

Foals of Their Own

THE ROAD TO DICK AND LAURIE LEPAK'S 5-ACRE ranch on the outskirts of Parker, Colorado, is still dirt and gravel. They never settled on a name for their ranch, so there's no sign along the driveway. As a car pulls up, four pretty heads pop out of the stalls that the young couple built when they moved here in 1981.

To the Lepaks, building a family through the years meant raising a daughter, Kari, but also their 15 foals from Day 1.

"They always saw me before they saw mom," Laurie says with a smile.

In the kitchen, she opens a thick scrapbook that details each and every member of their

horse family. She fondly shares stories about near-misses in the show ring, high honors and a few lives that were cut short. Most of all, she reminisces about countless moments that prove the integrity of their horse family.

Laurie got her first filly in 1957 when a family friend hauled some Quarter Horses up from Texas in the back of a stake truck. Growing up, Laurie showed in 4-H and worked at her family's rental horse business in the summers.

One fateful day, a mischievous teenage boy with little riding experience came to rent horses with a friend. As luck would have it,

50 years of marriage + 30 years with horses = a lifetime of success for Dick and Laurie Lepak.

By Lauren Back

A goal of raising and showing their own horses led to friends across the United States for Dick and Laurie Lepak.

COURTESY OF THE LEPAK FAMILY



Dick and Laurie crossed paths again several years later.

“I lucked out when we got married that he fell in love with horses,” she says. “He had always wanted to be a cowboy!”

The Lepaks, both 71, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this year. Once they were married, they bought two geldings but soon decided they wanted foals of their own. With Laurie’s lifetime of knowledge and Dick’s fast-improving skills, they saw breeding as the best way to create the kind of horse they dreamed of owning.

“In the early years, we couldn’t afford the

quality of horse we wanted to show,” says Dick, an AQHA life member. “So the only way we could see to do it was to buy the best broodmare we could afford, cross her with the best stallion, and produce what we wanted in a horse.”

In 1980, they found the first mare of their line – Bood Potter, a 1974 red roan who produced two fillies in the following two years. It was just the start of nearly three decades of successful breeding. Out of 15 foals, the Lepaks only had three geldings.

“People would ask, ‘Is it something in your water?’ ” Laurie says with a laugh.



Hesa Fancy Boy competes in many events.



Laurie Lepak and Sheza Fancy Premium show at halter.

Slow and Steady

CAREFUL BREEDING AND STEADY TRAINING PAID OFF WHEN THE Lepak horses entered the show ring.

The 2001 bay gelding Hesa Fancy Boy, by Heza Premium and out of Fancy N Impressive by MBJ Jans Cowboy, qualified for the Level 1 Championships in western pleasure and trail with owner Russell Steen of Parker.

The gelding's full sister, Sheza Fancy Premium earned halter points.

Roansome Dove, a 1992 red roan mare by Sonny Vista Bar and out of the Lepaks' mare Burgundy Broad by Mr Jet Will, placed in longe line and halter futurities.

Years of showing their horses in everything from western pleasure to trail to halter have proved just how special these bloodlines are. Yet when the Lepaks look back, it was often the admiration of their peers that measured the Lepaks' success.

One filly with exceptional conformation was purchased from across the United States after friends saw a photo. They were close runners-up to the best competitors at times, but still received high praise from judges and winners. For the Lepaks, it was affirmation that they were doing something right.

To keep up with the industry, the Lepaks went to the AQHA World Championship Show every other year and saw some of the best stallions in Quarter Horse history. On road trips, they often detoured to see horses they had read about in the *Journal*.

"If somebody had a sign that said 'Quarter Horses,' we'd stop. See the horses and talk," Dick says. They've made life-long friends all over the United States who share their love of the breed.

As small-scale breeders, Dick and Laurie's philosophy was to produce quality, affordable horses.

"We just wanted a nice all-around horse so that when people bought them, they'd enjoy doing whatever they chose to do with them," Laurie says. "We never looked at it as a way to make money. It was just the love of starting with a baby that we created."

They always aimed to perpetuate the highest standards of the breed. They aspired to produce overall desirable horses.

"We wanted to have a good all-around, big, healthy Quarter Horse that looked like a Quarter Horse," Laurie says. "I love a big butt!"

Stallions were carefully picked based on even temperament,

as well as what they could afford, and what could strengthen the weaknesses in their mares. They focused on having one foal every other year, often selecting from futurity sales so they could show their young horses at that level.

"We lucked out that they fit in at the futurities in halter," Laurie says modestly. "We produced babies that were presentable and didn't look out of place."

Dick and Laurie decided to cease breeding their mares after one last foal in 2007. The four horses at their ranch, age 10 through 20, will be their beloved projects in the years to come. Laurie says they are also getting their grandsons, Braxton, 7, and Jace, 4, horseback on Quarter Horses. The boys belong to daughter Kari Harvey and her husband, Mark. Saying the horses keep them young and healthy, the Lepaks will continue to train and show, always caring for their horses as part of the family. 🐾

The Lepaks and their contributions to the horse community in Colorado are featured in this month's issue of America's Horse. Lauren Back is a special contributor to the Journal. To comment or to suggest AQHA members who should be featured in Amateur Spotlights or Breeder Spotlights, write to aqhajrnl@aqha.org.

Dick and Laurie Lepak have spent their lives together with their horses.

