

NATURE'S WAY!

By Gail Smith

THERE IS a small town in North Dakota — fifty miles from Fargo — that is not found on many maps, but well known in the Appaloosa world. That town is Sheldon and five miles east is the Sheldak Ranch, birthplace of dozens of national and world champions. The ranch, owned and operated by Dave and Kim Utke, shows the pride they have in their horses. Dave and Kim used to ride and show horses. When they got married, they started with one mare, precious little financing and everything to buy, representing a challenge for a young couple.

The Sheldak Ranch had a humble beginning. The first year, 1968, was spent in the original small old house, chopping wood and cooking with an old wood cookstove. The house was "cozy." Dave's dad came to live with them after selling his farm and Kim's mom also, to enable Kim to help with field work. After years of fighting with the old two-row corn picker, then taking the corn right back out to the field, the Utkes got smart! They left the corn standing for the mares to pick and husk on their own.

Dave and Kim started with Quarter Horses, but fell in love with the Appaloosa when they saw a red leopard stallion win his class at a large area show. The stallion was Rebel Red Hawk and the Utkes bought him the next day. He gave the Utkes a good start in the Appaloosa business, providing income from stud fees, while siring good foals. Since that year, the Appaloosas have supported the Sheldak Ranch, providing income for buying more land, building a house, barn and sheds, paying all expenses and land payments, financing additions and improvements.

Rebel was sold when Go Meyer Jim was purchased. This black and white blanketed son of Spotted Jim sired several champions, including the black and white blanket colt, Go Bar Jim. Although lame, this colt placed second at Fargo in the weanling class at the 1973 Futurity after being halter broke only the day before! The judge explained he couldn't put a lame colt first. (He was injured while being tube wormed.) Go Bar Jim was sold as a baby, and went on to win hundreds of blue ribbons and high point awards through 1985.

Two other stallions owned by the Utke pair were Prince's Jim and Prince David, both by Prince Plaudit, both bred by Carl Miles, and both purchased from him. All of the national champions, world champions and national Top Ten halter and performance horses sired by Prince David were bred by Dave and Kim and nearly all were sold as weanlings.



One of the Utke children, Lori Jo, knows the meaning of the term, Happiness Is Owning an Appaloosa. She poses with Prince's Kim, a future halter mare champion.

The list of winners reads like a Who's Who of Appaloosas. Prince's Jim is in Florida siring more champions and Prince David in Canada where he has sired more national champions and national winners.

Well known are the stallions the Utkes have now: Mighty Tim, age 20; Spittin' Image, 21; and King David, 11. Mighty Tim, a 1967 Appaloosa stallion bred by Lane Hudson, was one of the Top Ten halter and performance stallions in the U.S. in 1971 and 1972. He was many times first and second place Aged Stallion, Grand and Reserve and High Point Halter Stallion throughout seventeen states in 1971 and 1972, plus numerous High Point

Performance Awards winning in nine different events. Every single horse in his pedigree is a champion or producer of same. Tim stands 15.2 hands and weighs 350 pounds, a powerful show horse. But Dave and Kim knew his real potential because of his flawless pedigree, and turned him into a powerful sire! Breeding him only to their own mares, they turned him into an all-time leading sire of national and world halter and performance champions, 1948-1986!

Mighty Tim went permanent with his first crop of foals in 1974, from which he sired the 1975 Canadian National Jr. Grand Champion stallion, Tim's Mighty

Kim And Dave Utke Believe In Using Mother Nature To Raise Prize-Winning Foals!

Bar, who in turn has sired many Champions and is Get Of Sire winner. Mighty Tim's offspring keep right on winning through today.

The Utkes stood Mighty Tim to outside mares only the first year they purchased him. From one outside mare was produced Mighty Leo, who in turn being bred to his owner's two mares, has an impressive sire record. Mighty Tim is all-time leading sire with famous stallions that are bred artificially up to and over one hundred mares per year — many of those national and world champion mares and producers of — with most of the foals being trained and shown by professionals.

A second stallion owned by Dave and Kim Utke is King David, bred and raised by them, sired by Prince David and out of Barretta Bright. Word spread quickly about this tremendous 1976 weanling colt and some of the top horsemen in the nation made offers to buy him. King David hasn't been bred to many mares each year (he usually runs in the smallest pasture which holds the least mares), though his foals have made a name for themselves.

