

## Appaloosas on the Spot

Contributed by Stephanie Duquette

From its earliest history, the Appaloosa has been a breed that survives — and thrives — against the odds.

Selectively bred by the Nez Perce Indian tribe beginning in 1730, in the part of the Pacific Northwest now known as eastern Washington and Oregon, the Appaloosa was nearly wiped out in the Nez Perce War of 1877. When U.S. Army troops captured Chief Joseph near the Canadian border after an astonishing 1,400-mile pursuit, they shot many of the spotted Nez Perce horses. The ones they could catch were either sold to area ranchers or outcrossed with draft-type horses, eliminating the meticulous Nez Perce breeding program. The Appaloosa teetered on the brink of oblivion until 1938, when a dedicated group in Oregon and Idaho formed the main breed registry, the Appaloosa Horse Club (ApHC).

Since then, according to ApHC Chief Executive Officer Steve Taylor, the association has registered some 700,000 horses, and its current membership stands at approximately 20,000. It is considered one of the top international breed registries and the third most popular breed in the United States, behind the Quarter Horse and Paint. While the military assault against their ancestors is long past, modern Appaloosas confront new threats to their future.

“Memberships are down a little bit,” Taylor said. “Show activity, obviously, goes along with that. The real concern for a lot of us is just the outlook for the next couple of years, where we see breeding numbers dropping off fairly significantly, sometimes 20 and 30 percent, as far as mares bred.”

As part of its plan to give Appaloosa ownership more widespread appeal, the ApHC is working harder to place its versatile, colorful horses on a broad competitive stage. In March 2008, the association beefed up its incentive program for ApHC-registered horses who win in all-breed disciplines, including reining, cutting and reined cow horse. The ApHC board of directors voted to add \$40,000 to its existing \$10,000 Appaloosa Excellence (APEX) incentive fund, which pays Appaloosas for achievements in eight different competition arenas: the NCHA, NRHA and NRCHA Futurities; PRCA National Finals Rodeo roping; the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event; the Just For Pleasure Futurities; the Western States Competitive Trail Ride; and the World Championship Barrel Futurity.

The ApHC also offers the Appaloosa Competitive All-Breed Activities Program (ACAAP), a merit award system for Appaloosas competing in any organized equine sport.

“We need to make it easier, not harder, for people to get out with their horses and compete, not just in breed shows, but in all-breed events and specialty association events,” Taylor said.

While it’s customary for most reining, cutting and cow horse competitors to throw their saddles on AQHA- or APHA-registered horses, a strong contingent of Appaloosa aficionados wants to make “seeing spots” in the show pen the rule, rather than the exception.

### The Reiners

Reining trainer Terry Thompson, Aubrey, Texas, jokes that he’s been involved with Appaloosas and reining “since Abraham Lincoln was running around.” Over his three-decade career, Thompson has amassed 250 world and national titles in ApHC, AQHA and NRHA competition, along with \$300,000 in earnings; and was named the 2005 ApHC Trainer of the Year. He is the driving force behind the success of Appaloosa reiner Ima Frosty Lena, an exceptional stallion with a productive career in both the Open and Non-Pro divisions of NRHA and Appaloosa reining. He earned \$6,464 in career reining money. The stallion was sired by Ima Little Lena, an Appaloosa son of Smart Little Lena, and out of Ms High Five (AP) by High Sign (AP).

Thompson is widely regarded as the first trainer to turn a deaf ear to unflattering breed stereotypes — coarse, stubborn, untalented — and take Appaloosas to the top in the reining pen. One of his signature victories came in 1977 at the All American Quarter Horse Congress, when he won the open reining on an Appaloosa named Charger-Charmer.

“That kind of started my claim to fame as an Appaloosa person,” Thompson said. “I invented taking them out in the open and showing them. I took more abuse than any soul alive in the industry. But I introduced, and I think in a good way, the Appaloosas to the NRHA.”

