



Dick Bingham **A Positive Change**

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Each year, Monday morning of the AQHA World Show is the first day of classes. It's also halter day. Halter classes start at 8 a.m. and go until they are all finished. Of course, halter is not considered by many people to be one of the most exciting horse show events. As a result, there are not very many people in the stands at eight in the morning. Dick and Karen Bingham are usually there, and they were this year.

Dick is AQHA President but that had nothing to do with him and his wife being there that early in the morning. "Karen and I like halter the best," Dick grinned. "We always have."

"Always" goes back more than 30 years for Richard D. Bingham of Elk Grove Village, Illinois. In 1962 he and Karen bought their first Quarter Horse, a weanling halter colt. Then they bought another one or two, and then things snowballed—a typical Quarter Horse story—their kids got old enough to show.

That's how President Bingham got into the Quarter Horse industry, in a big way, as we'll see later, but it doesn't explain everything about his life today. The Bingham family runs a bus company, with terminals in three different cities.

Dick and Karen both were raised in west central Illinois, near Beardstown. When Karen started school, she attended a one-room schoolhouse in the country. There was no bus service, so her mother, in 1947, purchased a '38 Chevrolet and started making the rounds each morning and afternoon, taking the kids to school and then back home. In 1949, there were nine kids in the area who needed rides, so she bought a station wagon. Then in 1951, she bought her first bus, one that would carry up to 34 passengers. In a short time, her fledgling business expanded to six buses and included the Beardstown school district.

Dick and Karen were married in 1956, and in 1961, when Karen's parents, the Davidsmeyers, expanded their company and moved to Chicago to take over an already existing bus company, the Bingham family went with them and joined the business.

Today, Davidsmeyer Bus Service owns about 130 school buses and provides bus service for 10 Chicago area school districts. The company also owns Mid-America

Charter Lines, a charter bus operation with offices in Elk Grove Village, as well as Grand Prairie, Texas, near Dallas, and Commerce City, Colorado, near Denver. Elk Grove Village is a suburb of Chicago, and Davidsmeyer and Mid-America headquarters is located directly under the approach to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. The other two divisions are also located near those cities' major airports. The total employee work force for both companies is approximately 300.

The coach division handles tours throughout the country, and in addition to normal tour buses, there are three executive coaches that are leased periodically by major corporations and big name entertainers. Barbara Bush used one of them on campaign tours a few years ago. Playboy founder Hugh Hefner leased one to travel to his high school reunion.

The Bingham family live adjacent to the bus company, and it was there that they began their Quarter Horse business.

"We bought the property next to us," Bingham said, "to have more room for the bus company, but that also gave us room for a barn. For a while, we kept up to six broodmares right here in town."

It was about that time that horse shows began to hold an attraction for the whole Bingham family. The first of the children to get the bug was Rob, who showed Tee Jay Skeeter, a mare by Jackie Bee with which he earned points in halter, showmanship and hunter under saddle. Then Bill, the oldest son, got a daughter of Jet Smooth called Miss Sun Jet, which earned points in halter, showmanship, western pleasure and hunter under saddle.

"We were showing a lot up at Libertyville, Illinois, at that time," Bingham said. "One time they had an open showmanship class for anybody. Our daughter Kim was seven years old, and she showed Rob's mare. She won that class, and then we had all three of them hooked."

For the next several years, the whole Bingham family was together at a horse show nearly every weekend. They achieved quite a bit of success, with all three children qualifying for the Youth Finals (now the AQHA World Show) several times.

By this time, they had totally outgrown their six-stall barn in town, and the family purchased a small farm near Harvard, Illinois. The horse operation was moved there, and although it was a 50-mile drive from their home, all three children made the trip nearly every day after school to work their horses.

Of course, things change, and as Bill and Rob grew up, married and had families of their own, their priorities did not include horses. Both of them work for the bus company today, but Kim's story is different. She lives and works at the farm near Harvard, and hers is full-time job—the Bingham family have approximately 150 horses there.

Kim manages the horse operation, which includes training and fitting the show horses, breeding six stallions, and caring for all the weanlings, yearlings and broodmares. She also takes the horses to shows, but she and her father have agreed not to show any horses this year because of his position as president.

"Kim shows only our own horses, and is an amateur" Bingham said. "She especially likes halter and western pleasure, and wants to get back into reining when we start showing again."

The Bingham's stallion battery includes a full brother to Mr Impressive called I Do Impress, which has sired a reserve world champion and a number of futurity winners, a son of Sir Quincy Dan, Call Me Explosive; and Continentalclassic, by the Continental.

"We also have a son of Two Eyed Jack, Celestial Jack, that we use quite a lot," Bingham said. "I really like the Two Eyed Jack line. Not including the first mare that Kim showed, she's had nothing since that wasn't Two Eyed Jack-bred. She had a mare called Queenie Pat Jack and one called Miss Pearly Jack, and she had a gelding called Jacks Sensation. She had good luck with all of them. Of course, back when she was showing those horses, we showed them in a lot more events than people do today."

All three of those horses were shown in multiple events. The two mares were both Superior halter horses and had numerous points in other events, and the gelding is ROM in three events, with points in four more.

"Kim just purchased a new weanling filly that she will be popping out next year as a yearling," Bingham continued, "and she also shows her grandmother's stallion, a horse called Recognized, by Diversified. He's a three-year-old, and won his class at the Congress last year."

In recent years, Bingham's interest has not been limited to the horse show arena. Four years ago he was involved in a partnership on a race filly, and in 1992 he was appointed to the AQHA Racing Council. There he experienced first-hand some of the major problems facing Quarter Horse racing, and worked to help solve some of them. At the All American Sale in Ruidoso, New Mexico, this year, he partnered with former president Jim Barton of New York and AQHA Director and racing committee member Walt Fletcher of Kansas on a yearling colt they will start in the spring.

Bingham has been to a number of races during his term on the executive committee, and he and Karen like Ruidoso so well, they are considering retiring there when the time comes.

The Bingham's became involved with the Illinois Quarter Horse Association in the very beginning, and Dick has been a director in that association for a number of years. He has also served two years as its president. Karen has been secretary/treasurer of the association for the past 17 years, and has handled the secretarial duties at the annual futurity for 10 years. The Bingham's also keep all the state association's records on their company's mainframe computer, to include all the show placings, entry fees, etc.

Bingham became an AQHA Director in 1981. He served on the youth activities and site selection committees, and was chairman of the youth activities committee for two years before being named to the executive committee in 1990.

Executive committee members are elected from the board of directors, and normally serve five years on that committee. During that time, if they are re-elected each year, they advance up through the ranks of member and each of the vice president posts, until the fifth year, when they are named president.

AQHA's youth program has been Bingham's main interest since he first became a director, and he considers that program to be the future of the industry today. "Even some of today's directors have come up through the youth program," he said. "It's growing like wildfire, and it tickles me to death."

Bingham considers his year as president to have been very positive, and says that his biggest goal, when he was appointed to the executive committee, was to let the

membership know that it is their association, and that the staff and the executive committee work for the members.

“I have made it a point to be out with the membership, where I can talk to them and carry their ideas back to Amarillo,” Bingham said. “I have been attending some of the little, local shows, and when I walk back through the barns, someone will always say, ‘Bingham, what are you doing back here? You’re on the executive committee; you’re supposed to stay up front.’ Well, back in those barns is where I started, and that’s where I’ll be next March when I leave the executive committee. In the meantime, I want to talk to the people, and I want to hear what they think should be done. Those of us on the executive committee want to listen to their ideas, and implement them if we can. We’ve made some positive changes, and I think there are more coming.”