For years, Dave and Kim Utke admired another of Mighty Bright's top sons: Spittin' Image. And for years they attempted to buy him from oil man Joe Stroube. Finally their patience and persistence paid off, and in 1981, at 15 years of age, Spittin' Image was theirs!

Now blind, Spit stays home to be bred to the retained 2-year-old fillies. Thanks to a fabulous disposition, this job can be handled by a kid. After teasing over the fence, the filly or mare is brought around through his stall and into his pen while ordering, "Spit, get back in your corner!" Spit runs to the end of his pen, turns and waits to hear the "snap" of the mare's halter to the rope that stays tied to the same post.

With, "Spit, come here!", he comes, and "Spit, go back to your corner!" he does when he's through. And on the rare occasion when a filly decides at the last minute she's no longer receptive, it's amazing how Spit, totally blind, like the most graceful boxer, can avoid her blow! But his senses are strong, for even when a cat noiselessly walks across his pen in the soft sand, Spit cocks his head and follows her along.

During the summer, Spittin' Image is probably in better shape than the hardest worked race or performance horse, for he runs up and down his pen as hard as he can go, spinning at each end, missing the barn or the fence by a fraction of an inch. Often he keeps this up twenty-four hours a day, slowing down to a trot at feeding time when he dashes in for a mouthful of grain, spins and runs out again. If his heart doesn't burst, it should keep this 20-year-old horse

in shape for some time!

The Utkes do not have records of the many halter and performance champions sired by Spittin' Image before they purchased him, but there are many. Kim has given up trying to keep track of the many winners they have produced, as their issues of the *Appaloosa News* were getting so marked up circling all the winners. Probably missing some, from 1975 to 1982 the Utke's sold twenty-eight foals that have won eighty-three national championships, world championships, national high point and Top Ten awards! This does not count the many state and regional high-point award winners, but it is a record that no doubt will soon be doubled.

At some of the Class A shows in the

West, nearly every award has been won by a Sheldak Ranch horse. It has not been unusual to see the winning results of a Class A show dominated almost entirely by Sheldak Ranch horses. At many Canadian Internationals in the past, as many as fifteen class winners have been from the Sheldak Ranch. In one Canadian National, eleven class were won by Mighty Tim offspring, but that one year they didn't allow post entries for Get Of Sire!

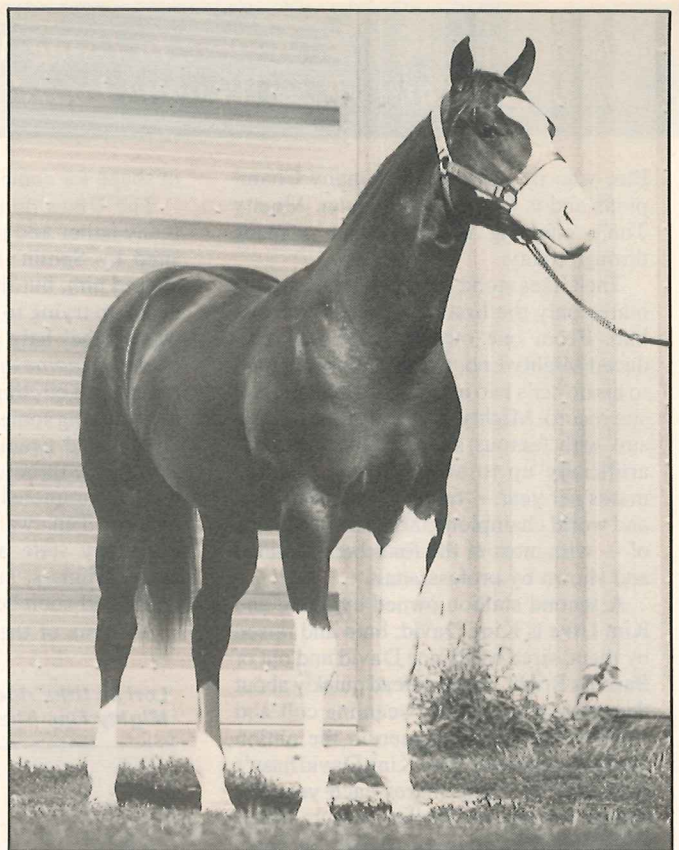
Other famous stallions Dave and Kim have owned in recent years are Prince Fury and Brite Eyes Plaudit. They also have sired winners from Sheldak Ranch mares. Prince Fury is in Minnesota, siring futurity champions, and Brite Eyes Plaudit in Oregon, where he entered stud duty in 1986.

