

# A Journey that started *in the Equine Industry*

Ty Wilkerson grew up showing in the equine industry.  
Now, still involved, he shifts his focus to law enforcement.

By: Hannah Ruth Pettyjohn



Wilkerson and his grandmother after he unanimously won Non Pro Trail at the World Show in 2019

For Ty Wilkerson service is at the center of it all.

## Growing up in a Family Legacy

Wilkerson is the third generation in his family to take an active role in the Equine Industry. His grandmother barrel raced and his father owns Wilkerson Performance Horses. He grew up on and around horses- starting his career showing horses at a young age. Wilkerson is thankful for the impact he has received both from the

Equine Industry and his family's legacy.

Growing up as a trainer's son meant he got to help his dad with the family business- driving to shows, riding horses, cleaning stalls, helping with the paperwork and helping other riders get ready for the show. Wilkerson said he got great fulfillment from helping others- often getting more nervous to watch those he helped show than he would get for his own show.

"It means a lot when I can help with other people's success," Wilkerson said. "I could get the gate in every class I went in and that wouldn't mean to me as much if someone else from our barn was having success. The best feeling I get is when I can help someone else succeed"

Like anyone, showing has been a journey for Wilkerson. It took time and dedication to master his craft. Wilkerson stumbled through a losing streak before he ever would win- having to build a bond with his horse and shift his mindset.

"I guess when I was younger winning didn't really matter to me so much, I never really thought about it. That just wasn't something



Pictured: Ty Wilkerson and girlfriend, Ashley with horses Always Bet on Black (Vegas) and Don't Look Away (Jesse).

2019 was a big year for Wilkerson. "I closed out my show season at the 2019 World Show by unanimously winning the Non-Pro Trail with Don't Look Away (Jesse) and placing third with Hashtag Hunting. I also won the Non-Pro Showmanship with Jesse. These performances along with my placings in western pleasure and horsemanship led to me winning the Champion Non-Pro Western Exhibitor at the World Show," he said.

## Two Worlds Collide

As it seems to happen to many of us; Wilkerson found himself moving away from his family home in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania, to his now home in Krum, Texas. This move forced inevitable change for Wilkerson. Now, focusing on his career in law enforcement and working with horses less. This has shifted his methodology with his horses.

"I've kind of changed my approach to riding horses or training my own horses because I don't have as much time to spend riding as I did before when we would ride about 10 horses. Now, I spend a lot more time thinking about riding, thinking of how I should be teaching the horse," Wilkerson said. "Now that I have a full-time job I'm very limited on my free time to

that I was necessarily worried about, so, I never thought about preparing to win. I just loved riding horses and being around the horses and I just liked to go out and compete but it took a long time until I won anything. The first time I won a class was in 2012 at the Youth Worlds in Tulsa. I won 13-15 Trail with my gelding Blazing Scotch." Wilkerson said.

Despite the win, Wilkerson recalled still struggling- "For over a year I couldn't make it through a pattern clean and trail was just a train wreck for a long time. The frustrations of having bad performances for a long time pushed me to grow and work harder."

"After I graduated high school, it seemed like I got a lot better. Once I got out of youth and moved into Non-Pro, I started winning more than I was before for whatever reason," Wilkerson said. "I've had the same mare for a while and I think we just kind of clicked finally. For most of my youth career my dad usually got my horses prepared to show for me. I never thought much of how I was training a horse and preparing it to show. But after many years of working with my dad, watching him and other trainers, I finally started to figure the process out."

"I finally had a very successful stretch during my last year of youth and first few years of Non-Pro, winning several championships, reserve championships and Year-End High Point awards," he said.

Wilkerson after winning Non Pro Trail with Don't Look Away (Jesse) and placing third on Hashtag Huntin (Luke) at the 2019 World Show.







Wilkerson and family at his brother's graduation at the West Virginia University

ride. I have two horses of my own now so I try to come up with a plan with what were going to accomplish before I start riding them so I can maximize the time that I have."

Wilkerson is a trooper for the Texas Highway Patrol; serving his state. Though his career means spending less time with his horses, the equine industry played a role in his journey to law enforcement.

The passion for law enforcement came at a young age, for Wilkerson.

He said, "It was something that I was kind of interested in for a long time. I was really interested in middle school, maybe, early high school..."

Despite being passionate at a young age Wilkerson wasn't always set on working in law enforcement. His dream was put on hold as he pursued a college degree.

Wilkerson said, "My family wasn't excited about the idea of me working in law enforcement so I thought should look for a different area of study during college. Engineering sounded good on paper so that's what I originally attended school for."

After taking a semester of engineering classes he decided that wasn't the direction that he wanted to go in. This led to a few changes in his trajectory along the way.

"After changing degrees and schools a few times, I finally graduated from the University of West Virginia with a degree in Energy Land Management. At the time I wasn't very excited to have a job that would put me into an office," he said.

Knowing that he needed to shift paths once again, Wilkerson returned to his original dream-law enforcement. He remembers the exact moment he decided to make this leap.

"I literally woke up one day and I'm like, 'You know what I want to go back' [law enforcement]," Wilkerson said.

The lessons he learned through his time in the Equine Industry have become invaluable to him today. Wilkerson utilizes lessons he learned from his horses in his career every day- implementing patience and awareness of his surroundings.

"Training horses kind of helps with my job now because the horses have taught me just to be patient and kind of take things slow. All that patience I've learned from that helps me deal with some of the people that I deal with every day with my work," he said. "Being around an animal that weighs over 1000 pounds could be dangerous but being aware of them can keep you from getting hurt. Always being aware of my surroundings is something I have to do with work all the time. At a basic level horses and people behave the same way."

## Dreams Becoming Reality

Wilkerson is thankful for the career that he gets to embark on every day. Being a trooper may have started as a dream many years ago but is now a reality. He said that it is the day-to-day tasks and ability to protect others that keep him coming back.



Wilkerson at his academy graduation in Austin, Texas



Wilkerson and family celebrating at a wedding.

but also on his state. We are thankful for his service and dedication to those around him.

He encourages younger members to just have fun along the way. To avoid getting wrapped up in winning but rather make memories and friends along the way. Wilkerson does not take for granted the opportunities and lifelong friendships presented to him.

“At the end of the day, showing horses, is just a hobby, it’s just something to have fun and if you’re not going to have fun at it then what’s the point? You know? I know everyone’s out there and wants to win but just enjoy what you’re doing and be in the moment,” Wilkerson said. “I’m looking forward to when I can make working with horses a large part of my life again.”

“Being a State-Trooper gives you a lot of freedom to do what you want every day. You know, every day I can go out and do something different. It’s not the same thing every day. I get to work with a bunch of great people. I get to meet a lot of interesting people- good and bad. It’s led me on an adventure the last year and a half,” Wilkerson said. “I really enjoy getting out there and helping people the best I can. It drives me to strive for excellence when I know that my presence in someone else’s life means, they are quite possible having the worst day of their life and its my job to do what I can to help them.”

## Encouragement for the Next Generation

Wilkerson has undoubtedly made an impact not only on the Appaloosa Horse Club

Wilkerson and family after brother, Chase Wilkerson, won Reserve Novice Western Horsemanship 14-18 at the Youth World Show in 2017. Chase was teamed with horse, Do My Thang (Miley).







Wilkerson and horse Jesse before competing in trail while in Georgia.

**Ty Wilkerson is currently the President of the Appaloosa Reining Horses Association. Wilkerson has been in this position since the Word Show last year. He said, “I am looking forward to promoting the Appaloosa breed. I want to help the breed get to the point where they can constantly compete with other breeds at the NRHA events.”**