



In it for the Long Run

Coyote Rock Ranch in Oregon's Cascades

By Honi Roberts



COURTESY OF COYOTE ROCK RANCH

IN THE HIGH DESERT LANDSCAPE OF CENTRAL OREGON, THE AIR is filled with the scent of juniper and bitter-brush. Massive boulders strewn across the ancient plateau combine with razor-sharp escarpments of centuries-old compressed volcanic ash to lure rock climbers from around the world to scale the Smith Rock formation.

Outdoor enthusiasts – skiers, fishermen, hikers, white-water rafters – are drawn to picturesque Bend, founded by early settlers at one of the rare fordable points along the powerful Deschutes River. Meander north on Highway 97 for another 20 miles or so and you'll find yourself at Coyote Rock Ranch, home to top-notch Quarter Horses and, at 2,200 feet elevation, a haven both serene and green.

Penny Knight and her husband, Phil, love central Oregon. Half a dozen years ago, when Penny's sister, Kim Pierce, found the ranch with its expansive views of 10 Cascade Mountain peaks, it was the perfect site for Penny's equestrian dreams to come to life. Today, the ranch is home to more than 15 American Quarter Horse broodmares and their babies.

Down the road, in Powell Butte, six Coyote Rock Ranch stallions and some young performance prospects train at Wes Chappell Performance Horses. Their success speaks for itself: Four of the five stallions qualified for the 2009 AQHA World Championship Show as Superhorse contenders.

While it might seem that the program has gone from zero to 20 at a sprinter's pace, the woman at the helm is a marathon runner, literally and figuratively. Her plan for the program is thoughtful and deliberative, with an eye to the future. Every year, she has a goal-setting conference around the kitchen table; every breeding is purposefully analyzed; every show entry discussed. And every horse has a job – or three.

"We don't have horses that do just one thing," Penny said, a smile in her eyes. "We want to breed all-around performance horses that can compete in two, three or four classes. Horses live a long time, and we want our horses to be valued for their ability to do something throughout their entire lives."

Can't Have Just One

PENELOPE KNIGHT GREW UP THE OLDEST OF FIVE CHILDREN; her sister, Kim, was the youngest. The three boys in between had sports to unite them.

"My sister and I always had horses in common, and we loved them as only little girls can," Penny recalled. "I was the shy one, and she was the outgoing baby of the family. Kim is a beautiful rider and in fact, her senior Quarter Horse is one of our pasture ornaments today.

"I have Quarter Horses because I just love everything about them," she said, then added with a chuckle, "I like their conformation – short, stocky and strong – which is sort of the way my family looked!"

A few years ago, Kim started reining lessons, and Penny was drawn back into horses again. Her entrée was, in large part, due to one talented bay stallion, Drag And Fly, by the Reminic son Bueno Chexinic and out of Sheza Dualin Jane by Dual Pep. In 2009, Drag And Fly qualified for the World Show in five senior events: cutting, working cow, heading, heeling and reining.

"Kim found Drag And Fly, aka 'Drago,' in 2004 when he was a 2-year-old," Penny said about the ranch favorite. "He was the first horse I bought, and he's a winner, both physically and mentally. For instance, he'd never done any cutting, but we threw him in a cutting class, and he won. I'd like to produce horses just like him.

"Today, we have five terrific stallions – I gravitate to the boys," she added. "They have amazingly different temperaments, but they're all kind and well-behaved."

The Boys in the Barn

A VETERINARIAN INITIALLY REFERRED AQHA PROFESSIONAL Horseman Wes Chappell, Coyote Rock Ranch head trainer, to the sisters when they needed a farrier. His experience and advice were invaluable to the fledgling program, and his sense of humor was a tonic. A native Oregonian and lifelong horseman, Wes rodeoed before he turned his attention to the horse show world and opened his facility eight years ago. He was instrumental in bringing Drag And Fly to Coyote Rock Ranch, and in 2009, he and the handsome bay won the Northwest's Greatest Horseman Championship.

"I'm just a good roper gone bad," he said with a laugh.

He, too, is steadfast in the belief that horses need to do more than one thing well.

"Drag And Fly was my first Snaffle Bit (Futurity) horse, and he just gets better and better," he said of the horse that won the high-point title in working cow horse in 2008. "At home, he's a big pet and a bit of a clown, but in the show pen, he's all business: wicked down the fence, fast, and incredibly smart and strong-minded. He's a good one."

Wes handpicked the other stallions in the barn for Penny, and each brings special bloodlines and talent to the mix.

