Amateur Owned and Trained Winner) trace back to Governor on both sides. The 2015 Spring Show Open Versatility Champion, Majestic Sunrise, traces back to Governor on both sides. And, Foxfire’s Little Britches, a mare who in 2014 became only the third Missouri Fox Trotter to successfully complete the 100-Mile One Day Western States Trail Ride (known as the Tevis Cup), is also Golden Governor-bred on both sides.

And truly, many of our regular, non-competitive horses, also seem to embody the desirable traits of their ancestor, Golden Governor. One example is Sergeant Major Sunrise, who is owned by 4-P’s Ranch. This young palomino is known for carrying inexperienced riders safely through any terrain, even if they are by themselves; go swimming and pull people in innertubes through the water; and cheerfully and expertly perform cattle work in a sale barn, “with a smile on his face,” said his trainer Jeff Peck.

Golden Governor, who died in 1963, left an astounding legacy of horses who, willingly and beautifully, really can do it all.

Cover: Legend’s Wendy, 2014 Sr. Open WGC winner is a descendant of golden Governor.