

SMOKE N SPARKS (Obituary)

Smoke N Sparks, a nationally-ranked barrel horse sire of over \$1.3 million in Equi-Stat progeny earnings, passed away due to colic complications at the age of 29 on April 18, 2021. He is laid to rest under the cottonwood tree at the end of the paddock that he called home for 24 years at Gerald “Jerry” and Iva Korell’s home in Riverton, WY; it was by this tree that he watched expectantly each spring to see new mares arriving. The Koreells imagine he is still gazing at his ladies in heaven.

“Sparks” was more than just a horse to the Koreells. He was a sire. A livelihood. A comrade. A legacy. Sparks put them on the map on a national scale. Bar Three Stables was a small, homegrown breeding operation that focused on racetrack and barrel horses. They had already been in business for decades and were creating exceptional equine athletes, but they blossomed into a countrywide known premier breeding facility. All of this was because of Sparks and some exceptional mares that produced hundreds of performers, including two-time WNFR qualifier, WNFR Go-Round winner, and Rookie of the Year RF Firefly “Cleo” (with Kelli Tolbert Thouvenell) and Better Barrel Races World Champion and Run for the Bonus World Champion Smoke N Sunshine “Shine” (with Kathy Korell-Rach). His progeny have won countless futurities, derbies, rodeos, high school championships, and college championships; they have set an abundance of arena records in the process.

Sparks’ colts were also performers in other events. On the racetrack, he had 28 starters that earned almost \$157,000 with 22 wins, one stakes winner, and one stakes placed horse. One of his best performers on the track was WY All Breed Futurity Champion Chloes Smoke N Fame (bred by the Koreells and owned by Richard Dolbow). Sparks also had offspring win in the roping pen, including two-time PRCA Big Sky Head Horse of the Year and three-time CNFR head horse competitor Smokin Grits (owned by Janet and Sid Erickson).

“Sparks was such a blessing. Our everyday lives revolved around him,” explained Iva. “We loved him, and our place will never feel the same without him. We watched him through our front window year-round, and it’s so gut-wrenching to look out and see an empty pen.”

The Koreell’s acquisition of Sparks was like a story out of a NY Times Best-Selling novel; certainly, God had His hands all over it. The Koreells lost their stallion Barjo Twist, who also produced countless top-notch barrel horses, at age 27 and were looking for a replacement. Gerald saw that Sparks was for sale in the October 1997 Heritage Place Sale in Oklahoma, and was interested primarily due to the Shawne Bug on his bottom side.

Sparks was a performer in his own right. Born March 11, 1992, the leading money-earning son of Dash For Perks was a Grade 1 Stakes Winner of \$96,101. He won the Kansas Futurity, was second in the Easy Jet Handicap, and fourth at Remington Park Futurity. The Koreells figured that big, handsome, black five-year-old stallion would most certainly be out of their price range, but they set out to Oklahoma with prayers said and fingers crossed they could come home with him. At that time, first-time purchasers at the Heritage Place Sale had to bring cash. Iva secured a cashier’s check for everything they had in savings, which amounted to \$16,000. Gerald’s father, Jake Korell, thought Sparks was a good gamble and sent them with an additional \$14,000 in cash, which was anxiously stuffed in Gerald’s boot tops.

The Koreells were shocked and elated when the final gavel drop resulted in them buying Sparks for \$14,000 from then owner James Martin III. They made a treacherous journey home in one of the worst

snow storms of the decade. They were unable to stop because all of the exits and frontage roads were snowed under and closed, so they just kept trucking. Sparks, who previously made his home in Louisiana, was not too keen on his new frosty accommodations that first winter. But he came to love the snow and played in it like a colt annually.

In the coming weeks, the Koreells received several phone calls from people who were planning to bid on Sparks but were sidetracked or otherwise preoccupied when he went through the ring. No doubt, it was a heavenly intervention. Callers made multiple offers, including paying three times the purchase price just to be a half owner. But the Koreells declined and Sparks became a fixture on the place for over two decades. Taking that risk was one of the best decisions they could have ever made.

“Sparks made our livelihood. He made our lives,” reminisced Gerald. “He earned his keep and our keep too by bringing in our full income for 24 years. We were devoted to him and he was invested in us. Partnership fails to describe it. Sparks was family.”

Sparks proved himself to be a lively, fun-loving horse. The halter was a toy rather than a piece of tack, and he amused himself by trying to grab it each time before someone could put it on. He was often found racing around his pasture, bucking, running and spinning like a colt even until a few weeks ago. His favorite game was to wait patiently in his shed until someone rode a green colt by his pasture. Then he would ambush them from the shed, bolting out like he was leaving a starting gate and boiling up behind them to produce some entertainment. If a colt could stick with him, you knew it could make AAA on the track. Sparks kept his playful attitude until just hours before he was euthanized. He passed his high-spirited, gritty, loveable demeanor and raw talent to most of his offspring.

Sparks was in the top 10 on the Equi-Stat Leading Futurity, Derby, 5-Year, and All-Time Barrel Sire lists for over a decade. He is also the grandsire of over \$168,000 in Equi-Stat performer earnings. At the time of his death, he was Five-Year Leading Barrel Sire #31, Five-Year Leading Futurity Sire #37, and Five-Year Leading Derby Sire #33. He will continue to live on in the pedigrees of performers for years to come. A limited supply of frozen semen is still available at Sage Veterinary Services.

The Koreells have been breeding horses for over 60 years, and have stood a stallion to the public all of that time. Their names have become synonymous with Smoke N Sparks, so this loss is profound on multiple levels. While they will not be standing another stallion, they will continue to breed some of the finest performing Sparks daughters to the best racetrack and barrel sires available. The Bar Three Stables legacy that was catapulted with Smoke N Sparks will endure timelessly.