Starlighting, by Grays Starlight and out of Ollie Olena by Doc O'Lena, was shown by Bob Avila in Reno, Nevada, and marked a 224.5 to win the National Reined Cow Horse



The mare barn.

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The decision-makers: from left, Sue Hagerty, Wes Chappell and Penny Knight.

Association Futurity preliminary open rein work before he arrived at Coyote Rock Ranch.

“Nothing bothers him, he’s always a happy camper but has all the gas in the world when you need it,” Wes reported. “We have a pretty special yearling of his out of a Shining Spark daughter.”

Then there’s Im A Tuff Bueno by Tuf N Busy and out of Scamps Madame Fritz, whom Wes calls, “one of the best roping horses I’ve put a leg over.” Having already earned both performance and halter ROMs, and his AQHA Champion title, Im A Tuff Bueno qualified for the 2009 World Show in heeling, heading, tie-down roping and performance halter.

Reed N Reminic, by two-time National Reining Breeders Classic Derby Champion Reminic N Dunit and out of Sweet Mesquite Smoke, is a buckskin who might be the biggest stopper in the barn, according to his trainer.

“He can turn on a fence like nothing else,” Wes added, with a twinkle in his eyes. “But he wants to eat cows, and we’ve got to get that issue figured out.”

The youngster in the line-up is a Shining Spark son out a Doc’s Hickory daughter. Sparkin Playboy is about as cute as Barbie’s boyfriend, and yes, his barn name is “Ken.”

“You’d expect a baby to be a little sideways and spooky, but he’s as relaxed and easy-going as they get,” Wes reported. “I can rope 50 steers on him, and he doesn’t break a sweat; and he can plus-1 every stop. He’s a little teddy bear with a big future.”

The Distaff Side

IF YOU SENSE A PATTERN DEVELOPING, YOU WOULD EXPECT THE Coyote Rock Ranch broodmare band to be filled with some of the nation’s top performance bloodlines. However, in any group imaginable, two accomplished mares would stand out: Gunnalena, by Playgun and out of Churlena; and Tangys Classy Lady, by Tangys Classy Peppy and out of Lady Reminic.

Both were NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity reserve champions, and both chalked up career earnings of close to

\$100,000. Plus, they are proven producers. The sweet dilemma Penny now faces: Which of her stallions to breed to these superstar mares?

On hand to help with those big decisions is ranch manager Sue Hagerty. A longtime family friend who shared a love of horses, Sue originally came onboard to help out with office paperwork on a part-time basis. In short order, the number of horses and size of the operation lured her to the ranch full time.

“There isn’t a day I don’t reflect on just how lucky I am,” she said. “Penny is very smart and caring. Whatever the horses need, they get. When I see a foal in the pasture and instinctively know who his parents are, it feels very special. At the moment, my favorite is a charming filly by Drag And Fly and out of a Doc Tari mare. Wherever you are, that’s where she wants to be. His babies all act like that: in your hip pocket and a delight to be around. And this little one has big things ahead of her.”

If you were at the 2009 AQHA World Championship Show, you might have heard another of Sue’s talents – her voice. She sang the “Star-Spangled Banner” for two evening finals nights during FedEx Open Week.

Looking Forward

SOMETIME THIS MONTH, PENNY, WES AND SUE WILL SIT AROUND a table to hammer out their goals for 2010, including show schedules and breeding choices.

“We used 2009 as a year to refine our goals and focus,” Sue said. “Last year, we had five foals, but we expect just two in 2010.”

“Sue is an attorney and very organized, so she draws up our agenda and we go over every topic,” Penny said. “Sometimes we have unscheduled business – like when people called and wanted to buy our palomino stud, and my instinctive response was that he wasn’t for sale. Wes tried to convince me that there was *always* a price on all of them, but every one I have, I love – what can I say?”

During the winter, as dry, powdery snow piles up at Coyote Rock Ranch, broodmares sink into deep bedding, snug in the spacious barn built by Sue’s husband, Eric. Penny savors her research into bloodlines and performance records, in preparation for the next breeding decisions.

“It’s exciting and rewarding,” she said. “Whether it’s watching Wes ride a bridleless reining pattern on Drago, getting up early to welcome a newborn foal into the world or talking with new friends at a Quarter Horse show – I couldn’t chose my favorite part of life at Coyote Rock Ranch, because I have so many favorites.”

The marathon runner is just beginning to hit her stride. ☐

Honi Roberts is a special contributor to The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to aqbajrnl@aqha.org.

JOHN OHARA



Drag And Fly



Sparkin Playboy

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Starlighting

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