

All in the



With a focus on family and quality, Yarnelle Farms has laid down deep roots in the Paint industry.

By JESSICA HEIN

Family



Even without the signature “Y” brand decorating their left hips, the Paints of Yarnelle Farms remain easy to spot in a crowd. These pretty, good-moving, good-minded horses—usually some of the loudest-colored in the pen—have earned their fair share of champion buckles and rosettes around the country. With decades of carefully crafted breeding decisions providing a firm foundation for their stock, Yarnelle Farms’ family-first operation continues to produce a legacy of champions and advancement of the Paint Western pleasure industry.



Paint

Only Krymsun



Rooted in Paints

Paints were always a family activity for them, says John Yarnelle, owner of Yarnelle Farms in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

“My mom, Susie, was the original horse lover, and she got all of us—me, my older brother and my younger sister—into 4-H,” he said. “I showed at the state fair when I was 7 years old and won it on my first Paint Horse, Leo Hosanna. It just kept rolling from there.”

John’s personal love of horses kept growing, and he trained his first Paint at age 16, the 2-year-old Dance Hall Doctor. Their success was fruitful—Dance Hall Doctor won seven consecutive National Snaffle Bit Association futurities, says John. It wasn’t long before the young trainer was hooked.

“That was what I really loved, so I kept doing it every year,” he said. “I’d buy one or two or three more prospects, train them up, show them and then sell them. I did the showing part of it, and my brother got into the breeding part of it with me.”

At request of a local veterinarian, the Yarnelles—John, brother Billy and father Bill—built a breeding facility on their 135-acre farm. As the veterinarian frequented their facility to collect stallions and breed mares, it was only natural for the Yarnelles to expand their operation to include a stallion of their own.

“We just had a dream to have a stallion,” recalled John.

Paint Me Zippo, a cropout stallion by Zippo Pine Bar AQHA and out of Blazers Bonanza AQHA, was selected to anchor Yarnelle Farms’ maiden voyage into the Paint breeding business. Purchased in 1989—just one week after John and wife Kathy were married—the 1987 sorrel overo stallion certainly lived up to the family’s expectations.

“Zippo Pine Bar AQHA was the hottest thing at the time,” said Kathy,” so it was really exciting to get a Paint by Zippo Pine Bar to carry that bloodline into the Paint industry.”

“We always said that Paint Me Zippo basically put us on the map,” John continued. “He was an own son of Zippo Pine Bar. Of course, there have been several since then, but he was really the first Zippo Pine Bar son that came into the Paint side.”

It didn’t take long for Paint Me Zippo to prove his merit in the Western pleasure pen. Winner of the 1989 National Show’s 2-Year-Old Western Pleasure Futurity, the stallion went on to earn a unanimous 1991 world championship in Junior Western Pleasure and a 1991 reserve world championship in Amateur Western Pleasure with Billy Yarnelle.

Retired to the breeding shed in 1992, Paint Me Zippo also showcased his prepotency as a sire. His get have tallied more than 34,000 APHA points, 11 world championships and 24 reserve world championships to date.

Though Paint Me Zippo died in 2008, he still ranks on APHA’s 2010 leading sires charts—tied for seventh on the point-earning performance horse chart and 21st on the performance class winners chart at press time. He also owns several spots on APHA lifetime leading sires lists, including third for performance points earned, fifth for Superiors earned, seventh for Register of Merit earners and eighth for Superior earners and reserve world champions earned.



Yarnelle Farms’ signature brand signifies horses bred or owned by the family. Most of the Yarnelles’ horses are branded as long yearlings, linking them to the farm for life.

Standing tall

Today, Yarnelle Farms is home to several top-notch stallions that are helping the family realize their dream of producing some of the industry's best Western pleasure horses. After 20 years in the breeding business, John has identified four criteria that he believes make a successful breeding stallion.

"We learned a big lesson with Paint Me Zippo," said John. "We have had a couple of other cropouts or minimal-color studs, and we've definitely learned our lesson in terms of what you need to have to make it and expand in the breeding business for the Paint Horse breed. You can't have two or three generations back to get to a really great stud—you have

"When you keep your focus on quality, it should win in the pen regardless of what color it is."

to have an own son. Everybody wants to breed to a big horse, and they all want to breed to a pretty horse—and you have to have color. That combination is what we're striving for."

