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Specialty Magazine

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In *Love* with **Appaloosas**

More than 45 years ago Dave and Kim Utke met at the North Dakota State Fair while showing horses. They fell in love and started an adventure that has brought them through many years of raising, breeding and selling Appaloosa horses from the Sheldak Ranch in Sheldon, North Dakota.



Left: Broodmare Lacy Acclaim, only daughter of Acclaim, America's most beautiful leopard Appaloosa. He was Honored Appaloosa of the 1984 US Olympics, 1982 World Champion Yearling (three firsts), 1982 #1 National Top Ten, January-November Bronze Medallion Winner, 24 Firsts Halter and dozens of State and overall hi point awards.

At first they worked on Dave's dad's farm north of Fargo farming, ranching and hauling bucking bulls to rodeos. Then one day a breeder was traveling through on his way to a show and needed to board his Appaloosa stallion. Dave and Kim took care of the horse and fell in love again – this time with the leopard color and disposition of the Appaloosa. They ended up buying him and the die was cast. Kim got serious and started researching. She discovered a famous Appaloosa stallion named Mighty Tim and they eventually acquired him.

Raising Appaloosas was something they just had to do. They started out with \$1,000 between them in 1969, borrowed from the bank for everything else and they were on their way.

Their Appaloosas have been making the payments for them ever since.

"It's just a living," said Kim, "but a rewarding one. No hired help, seldom vacations, but the end result is worth it. I guess when *The Western Horseman* magazine picked our ranch to be the first Appaloosa ranch they ever featured, that 'told it all.' We were honored.

"Our sale stock ranges from Appaloosa weanlings and yearlings, to brood mares, and includes some select breeding age stallions. Our horses are all just 'Naturally Appaloosa' – horses with a natural glow, natural physique and typically sweet dispositions.

"We are dedicated to raising the richest Appaloosas in the breed. Priceless pedigrees where every sire

and dam in four solid generations is a champion and/or champion producer. These bloodlines have known no equal in producing versatile, proven performers with top halter conformation and unmatched dispositions. The stuff champions are born with!

"We have purchased and bred the very best Lane Hudson, Carl Miles, Cecil Dobbin and Hank Wiescamp horses and offer the rich results of this breeding program. All of them going back to OLD FRED. And now for the icing on the cake, we are infusing the blood of String Of Stars through daughters of Master Star and present day stallion Imagine!"

FarmLife found some interesting information on the "Frequently Asked



Mighty Tim was a bay blanket stallion that was with us nearly his entire lifetime (1967 to 1992), siring champions all over the US and Canada, including the Nationals and Worlds: National Top Ten Halter Horse • National Top Ten Performance Horse winning nine different events • Leading Sire of Halter Horses • Leading Sire of Performance Horses • Leading Maternal GS National / World Champs • National Champion Get Of Sire Offspring

Questions” section in their website.

Q: Do you stand your stallions to outside mares?

A: No. Since our summer pastures are several miles in different directions from the headquarters, we only pasture breed. The maximum handling capacities of the pastures are maintained with just our own mares.

Q: When are breeding and foaling times?

A: Each stallion is turned out with his band of mares around May 10th, if the pasture grasses are ready. He will run with his band for 60 days, and then come home. Foaling starts the middle of April and runs for about 60 days. Our mares foal out on the summer pastures, unattended. Every morning is spent driving to each pasture to feed and check all the horses.

Q: What type of feed do you use?

A: During the summer we use commercially purchased “broodmare pellets” fed each morning on grass, to gather and check the horses. Nursing foals are fed free choice a commercial creep feed in walk-through feeders. When foals are brought home in the fall, they are switched to whole oats and straight alfalfa hay. Horses at buildings are fed whole oats and alfalfa (stallions, young stock, etc). Pastures are emptied the end of October, and the mares come home and are turned out in the fields to winter. Once a week the hay wagons are refilled with big bales of alfalfa. They also graze on the corn fields. Rabon Horse Blocks (Fleet Farm) are set out in bunks spring, summer and fall, as they have the best calcium/phosphorus ratio found in a hard block, and hopefully help with the fly problem. Mares congregating at the bunk for the blocks help foals get started going into the adjoining creep feeder.

Q: Do you sell all of your weanlings every year, and by what means?

A: We offer all of our weanlings every year as it is our sole means of income and has been since 1968. Occasionally the weanlings are not all sold out by December 31st so we will have “yearlings” to offer the following year. We have run full page ads in *The Appaloosa Journal* since 1969, and have had our own web site (www.sheldakranch.com) since spring of 2000.

Q: What is the farthest one has traveled to a new home?

A: Alaska, Mexico Chile, Panama and Australia for foals; Hawaii, Belgium, Sweden and Germany for adult horses.

Q: What horses have you bred or owned that were your favorites?

A: They are all “favorites” in our hearts. I guess Mighty Tim just has to be number one. He was a bay blanket stallion that was with us nearly his entire lifetime (1967 to 1992), siring champions all over the US and Canada, including the Nationals and Worlds. Although if you count the

tears when they passed on, there was no difference between Mighty Tim, Spittin Image or Mr. Exclusive.

Q: What honors or awards have you been most proud of?

A: Any and all awards won by our horses have made us proud. I guess having raised Prince Shannon and learning of his Reserve National Champion title at his first show, then seeing his offspring dominate nearly every National Top Ten list years ago was quite a thrill. Then to go on and become Leading Sire of Halter and Performance Horses, And, then to be named in the Hall of Fame was quite an honor.

But you know, some of the greatest feelings have not come from the National and World Champion titles the horses we have raised and sold have won, and not in the National High Point titles, nor the Superiors, nor ApHC Championships. It is in hearing how honored and respected our breeding program is by the Appaloosa Club, influential people in our breed, and other breeds, and by very important people that we look up to. That makes all of the “blood, sweat and tears” worth it. And better than any trophy that could ever be won.



Seven-year-old Dustin Steedsman from West Fargo, ND and the Appaloosa stallion Imagine at the Sheldak Ranch in Sheldon, North Dakota. Dustin is the grandson of Dave and Kim Utke, owners of Sheldak.