In 1986, Thompson rode the ApHC mare Gunsmokes Skeeter to fourth place in the NRHA Futurity, and has consistently guided many other Appaloosa reiners to success in the show pen. He noted that Appaloosa bloodlines are less predictable than Quarter Horses’, and the talent of horses like Gunsmokes Skeeter was more by chance than by design.

“That’s the initial thing that we lacked, is horses that were bred to stop,” Thompson said. “She [Gunsmokes Skeeter] had the quality, just like the horse I won the Congress on, which is the stop.”

That's why I was able to compete on an NRHA level. It's not like it is now; it wasn't nearly as tough. But at that time, she was accepted because she was a tremendous stopper."

Breeders of Appaloosa show horses often look outside the breed to add a certain appearance or talent to the signature Appaloosa color or, in some cases, lack of color. The ApHC has a "non-characteristic" registry designation for horses that have at least one ApHC parent, but did not inherit Appaloosa traits: coat pattern, mottled skin, white sclera around the eyes, and striped hooves. Non-characteristic Appaloosas are still fully eligible for breed competition if their owners buy a performance permit. The revenue goes into a special incentive fund for show, race, competitive trail and endurance winners, which paid out approximately \$46,500 for the 2008 show season.

The ApHC approves outcrossing with Quarter Horses, Arabians and Thoroughbreds, and will register the offspring if the foal's sire or dam is a registered Appaloosa. Though commonplace, outcrossing is a source of dissent within the Appaloosa community.

"There's always debate, and people who think that the old bloodlines need to be preserved, which is a good thing, and folks are trying to compete in the big, wide open world out there, and they want to take advantage of whatever good genetics they can get hold of as part of their process. I suspect the tug of war will continue," Taylor said.

Many in the performance horse industry believe outcrossing is the best insurance for the Appaloosa's success.

"Our horses were bred originally to be Indian ponies that could endure over long distance. Who in the heck wants to go ride a horse down for six hours before he can go show? So, we've had to try to breed that out of them," Thompson observed. "Our horses, the ones that are accepted, get a lot of their talent and their ability from the Quarter Horse. They get a lot of their determination and their mindset from the Appaloosa. And in the right instances, that works."

It worked in the case of Some Kinda Shine, a 2005 Appaloosa stallion by Shine Of A Kind (Shining Spark x Sonitas Kindra x Sonita's Last) and out of the ApHC mare Precious Lady D (Pok A Dan [AP] x Some Kinda Lady [AP] x Prince Carl's Wapiti [AP]). Thompson trained and showed Some Kinda Shine to the 2008 Open Futurity Reserve Championship in the premiere competition for Appaloosa reiners, the Appaloosa Reining Horse Association Futurity, held in conjunction with the ApHC World Show in Fort Worth, Texas, in October. The Reserve Championship was worth \$3,060, and the whole event paid \$50,000.

Some Kinda Shine's owner, Florida attorney and non-pro reining competitor Frank Marley, has an ambitious show career planned for the stallion, nicknamed "Frankie," who is now closer to home, in Florida trainer Jose Seutter's barn. Seutter is also riding an NRHA futurity prospect for Marley, an ApHC filly by standout Appaloosa reiner Ima Frosty Lena.

"This is the first set of Appaloosas I've ever ridden," Seutter said. "The filly, she's wonderful. She's so physical with the stop and the turn, it's amazing. The stud, I like what he does with everything, the turning, stopping and the circling."

Seutter said Some Kinda Shine will plus-one his stops and spins, and holds nothing back in the show pen. "He was there 100 percent of the way, with everything I asked him to do. He's a nice horse," he said.

In addition to planned appearances in open and non-pro NRHA and ApHC reinings in 2009, the stallion is on track to be Marley's non-pro FEI reining horse in 2010. Along the way, Marley intends to establish Some Kinda Shine as a sire of quality performance Appaloosas.

"I'm a firm believer that the [Appaloosa] horses are better than they're getting credit for," Marley said. "I just liked the story. I kind of came from nothing, and they're kind of the castoffs, not really looked at as being much. I just wanted to prove that there are some good ones, and if you're a good enough rider, with a good enough coach, in a good enough situation, that they can actually do something."