The farm's current stallion lineup certainly reflects that philosophy. Though they're dedicated to the Paint business,

the Yarnelles keep a close eye on winning bloodlines in the Quarter Horse industry and try to incorporate those lines into their program.

Special Invitation, a 1998 bay tobiano stallion who currently reigns as Yarnelle Farms' senior stallion, was sired by

AQHA leading sire Invitation Only and is out of the Paint mare Ribbon In My Hair. A Superior Western pleasure horse himself, Special Invitation has sired 386 get to date that have collectively earned nearly 20,000 APHA points, three world championships and four reserve world championships.

Furthermore, son Endless Invitations won the \$110,000 Reichert Celebration 2-Year-Old Color Classic in 2006. At print time, Special Invitation ranked Number 2 on the 2010 leading sires chart for point-earning performance horses and third for performance class winners, and he can also be found on several lifetime leading sires charts.

Purchased by Yarnelle Farms in 2008, Zips Heaven Sent is another veteran stallion at the farm. The 1998 sorrel tobiano stallion was sired by Zippos Heaven Sent AQHA, a Zippo Pine Bar son, and is out of Ballou Bar. With just over 200 registered foals to date, Zips Heaven Sent has already sired three world champions and five reserve world champions. He also sired the 2008 Reichert Celebration 2-Year-Old Color Classic champion, Dreams By Heaven. On the 2010 leading sires list, Zips Heaven Sent ranks fifth for point-earning performance horses and 10th for performance-class winners.

The 1999 bay tobiano stallion Classical Pizzazz carries Paint Me Zippo's lineage into a new generation of Paints, and he's out of the tobiano mare Shadow Leo San. With only 32 registered get to date, Classical Pizzazz is already a reserve world champion sire.

Another young stallion is Only Krymsun, a 2004 sorrel overo stallion. Sired by One Hot Krymsun AQHA—a son of Invitation Only—Only Krymsun is out of Glow In The Rock, a Dirty Rocki daughter. Only Krymsun is close to becoming double registered with AQHA, which John expects will open up another marketing avenue for his get.

The Yarnelles are enthusiastic about their youngest stallion prospect, Sudden Meltdown. The 2-year-old is by RL Best Of Sudden, an up-and-coming Quarter Horse stallion, and is out of a multiple world champion producer.

John Yarnelle is never far from his young sons—Luke and Eli often enjoy a bird's eye view perched atop dad's shoulders.



“We’re very excited about him; he’s my Reichert 2-year-old,” said John. “He’s got all of the attributes too—he’s got the size, he’s got the pretty, he’s got the look, and he’s got the color.”

Although their breeding focus is to produce great Western pleasure Paints, Yarnelle Farms has found a secondary market in creating Youth and Amateur all-around horses, thanks to sires like Special Invitation.

“When we’re looking at mares of our own and which studs to cross them on, we try to look at their characteristics and decide what will cross well,” said Kathy. “Sometimes you just have a mare that maybe has some size and a real pretty profile—in the back of your mind, you’re thinking ‘This is going to be a nice pleasure horse that’s going to go on to be an all-around horse.’”

John says embarking on an all-around career gives his Western pleasure futurity horses a viable way to continue their careers. Judging from year-end awards lists and major show results, it’s obvious that they are equally successful in their second careers, as well.

“Special Invitation has evolved us into that all-around market,” John said. “They have a lot of size and substance to them, and they have brains. When the Youth and Amateurs take them, they can do the showmanship and the equitation and the trail.”

Standing some of the loudest-colored Western pleasure horses in the market, John says the farm’s focus on quality has helped the stallions’ offspring

win in a discipline where minimal-colored Paints sometimes seem to be the norm.

“There used to be a stigma that you couldn’t beat a cropout or a minimal-colored overo with a tobiano,” said John. “But that has been proven wrong with horses like Special Invitation.”

“We always try to keep our focus on quality. We view the color as the icing on the cake.”

