

14 YOUR TURN

into the life

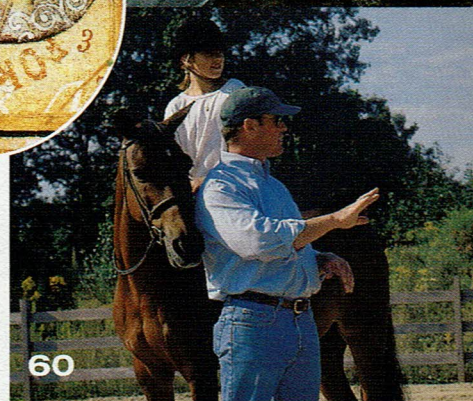
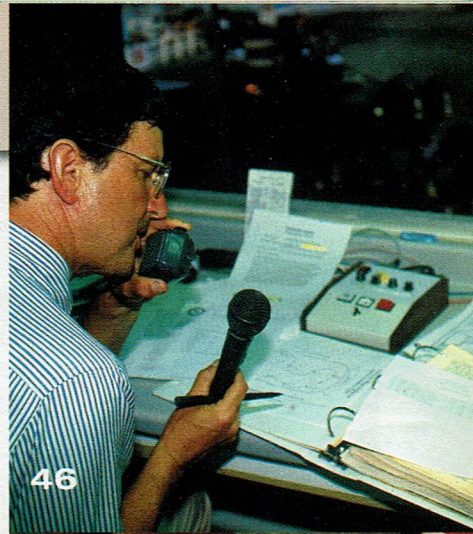
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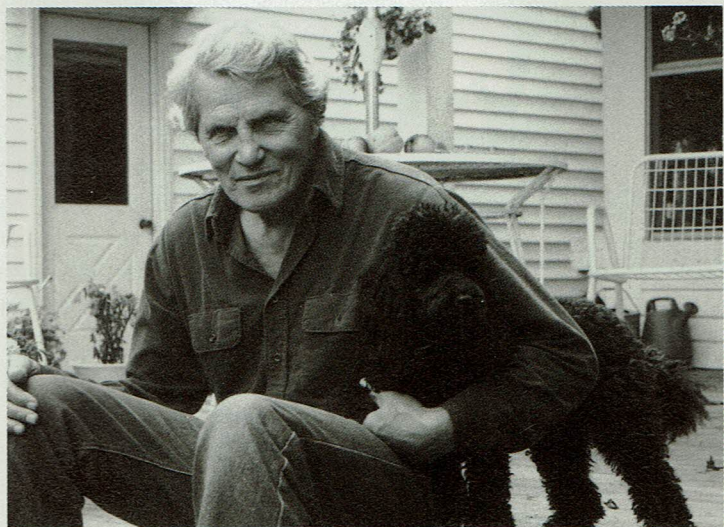
in the news

Sam Savitt: A Sketch

If you look through your equestrian library, especially if you've kept the horse books you loved as a youngster, chances are good that at least one was illustrated by Sam Savitt.

That's because Sam, who died on Christmas Day at the age of eighty-three, was the most prolific equine artist in America—and quite possibly the world. In addition to the illustrations in his own fifteen books, his paintings and drawings graced the pages of an astounding 150 others. And that doesn't include any of the comic books that starred Roy Roger's Trigger, Gene Autry's Champion, and the Lone Ranger's Silver (whom the artist regarded as the true stars of Western movies), or the well-known posters—of equine breeds, and the parts of horses, and their gaits—that adorned bedroom and barn-office walls for generations.

Fascinated by horses from an early age, Sam studied at New York City's Pratt Institute and the Art Students League. His two greatest heroes represented his two fields of expertise. One was Paul Brown, still one of the most respected equine artists this country has produced. The other was legendary trainer Gordon Wright, the founding father of hunter-seat equitation and the trainer of



Sam at home with his poodle, Spencer, in the summer of 1995.

PHOTO AND ARTWORK COURTESY OF BETTE SAVITT

such show-jumping greats as Bill Steinkraus, George Morris, and Ronnie Mutch.

It was through Gordon Wright that the now-classic *Draw Horses With Sam Savitt* came to be written. Its editor, Barbara Burn, recalls, "It was during the early '70s, when I was at Viking [Press]. Gordon Wright was looking to do a new edition of a book on the United States Equestrian Team that he had privately printed, and for which Sam had done the illustrations. That book finally went to another publisher; but in the meantime, Sam and I were trying to think up

a project for him to do. One day in my office, I asked Sam to help me with a personal problem, which was how to draw a horse facing right. Since childhood I'd had no problem drawing horses facing left, but I could never do them going the other direction. Always the natural teacher, Sam asked me for a piece of tracing paper, which someone in the art department found, and then he taught me how to adjust a left-facing horse into a right-facing horse. I asked if he had other tips like that, and he said, 'Sure.' Out of that grew the drawing book, which is now with its fourth publisher [Half Halt Press] and still going strong." As the Team's official artist, Sam went on to illustrate *Great Horses of the USET* and provide artwork for fundraising brochures and many other projects.

Teaching was always an integral part of Sam's life. He was one of the founders and leading lights of the American Academy of Equine Art, which since 1980 has provided fledgling artists with opportunities for learning and exhibiting. AEA president Werner Rentsch remembers the artist's vocal and positive force on juries that selected works for



Left: *First Time Out* "is a family favorite," says Bette Savitt, Sam's widow. "When Sam finished it, I said, 'This is one I want to keep.' The morning haze created a mood, and the look of the mare shows tenderness and concern." Right: *The Drop Jump* "is in North Salem; during the years we hunted with Golden's Bridge Hounds, it was an obstacle we did not look forward to."

the organization's shows. "Sam was supportive of new artists, but never at the expense of the subject—he was a stickler for correct conformation drawing."

Like the horses and riders he drew and painted, Sam Savitt was a celebrity wherever he went. Recognizing him from his books, people sought him out at receptions and horse shows for his autograph—and for the anecdotes for which he was famous. Many of his stories involved his experiences as an avid fox-hunter and equally enthusiastic trail-rider around his northern Westchester County (New York) home.

Several years ago, Werner and Sam conducted a workshop at a Thoroughbred farm in Ocala. "Sam loved to get up early," Werner recalls. "We'd walk around the farm just so Sam could look at horses. He loved to look at horses."

There's no more fitting way to remember Sam Savitt than by being reminded that he loved to look at horses. And thanks to his artistic skill, we have had the opportunity to see them through his eyes.—*Steven D. Price*

USET/AHSA Battle to Represent US Horse Sports

The US Equestrian Team and the American Horse Shows Association—for five decades the twin pillars of international horse sports in this country—will never be the same again. Each has tried to reinvent itself over the last few months, seeking a way to earn itself US Olympic Committee (USOC) recognition as the National Governing Body (NGB) for horse sports. Competing proposals from each were presented to the AHSA's National Convention and the USET Board of Trustees in January, accompanied by a spate of supporting and opposing e-mails, faxes, and press releases. Though the AHSA took no vote, the USET trustees did, choosing the plan proposed by the USET over that promoted by the AHSA. At press time, chances seemed slim that anything would change in time to meet an upcoming USOC deadline for the two to agree on a single NGB proposal. →



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