Some Kinda Shine's first breeding season was 2008, and of the 12 mares in his book, eight were Quarter Horses.

"I'm a realist. He's not going to be Wimpys Little Step," Marley said. "If he sires youth horses, non-pro horses and rookie horses, I'm a very happy man. Very happy. If one of his babies is the Champion or Reserve Champion at the Appaloosa Futurity every year, I'm happy."

#### The Cutters

Organizers admit the Appaloosa Cutting Horse Association (ApCHA) has struggled in recent years with weak entries and declining membership numbers, but the club experienced a long-awaited rejuvenation in 2008, thanks to increased

sponsor support and better prizes. The ApCHA has just one annual show; like the Appaloosa Reining Horse Association, it's held in conjunction with the ApHC World Show in Fort Worth. It offers a Futurity, Derby, Sweepstakes and several Non-Pro divisions. Last year it attracted 76 entries, more than double what organizers had become accustomed to.

"It was one of the biggest cuttings they've had in years. Before, it was maybe 30 entries," said ApCHA President Liz Kincaid.

She has plotted a course for the association's growth, which includes recruiting more sponsors and applying for affiliation with the National Cutting Horse Association. As an affiliate, ApCHA winnings would also count toward an NCHA earnings record, giving Appaloosa cutters greater incentive to enter ApCHA events.

"We're on the way up, but it's [by] baby steps," Kincaid said, adding that the Appaloosa arena can be an ideal environment for beginners. Most trained Appaloosa cutters are less expensive than their AQHA counterparts, and Appaloosa exhibitors are universally described as "some of the nicest folks around";

"The people are wonderful. I have Quarter Horse friends of mine that come to show Appaloosas and they love the people," confirmed reining trainer Terry Thompson. "They are the best, nicest group of people you'll ever run into — they are not cutthroat-type individuals."

Like the reiners, Appaloosa cutters recognize the need to crossover into all-breed competition to showcase the talent of their colored contenders. One of the first horses to prove his merit in both the Appaloosa and NCHA show pens was Ima Doc O'Lena, an all-time leading sire of performance Appaloosas. The stallion and his owner/breeder, Jimmie Miller Smith of Geary, Okla., are both members of the ApHC Hall of Fame.

The 1979 frosted sorrel stallion was the first of only six Appaloosas sired by Doc O'Lena. The story of Ima Doc O'Lena began when Smith wanted to breed her champion ApHC cutting mare, Wa Jo's Freckles, to the best cutting horse she could find.

"Of course, it was Doc O'Lena at the time," Smith recalled, adding that at the time Shorty Freeman was standing Doc O'Lena in Scottsdale, Ariz. "I called and asked Shorty, 'Will you breed an Appaloosa mare?'" He said, "bring her on."

Smith's love affair with the Appaloosa started with the horse her father bought for her when she was a child.

"I'm 78. I've had them since I was 7 years old," Smith said. "I was an only child, and didn't have a mother; my Dad raised me. He bought me a little Appaloosa gelding, and I took every step he did, and so I've always loved them."

It was apparent to Smith, from the beginning, that Ima Doc O'Lena was not an ordinary horse. "When he was born, he was just absolutely the cutest thing — little bitty, short ears, and very athletic. But he liked people, so I pretty well knew I was going to have something special."

Ima Doc O'Lena's cutting training was overseen by some of the industry's best. Started under saddle by Smith's son, Jimmie Jack Smith, he went on to Hanes Chatham's training program and was also shown several times by legendary trainer Bill Freeman.

It was Freeman at the reins in 1983, when Ima Doc O'Lena, the only Appaloosa competing at the Pacific Coast Cutting Horse Association Derby, won the Open Championship over a field of 230 entries. The stallion, who retired with \$25,395 on his record, was also a NCHA Super Stakes finalist, a Bonanza finalist and the sire of many successful Appaloosa performers including Ima Jos Doll, the 1989 National Reined Cow Horse Association Snaffle Bit Futurity Open Champion with Carl Gould riding.