Kathy agrees. “When you keep your focus on quality, it should win in the pen regardless of what color it is,” she explained. “If you’re breeding what the judge is looking for, as far as the movement and trainability, and you go up against a solid horse, it shouldn’t make a difference, if the quality is there.”



Kathy and John are committed to keeping customers happy, which means they’re often found in the breeding barn.



The whole family pitches in to keep Yarnelle Farms running smoothly. Pictured (from l to r) are Hannah (with Special Bodaciousdoll), Brooke, Sarah, Eli, Luke, Kathy, John (with Special Invitation), Susie and Bill.

A focus on family

Producing high-quality Paints year after year requires help from everyone on the farm, and the entire Yarnelle family pitches in daily to keep the operation running smoothly.

Susie—the matriarch of Yarnelle Farms—is in charge of foaling out the farm's broodmares, which currently number around 50. During foaling season, Susie dutifully monitors 11 foaling stall cameras around the clock, via her computer or iPhone. When foaling begins, she's usually the first one with the mare and the last to leave the stall.

Bill takes care of odds and ends around the farm. If anything needs repairing, be it a door handle or a water bucket, he takes care of it.

"He does whatever we need," said Kathy. "He is retired, and this farm is his love."

Brother Billy and his family live nearby, where they raise cattle. Although they aren't directly involved in the breeding business anymore, they grow all of the hay for Yarnelle Farms. Sister Trisha and her family aren't directly involved either, but they provide much-appreciated support for the family.

John trains and shows Yarnelle Farms' show prospects; he and Kathy also take care of the day-to-day operations

around the farm. As the parents of six, they receive help from their children, too.

Oldest daughter Hannah, 19, grew up around horses—her role has long been as a Non-Pro rider for her dad's show horses, to help give them more experience in the ring. Sarah, age 16, is the newest driver of the bunch, and she makes most of the farm's FedEx deliveries. Brooke, age 13, feeds the horses each night after school. The family's youngest, 3-year-old Luke and 4-year-old Eli, keep everyone entertained. John and Kathy lost son Seth in 2005, but his memory remains alive in the minds of his family.

"We feel very, very blessed to make a living doing something we love and being able to do it with our family," said John.

Nowadays, John and Kathy are found around the farm more often than horse shows. Making a conscious decision to spend time with family at home, Kathy says she doesn't regret it.

"With our main focus being on the breeding, we really enjoy the fact that we don't have to be up and down the road every weekend," she said. "It's more conducive to our family life, because when it's all said and done, that's what matters most."



Lasting impressions

In light of the recent economic turbulence around the country, Yarnelle Farms has remained healthy and profitable. This year, each stallion stood for half of his normal stud fee, a \$425–\$1,000 discount for mare owners that proved popular in 2010.

“There are a lot of small breeders out there who have one or two broodmares that have been our customers for years,” said John. “We feel that our customer service is one of the best because of the way we handle situations that come up. You have to be aware of what’s going on in the real world and the economy—we adjusted our stud fees accordingly.”

It’s important to keep breeding fees affordable for small Paint breeders, says Kathy. Those breeders are a stallion owner’s best marketing tool.

“They are the people you count on to produce babies by your studs that go out and win and maybe sell for top dollar,” she said. “We just try to look at the whole situation and go, ‘OK, how can we still do this and still move forward, yet take care of all of these people who have been loyal customers?’”

“It’s really important that people see us as honest and fair and trying to do what’s right by the customer,” Kathy continued. “It’s just as important to us that our customers have a baby coming next year as it is to them.”

The goal of Yarnelle Farms today isn’t much different than the original one: to produce top-quality Western pleasure Paint Horses. John and Kathy constantly monitor the Paint and Quarter Horse industries to stay abreast of new trends, upgrade their broodmare band and adjust to marketplace demands—a combination that’s proven to be a winning formula.

“We want to raise good, quality horses,” said John. “It is very exciting to see that next cross, that gene pool that we put together. Then to see it as a foal, raise it up and train it, and it goes out and wins—that’s impressive. It keeps you going and keeps you striving to do it again.”

PHJ

To comment on
this article, e-mail
jhein@apha.com.

