

For AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

AMERICA'S HORSE

NOVEMBER 2007 • www.aqha.com

A photograph of a group of horses and two men in cowboy hats. The horses are of various colors, including brown, black, and white. The men are wearing cowboy hats and are holding reins. The background is a grassy field.

GENERATIONS OF RANCHERS
THE JOHN SCOTT FAMILY WINS
THE BEST REMUDA AWARD

"WORLD" CHAMPION



EDNA MAE HOLDEN

**The best of the breed,
immortalized in bronze.**

By Holly Clanahan



HE STRIDES ACROSS THE prairie with grace and ease, his mane and tail blowing gently in the Oklahoma wind. His conformation is classic, and the look in his eyes says just what he is: a world champion.

It certainly can be said that winners at the AQHA World Championship Show are molded and shaped. And this one was too – of clay cast into bronze to commemorate both Oklahoma's centennial and AQHA's influence on the Sooner State.

"World Champion" was sculpted by native Oklahoman Harold T. Holden, who has been capturing cowboy culture in sculptures and paintings for more than 35 years. The larger-than-life sculpture will be dedicated at the Oklahoma State Fair Park – home to the AQHA World Show since 1976 – at 10 a.m. November 16 during this year's championship show.

Realizing that this sculpture would be on display for thousands of horse lovers – and the best trainers and exhibitors in the business – Harold, who's known as "H" to his friends, knew it had to be just right.

As a lifelong horseman who had already sculpted a number of horses, he had an excellent eye for equine anatomy and proportions.

"I think you have to be around horses a lot, look at them a lot. You get to know how things bend," he says.

But he also had some help on this one, to make sure it had just the right air of an American Quarter Horse with world-class conformation and athleticism.

Cam Foreman, AQHA's executive director of shows and regional services; Jim Jennings, AQHA executive director of publications; and Alex Ross, AQHA executive director of judges, were called in as expert advisers.

"These guys know more than I do about conformation," H says. "I changed whatever they said" after they viewed a small clay model of the horse.

H's wife, Edna Mae Holden, recalls the men's visit to the studio: "Everybody was real quiet for a while, and you're thinking, 'OK, somebody start talking!'"

But the reticence was rooted in admiration, not disapproval.

About the Artist

HELPING DRAG CALVES AT A SPRING BRANDING ON THE FAMED Pitchfork Ranch in Guthrie, Texas, or watching the same done by Hawaiian "paniolos" at the Parker Ranch ... it's all in a day's work for Harold T. Holden.

"H" loves the cowboy lifestyle, whether he's living it directly or reliving it through sculpting or painting.

He cast his first sculpture in 1971, although art wasn't his day job then. He had attended Oklahoma State University and graduated from Texas Academy of Art, which prepared him for a career in commercial art. He went on to become art director for *Horseman Magazine*, painting at night. After a stint in the Navy, H decided in 1973 to concentrate full time on his art.

It was a gutsy move that's "not something I would recommend to anybody," he says. But by the early '80s, he had received several commissions for bronzes from the National Cattlemen's Association, and his career was jump started.

These days, H is well-known for his public monuments, of which "World Champion" is the latest.

Visitors to Oklahoma might also come across a sculpture of Will Rogers on horseback, which sits at Oklahoma City's airport named after the cowboy philosopher. Another renowned sculpture is a kneeling cowboy commissioned by Oklahoma State University as part of memorial to victims of a plane crash that involved the school's basketball team.

By the end of 2007, H should have 19 monuments in Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas, with several more planned for dedication in 2008.