Smith's breeding program continues to match quality Appaloosas with premiere AQHA bloodlines. This year, she is expecting four foals out of Ima Doc O'Lena daughters: two by Smart Little Lena and two by Smooth As A Cat.

In addition to her duties as ApCHA President, Kincaid also promotes an Appaloosa cutting sire, a striking palomino named Gay Bars Silver. Sired by Gay Bars Jess, an ApHC son of legendary quarter horse Gay Bar King, and out of a champion ApHC cutting mare named Silver Roxie (by The Poka Man [AP] out of Silver's Music [AP] by Silver Strikes Equal [AP]), Gay Bars Silver won four Appaloosa Cutting World Championships in two years before his show career was cut short by an injury. He also earned money in NCHA and American Cutting Horse Association (ACHA) competition. Originally started as a reiner by Clint Haverty, the stallion's greater aptitude for cattle led him to Mike Combs' cutting program in Tolar, Texas.

"He's a really good horse," Combs said. "He was a joy to train, because he never gave me

any problem the whole time I had him.”;

From Gay Bars Silver’s first foal crop, Kincaid raised Gunna Go N Gitem, a 2005 gelding who won the Appaloosa Reining Horse Association Open and Intermediate Open Futurity in 2008, with Zane Haverty in the saddle.

“We’ve got good horses,” Kincaid insisted. “Appaloosas seem to get a really bad rap. People don’t tend to respect Appaloosas. We have wonderful horses – we’re just small in numbers right now and need to generate more interest.”;

Fellow Texan breeder Robert Bjorkman, 80, Granbury, Texas, is doing his part to garner respect for Appaloosas in NCHA competition. In 1997, Bjorkman raised a brown and white stallion, Earthquake Ike, by cutting, reining and cow horse performer San’s Hap McCue, an ApHC grandson of Peppy San with multiple Appaloosa Cutting World Championships and an NCHA Certificate of Ability (COA). Earthquake Ike is out of the Doc’s Subscription daughter Suescription, also a Champion Appaloosa cutter.

Earthquake Ike followed the family tradition by claiming multiple Appaloosa Cutting World titles and an NCHA COA, and has also sired several money-earners.

“He’ll work in anybody’s arena. When you talk about Appaloosas, you think maybe the only place they can win anything is at an Appaloosa show,” Bjorkman said. “You’ve got to have an exceptional horse to win all the time, but we play the game, and we have a lot of admirers. This horse is so cowy and so classy, and so flexible, he’s impressive to watch.”;

Mike Combs also rode and showed Earthquake Ike, taking the reins when the stallion was a 4-year-old and campaigning him at NCHA aged events. He describes Ike as one of the best cutters around, of any breed.

“If they cut, it doesn’t matter to me what color they are. If I think I can go win on ’em, I’ll ride ’em,” he said. He took his share of heckling about his loud-colored mount, but Earthquake Ike turned the criticism into compliments.

“The first time I showed up with Earthquake Ike, the boys asked me where my Indian feathers were at,” Combs recalled. “After everybody sees him work, they change their mind. They want to know how he’s bred. They know he’s bred different than any Appaloosa they ever saw before, because of the way he works a cow.”;

Earthquake Ike’s sire and dam are registered Appaloosas, but you don’t have to go very far back in his pedigree to find famous AQHA names like Doc’s Prescription.

“If you’re going to cut, you better have some Quarter Horse bloodlines, or you’re not going to make the team,” Bjorkman said.

#### The Reined Cow Horses

The crown jewel of reined cow horse competition, the Open Championship at the National Reined Cow Horse Association Snaffle Bit Futurity, has been won only once by a non-Quarter Horse. It was Ima Jo’s Doll, a sorrel Appaloosa mare with roaning and spots, shown by Carl Gould in 1989. Sired by Appaloosa legend Ima Doc O’Lena out of the ApHC mare Quanah’s Leo Girl, Ima Jo’s Doll now resides in Alberta, Canada, as a valuable broodmare for Jim Dobler and Heather McLevin’s Thunderstruck Ranch.

