

## 2011 Riders Choice Winner

# JA Bannarr

Owned by Lori Windows

Ridden by: Lori Windows, Dana Iten, Cindy Schlund, Nelly Lewis, Bonnie Mielke, Jerry Cliff, and Aaron Mowrer

I purchased Bannarr sight unseen as a two year old in 1994 because he was the half brother of my good endurance horse, Benny. Fortunately, Bannarr was "Benny on Brains". He was easy to break, easy to train, and easy to get along with. I just had trouble fitting him into my ride schedule. In 1997, I found a rider for Bannarr, a young man by the name of Mark White. Bannarr and Mark were Reserve Champion Jr. Rider that year and Mark was High Point Junior Rider. Mark went to college the next year and once again, Bannarr sat out a year. The following year, my friend Jerry Cliff rode Bannarr a few LD's and I managed to ride him his first endurance 50's. I found out the workhorse I had under me, and the next year we did 600 miles of Endurance, placing no less than 2<sup>nd</sup> at every race.

In the Spring of 2000, I took Bannarr to Greenway Gallop in North Carolina to get an early ride. He won the ride but tripped crossing the finish line. By the time I got him home, he was non-weight bearing on his right foreleg. X-rays confirmed a huge triangle broken out from his cannon bone. Diagnosis from U of I was pasture pet. But miracles do happen, and by the time Spring of 2002 rolled around, my pasture pet was looking pretty darn sound. Another friend, Cindy Schlund, rode him comp all that season. I made her carry a 27# gel pad so she could ride Heavyweight and not compete against Shaman and me. About mid season, Joanne Gernant was getting pretty tired of being beaten by the team. She offered to buy Bannarr from me. When I told her I didn't think she and Bannarr would get along all that well, she replied, "I don't want to ride him. I just don't want anyone else to ride him against me."

The next year, Bannarr and I were back on the Endurance track with 400 miles of nothing worst that 2<sup>nd</sup> place. And the following season, another young rider took over. Dana Iten and Bannarr did a season of comp, and they followed that up in 2005 with perhaps the best season any one could ask for. The pair did 700 miles together. They won UMECRA, AHDRA, and AERC Midwest Jr. Championships. They won two Regional AHA Championships. They were Jr. Versatility team and placed in the Top Ten Mileage. It was Dana who best coined Bannarr's happy go lucky nature (albeit some could call it a little ADD). "You're riding along, concentrating on the trail, and all of a sudden Bannarr looks up into the sky and I swear he says, "Hey look at that cloud. It's shaped like Kentucky!"

I continued to ride Bannarr endurance, even did a 100 on him, and lent him to friends who needed a horse for a certain ride. And then, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008 – it happened. Bannarr slipped on some ice and we both took a horrendous fall down an embankment and into water. Bannarr scrambled off of me in time to prevent my drowning, and as I heard him trot back down the path to home, I remember thinking to myself, "At least he's sound." Of course, no one was home and most of you know that story. What some of you may not know was how depressed I was that Spring. My leg wasn't just broken, it was mangled. I truly thought my riding days were over. I was so sure of it that I called Cindy and told her she could have Bannarr. She picked him up and took him to a ride where he went lame. So she brought him home. To this day, I swear he faked that lameness. He knew the only way I was going to get better was a-top a horse. And he was

one of the few on whom I could trust my bad leg and poor balance. By July of that year, we were racing again – comps all season until the last ride of the year, AHDRA III, where we won, got BC, and brought home the coveted Harry McGlothlen trophy

In 2009 I kept Bannarr riding Competitive. We did over 500 miles, completed Bannarr's 4,000 UMECRA mile, once again placing no less than 2<sup>nd</sup>. And once again, we finished the season with a 1<sup>st</sup> LtWt Endurance at AHDRA III and Bannarr's 10<sup>th</sup> B.C. award. By 2010, I promised to stick to comp and let my younger horses run fast and far. But Bannarr never lets me forget that he could still take on the "kids". At White River Fall 2010, I was slowing him down in order to not come in early, and the LD riders streaking by were driving Bannarr nuts! As yet another LD rider came up on me, Bannarr (and myself) covered in foamy sweat, all four feet off the ground in protest, the rider asked patronizingly, "Is this his first ride?"

We started the 2011 season disasterously. At Run for the Border, Bannarr showed health issues which turned out to be Ehrlichia. He missed two months of rides, but recouped to be the only horse to do all four days (100 miles) at Draw-a-Rama and finish his 5,000 career miles at Oak Leaf Run, placing Top Ten Lightweight Comp in UMECRA.

So never let age (19 years) or broken bones or ugly limbs (ask any ride vet about those bumps and splints) make you think it is time to quit. It is heart and spirit and soul that keep you young. And occasionally, you have to glance up in sky and contemplate the clouds. There just might be one that looks like Kentucky.