December 2020 DeWayne Brown (by Elayne Barclay)

As we move from autumn into the winter months it is time to pick a new PNER member to highlight and who better to learn more about than someone literally born into our endurance family: DeWayne Brown.

Even though becoming an accomplished horseman was basically a “birthright” for DeWayne, he has consistently taken the time to observe horses and fellow endurance riders, absorbing knowledge, to earn that title. His grandfather had a herd of 250, including nine breeding stallions, and DeWayne started “riding” while still in the womb of his mother, Joyce Brown. Once out into the world, Joyce continued to carry him with her when she rode, but as soon as he could hold on he rode in his own custom saddle, built by his grandfather, that attached to the back of his mom's saddle.

When thinking about his childhood, DeWayne recalled, “I would go out into the pasture and sit in the grass and just watch the horses for hours and hours, watching how they moved, how they spoke to each other, and just their behavior.” He put the knowledge he acquired by his observations to good use when he started to train his first horse when only nine years of age. He and his horse went on to become champions in the show ring multiple times. By the time he was thirteen he was training horses professionally.

DeWayne's family have been competing in endurance for three generations. He rode in his first endurance event when he was nine on one of his grandfather's home-bred Appaloosa horses, but even though his grandfather was closely involved with the Santiam Cascade Endurance Ride (the first and longest running endurance ride in the Pacific Northwest - 2021 will be its 58thyear), DeWayne didn't become a serious endurance rider until he returned to Oregon after being in the Navy. He had been riding 3-day eventing horses while stationed in Virginia, but there wasn't much of that going on in this part of the country so he decided to get serious about endurance. Even though he had a banner of a first year (completing 17 rides and earning Rookie of the Year) he was anxious to learn more. DeWayne said, “I always was good at learning by watching and early on I learned to watch those who are good and learn what they know. In those years the winning family was the Westlakes. I made myself a leech and would hang around their camp and vetting area and watched and helped whenever I could. Terry Westlake was a master, I learned a LOT and using the skills I learned from Terry and others I was able to make myself a valuable asset as a groom or crew person, allowing me many a free ride to countries and places I could not afford to go at the time. I have been fortunate to go all over the world with endurance, Dubai, Abu Dabi, Malaysia, Portugal, Australia, Holland, Belgium, France and Spain... it's been a blessing.”

DeWayne continues to watch and learn. He states that his biggest challenge has been “finding a way to be competitive that fits into my respect for the animal, its well-being and long-term health, and my desire to win. It's something that I struggle with. I have drawn back from where I was before I knew what I know now. Something that has been good for me was putting on Competitive Trail competitions here in the Northwest. You can "win" and not just run the legs off your horse.”

When asked about his current endurance mount, DeWayne said, “I don't really have a competition horse right now but I have one coming in the wings. He is one I have raised. His dam is the last foal my grandfather bred and raised out of his last endurance mare. His sire, a son of one of my most loved mounts, Gulastras Splash. He is currently three so next spring I will be starting him under saddle and we will see what he says he wants to do. If my horse doesn't like the game (endurance), he won't be forced to do it.”

Looking back over the years accumulating his record of over 14,000 miles, he recalls with a feeling of accomplishment, “I have ridden and walked and jogged a lot, winning as well as coming in tail end. I love to spend time seeing nature. I believe I have ridden more horses (134) on endurance rides than any other person. Highlights include winning Reserve National Champion 100 mile horse in 1995 and completing six 100 mile rides in that season, making the team for the Pan American Championship two times, and riding in the North American Championships in 2013 in Florida. But the most precious memories of all are riding with my grandmother in 1988 when she rode her very last endurance ride, she also rode with me on my very first endurance ride in 1972, and riding with my mom on her last endurance ride in 2013.”

Soon the days will be getting longer again and a new season of endurance adventures lurks in the not too distant future. Take the advice of an accomplished horseman: watch those who are good and learn what they know, hang around and help them, be a leech, who knows the places you will go!