The couple has been involved with Appaloosas for more than two decades, and gained notoriety with their stallion High Sign Nugget, Canada’s top producer of Appaloosa cutting, reining and working cow horses. Purchased as a 2-year-old, the white horse with a few black spots was intended to be Dobler’s non-pro gelding. But when he went to famed Canadian trainer Les Timmons’ barn to prepare for the cutting futurities, Timmons advised leaving the stallion intact.

“Les said he was one of the best horses he ever trained. Like a sponge, he said,” Dobler recalled.

Fortunately for his offspring, High Sign Nugget, or “Spot,” was spared the veterinarian’s scalpel. Foals by the now 21-year-old stallion have won nine ApHC World Championships, three Reserve World Championships, 15 Canadian Supreme Futurity/Derby Championships, 10 Canadian Supreme Futurity/Derby Reserve Championships, an ApRHA Reining Futurity Championship and two Reserve Championships.

“I can’t say that we’ve ever produced one that we heard didn’t turn out to be a pretty decent horse,” Dobler said. “Probably our claim to fame has been selling horses for the non pro industry to show, because the non pros get along with them so well.”;

A perfect example is the High Sign Nugget son named YOR High Noon. Roger and Vicki Johnson of Saskatchewan purchased YOR High Noon from Dobler, before the colt was weaned from his dam, the Canadian Supreme Hall of Fame

Appaloosa mare S/W Red Velvet. Roger Johnson had a lifetime of horse experience, but never before attempted to train and show a working cow horse.

“He taught me more than I taught him,” Roger said. “There was lots of raw talent there, and I wish I would have had more experience myself.”

Despite being relative newcomers to the show pen, Roger showed High Noon to multiple championships in working cow horse, reining and cutting.

“As far as a trainable mind and a willing attitude and fearlessness, I don’t think you could find a horse to compare. He’s very mellow. When you put the saddle on him, he just knows, this is time to go to work,” Vicki said.

YOR High Noon, now 14, is the only son of High Sign Nugget to produce an ApHC World Champion reiner. He has sired foals that excel not only in reining and cow horse, but also jumping, pleasure, halter and gymkhana — demonstrating the Appaloosa’s signature versatility. The Johnsons point out that High Noon has close to 88 percent Appaloosa blood, representing a tight linebreeding program based on one of High Noon’s ancestors, a stallion named Mansfield Comanche.

“It’s an unbroken chain of these horses from an intensely linebred Mansfield Comanche sire called High Spot. High Noon represents the current application of these. They’re just as consistent as the day is long. I think it is actually due to the linebreeding,” Vicki Johnson said.

While Ima Jo’s Doll is the only Appaloosa to win the NRCHA Futurity championship, another Appaloosa mare recently made a mark for herself in NRCHA competition. Quanahs Spice Of Pep (Alexander Pep x Quanah Dawn Doc [AP] x Quanah O Lena) under the guidance of Utah trainer Brandon Buttars, made the Snaffle Bit Futurity Limited Open finals in 2005.

“She was good right from the start. She was a good mare. Still is,” said Buttars, who also showed Quanahs Spice Of Pep’s dam. Both mares are owned by Hurley Appaloosas, Tremonton, Utah.

“It was just one of the greatest things ever,” said John Hurley of the Futurity finals appearance by his homebred Appaloosa mare. Hurley was around Appaloosas when he was young, then later developed an appreciation for working cow horses. He wanted to bring the two together in his breeding program.

“I got enough of a kick out of that sport that I thought, ‘I wonder if I could ever raise an Appaloosa to go to that level?’” he said.

Quanahs Spice Of Pep could potentially make Appaloosa history in the NRCHA. With \$12,387 in reined cow horse earnings, she is about halfway to achieving the association’s highest merit award: the title of Supreme Reined Cow Horse. The award is given to a select group of horses that have won \$25,000 or more in all phases of competition — limited age events, hackamore, and two-rein/bridle. To date, no Appaloosa has achieved the Supreme Cow Horse ranking.

“He [John Hurley] would like to have the first Appaloosa Supreme Reined Cow Horse be this mare,” Buttars said.