Lori Jo Utke rides the ranch astride the all-time leading U.S. Appaloosa sire, Mighty Tim. She learned to ride on the Sheldak Ranch's numerous top stallions.





A grown-up Lori Jo Utke shows one of the Sheldak Ranch's horses that helped her win a 4-H showmanship competition.



This 1985 chestnut and white filly was sired by Spittin' Image; the dam was Key O Toe, a registered Quarter Horse.

It is no accident that the Sheldak Ranch has some of the top Appaloosa stock in the nation and is producing great champions. To build their broodmare band, the Utkes closely followed the advice of Carl Miles, who said, "Go out and buy the best mares you can find, even if you have to finance five years to do it. A sure way to lose is to buy a few cheap horses and pray for a miracle." They've stayed with the bloodlines that were winning twenty and thirty years ago, are winning today and will be winning tomorrow, as no other bloodlines have been as selectively bred via genius Appaloosa breeders Marshall and Mavis Peavy, Lane Hudson, Cecil Dobbin and Carl Miles. The Utkes are often honored by being labeled the greatest "Old Fred" perpetuators. They figure if that line could support Hank Wiescamp, Carl Miles, Lane Hudson and Cecil Dobbin, it's the best choice for anybody.

Their success record surely is no accident, for nestled in the gently rolling hills of this southeastern North Dakota ranch lies a broodmare paradise. Here graze superstar producers watched over by some of the greatest stallions in the breed.

In the fall, the mares are turned onto large clean fields of standing alfalfa and later moved to where they are on free-choice cornfields, oat hay and stacked alfalfa or wagons of big bales. The middle of winter, they are moved to a field full of stacked oats and alfalfa waiting for them, again. When the first foal is born in this field, the entire band is moved onto the clean twenty-

acre foaling pasture which is used only thirty days of the year. The middle of May, the mares are hauled to summer pastures a few miles from home and a stallion is turned out with each band. Here the majority of the mares foal.

Often an evening check on a pasture will give a clue to which mare will foal that night, as she will be off alone with the stallion like she is trying to receive comfort. The following morning, there will be a happy threesome. The pastures are checked every morning to record dates of newborn foals and fill the mineral and creep feeders for as long as the horses are in the pastures.

All the mares foal outside, since when that newborn foal hits the cold ground, it invigorates him to "get in gear." If the sack didn't break, those babies don't lie around thinking they are still in mother's warm tummy as some do foaled in a warm barn! Also a curious mare may come along encouraging the mare to get up which will also pull the sack off if it isn't removed. No iodine or shots are given newborn foals.

The conception rate is high from pasture breeding. All of the mares running with King David and Mighty Tim in 1984 had live foals in 1985. Several year back, when they had more mares, seventy-five foals were born within thirty days of each other — all a result of pasture breeding with the different stallions. Now they run about fifty mares, but as some of that number includes retained 2-year-olds to be bred for the first time, they will average

thirty-five to forty foals, as bred mares must be sold each year to make room for these retained fillies. Mares and foals are left on summer pasture as long as weather permits or until the first part of November.

A rigid vaccine and worming program is carried out every sixty days. This is done barehanded by Kim, regardless of frigid winter temperatures. Dave also trims all the broodmare's hooves at each session.

Kim is kept busy with all the book work, advertising, picture taking, registering, pedigree typing and research, and correspondence — at which she often spends several hours preparing pedigrees, photos and information per each letter. Kim also does all of her own developing and printing of the black and white photos. Some buyers choose their own foals, others buy from pictures or from their fall ads. Over seventy-five percent of their sales each year are repeat customers. In fact, those customers that have been the most faithful repeat are the ones that have purchased on pictures alone, putting their entire trust in Dave and Kim to make their best decisions, and have been the most satisfied customers.

At the Sheldak Ranch, horses live as close to nature as domestication allows; no artificial lights, no pens filled with outside mares, no hired help, no live-in vets. Instead, this industrious family believes in letting nature take its course as they work together day in and day out, year after year, to produce some of the finest Appaloosas in the nation. U