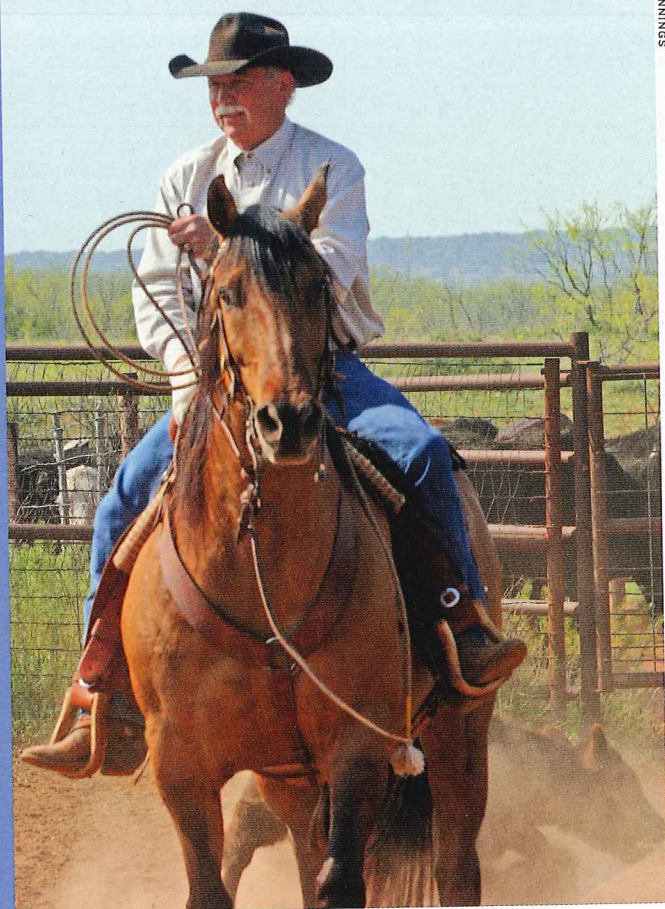
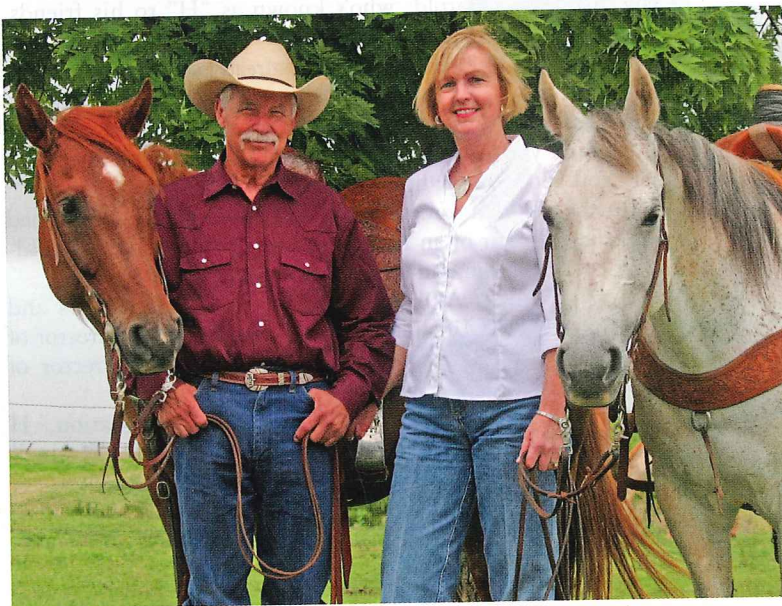
It's important work, his wife, Edna Mae, says.

"It's historical. ... It's something that can be there from now on."

"We're really proud of the piece," Cam says, and "it was quite a distinct honor" to help in its refinement.

Alex says H tried to "craft a horse that was a generic Quarter Horse. It's not a roping horse, it's not a halter horse. I think he depicted that well."

HOLLY CLANAHAN



JIM JENNINGS

And Jim was glad to see the project awarded to someone who's as comfortable in the saddle as he is behind the easel or the clay.

"I've known H a long time, and I sure think he's qualified to do the bronze," Jim says. "I'm glad he was selected."

For inspiration, H had to look no farther than his own pasture.

He and Edna Mae own several horses and enjoy roping whenever they get the chance. The Zippin Kid was a good heading horse before a pasture injury resulted in a "Sweeney," or atrophied, shoulder.

From the other side, though, he looks good, and he's a nice stout horse.

And H knew that one of his horse's ancestors, Zippo Pat Bars, sired many renowned show horses, so he figured that some semblance of "Zip" would be right at home at the World Show.

He did fix a few other things, though.

The original horse's pasterns are "a little straight," H allows, and Edna Mae teasingly elaborates: "It's like riding a pogo stick."

But the bronze version, we know, rides like a champion. 🐾

Visit www.hholden.com to learn more about the sculptor and see other of his works. Go to www.oklahoma-centennial.com for more on the Oklahoma Centennial Commission that commissioned the sculpture.