

The purpose of the Alabama Quarter Horse Association’s Pioneer Horseman Award is to honor an individual residing in the state of Alabama who has been instrumental in the long-term breeding, showing, raising, and caring for the American Quarter Horse for at least 20 years.  This nominee does not have to be a member of the Alabama Quarter Horse Association.  The recipient of this award is chosen by a committee made up of current ALQHA members and/or board members who have been appointed annually by the current ALQHA president.

 **James Wilson Coker** is this year’s recipient. Mr. James is a cattleman and a horseman – he has been a breeder, trainer, roper, and horse show judge for over 50 years.

James Wilson saw his first Quarter Horse in 1956 when John Larry McDougle rode his Quarter Horse stallion to the Halloween Party held on the Hayneville football field. Growing up on what he later named as Rafter J Ranch, James Wilson already owned a McCurdy Walking Horse named Lucy and he soon bred her to McDougle’s stallion to raise his first half Quarter Horse, Jim Dandy. In 1960 at the age of 16 he attended the Southeastern Livestock Exposition and Rodeo and talked with Ralph Eagle about some Quarter Horse colts he had for sale – all Harlan colts, out of Rey and Sandrift mares. James Wilson drove over to look at them, but they were out of his price range. Soon, however, Mr. Frank Wilton advised about a Harlan colt James Wilson might be able to afford – he soon purchased Tom Harlan, a son of Harlan out of a Rey mare that Pete Reynolds had given T.A. Simpson, and the rest is history. Barrel racing had just come to Alabama and soon Rafter J Ranch was hauling heavily on the national rodeo, open show, and AQHA circuits. In 1966, Bob Robey asked why Tom wasn’t being shown at halter – 24 months later Tom had 5 Grands, 5 Reserves, 15 halter points and his AQHA Championship. Mr. James eventually became and remained an AQHA judge for over a decade. Through the years he put together an impressive broodmare band and bred and stood such stallions as Zan Parr Bar son Zany and Cryin Time, by Triple Chick and out of his ROM Champion halter mare Chubby Ann Star. Chubby was a modern and visually striking mare – in fact, a photo of Chubby stayed by Orren Mixer’s side as he painted the “Ideal Quarter Horse” - that iconic painting that was commissioned by the AQHA in 1968 and remains our association’s mascot today. Mr. James has often said that “you can’t know a good horse unless you’ve been around a great one” – and he’s been blessed with owning and showing some of the great ones in his time.

      Others have noted that James Wilson “doesn’t look at a horse, he looks through him” – something that you will find much truth in if you have ever asked his opinion on your stock; a stickler for conformation, and a lover of speed, athleticism, beauty, and natural soundness in a horse, …

Ladies and Gentlemen, our 2012 Pioneer Horseman of the year is Mr. James Wilson Coker.