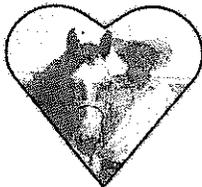


Hey Neighbor



For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Abilene Stable's Smooth-Riding Fox Trotter Best In The World

"All good things come to those who wait."

Willa Danner quoted that old saying in expressing her and husband Richard's thrill after their Fox Trotting Horse, Frank's Kansas Red D, was crowned world grand champion.

"It's taken 39 years of breeding, raising and showing Fox Trotters to reach

that ultimate goal," continued Willa. "We've been privileged to own some very outstanding horses in this endeavor. Most importantly, we have made so many Fox Trotter friends, who we will always cherish, and hope to make many more."

The Abilene couple's involvement with the unique breed of horses actually

began when Richard traded his stock horse, "who beat me to death," off for a horse that turned out to be a Fox Trotter.

"I was competing in bird dog field trials and got this strawberry roan mare, who was really smooth to ride," Richard recalled. "I really didn't know what she was doing, but at a competition

on Fort Riley, somebody told me she was a Fox Trotter. Since then, I've been hooked on the breed."

Before proceeding, the Danners wanted to explain more about Fox Trotters. "The horses we have now are registered in the Missouri Fox Trotting Breed Association," Richard initiated. "The breed was originally a combination of Arabian, Morgan and plantation horses from the deep South.

"Later, more American Saddlebred, Tennessee Walker and Standard breeding were added to give the Fox Trotting Horse a more pleasing appearance and disposition," Richard distinguished.

Horses meeting that breeding criteria were accepted into the registry until 1983, when the books were closed.

"Now only horses with both parents registered in the Missouri Fox Trotting Horse Breed Association are eligible for registration," Richard explained. Over 80,000 horses are now in pages of the official record.

The Missouri Fox Trot gait is basically a diagonal gait. A horse will perform his gait by walking in front and trotting behind, with reach in each stride. He may disfigure or overstep his track, provided he travels straight on all four legs and does a true fox-trot.

In further clarification, Richard related that Fox Trotters have 60 percent of their weight on the front end and 40 percent on the back end, in comparison to stock horse breeds, which

have the reverse of that.

Modern Fox Trotters over-reach their front leg stride 10 to 12 inches with their rear stride, and the best horses who win today over-reach 14 to 15 inches at a walk, Richard described.

"The Fox Trotter is not a high-stepping horse, but an extremely sure-footed one," Richard continued. "Because of the sliding action of the rear feet, rather than the hard step of other breeds, the rider experiences little jarring action and is quite comfortable in the saddle for long periods of time."

Willa inserted, "Richard always contended that they will make your backside smile. After riding Quarter Horses raised by my dad George Thompson, I have



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Feeling is believing, and after Richard's initial experience in the field with his strawberry roan, the mare was bred to a top Missouri Fox Trotter stallion. "Her first foal was an outstanding horse and won several top awards," he related. "So, we decided to expand in the business and bought several additional mares."

Their operation expanded to 10 mares raising foals each spring. "We always bred to stallions in Missouri. That's the hub of the Missouri Fox Trotting Horse business," Richard admitted.

At Danner Stables north of Abilene, stall facilities and a riding barn on the 25-acre tract have enabled the family to become one of the leading breeders and exhibitors of the Fox Trotting

Horses in the country.

"We traveled to shows nearly every weekend throughout the Midwest and also to Florida and California," Richard pointed out.

All of the training and showing was done by the Danner family. "I used to do all of the training, and Willa and I and all three of our daughters, Angie, Amy and Nicki, competed on our Fox Trotters in competitions," Richard confirmed.

"I don't train our horses anymore," he admitted. "People wouldn't appreciate an undertaker on crutches." His riding time has even been curtailed some since having back problems for a few years.

A carded judge, Richard has officiated major Fox Trotter competitions across the country as well. "I haven't done that for a while

either, due to my back," he added.

Their latest and greatest accomplishment to date came at the World Missouri Fox Trotter Show and Celebration in Ava, Mo., when their home-raised nine-

year-old sorrel mare topped entries totaling over 50 Fox Trotters in the various divisions.

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"Richard jokes that he is quite the horse trader as we owned and sold Country Frank's dam, Missouri's Rawhide Gold D, to Frank Forrester while she was carrying the foal, Country Frank, who became a champion," Willa chided.

The Danners were driving home from a Missouri show, trying to come up with a name for their filly when they spotted a Kansas billboard advertising a winery with an award-winning wine called Kansas Red.

"We both said at the same time, 'That's her name.' Frankie was so much fun to have at home when she was little," Willa insisted. "We knew from watching her that she was one of the best we had ever raised."

Show career highlights: champion 2000 Mid-America Two-Year-Old Futurity Amateur and 2000 Breeders Cup Two-Year-Old Amateur, reserve world champion two-year-old amateur, reserve world champion amateur three-year-old and 2004 reserve world champion ladies. "We bred her in 2005, but she failed to carry the foal," Willa related.

This spring, Frankie and Willa were the ladies champion and amateur speciality champion at a spring show in Ava, Mo., beating 70 head. Most of the mare's career

had been in amateur ranks with Willa aboard.

Their trainer David Ogle rode Frankie at the Missouri State Fair and won the senior stake championship. "It was such a thrill for me to watch David show Frankie. I finally got to see what everyone else was talking about her ability.

"That's when the lights went on that maybe Frankie could compete for the world championship," Willa professed.

With over 1,795 entries in the world show from 50 states and seven foreign countries, the world grand champion senior open was the last class of the show. "After a major rain, the track was graded, the time finally arrived, and David came in on Frankie. They put on the show of their life,

along with a lot of other good horses.

"After the five judges turned in their cards, the crowd was silent as tabulations were being made, before announcer Bob Crafton revealed the world grand champion to be number 549, Frank's Kansas Red D. Words cannot express how thrilled we were," Willa exclaimed.

In the competition, the horses are judged on conformation and performance. Ridden in a western saddle with a Walking Horse bridle, entries are shown at a flat foot walk, fox-trot and canter. Versatility classes include reining, trail and cattle working divisions.

The model class is the same as halter classes in most other shows. "We don't always enter the model com-

petitions, but we have had several winners over the years," Richard advised. A stallion they produced was a yearling and two-year-old champion a couple of years ago. "We sold him into Florida, and now he's a top gelding," Richard added.

A few of the family's favorite horses, prior to their most recent honoree, included Yankee's Alley, a palomino gelding who Richard rode to be the 1983 amateur world champion; Yankee's Silver Starlight, who Willa rode to be ladies side saddle world champion; Sundust Sadie, ridden by Willa to be ladies four-year-old world champion; and Jazz's Country Kate D, Willa rode to be Florida State Fair senior champion and Breeders' Cup Senior Stake Champion.

Three favorite yearlings were Kansas Kandi D, Missouri Prairie Pride D and Kansas Kowboy D, all which collected world championships for their outstanding conformation.

Danner Stables' activities are sharply reduced from peak years. "We only have three mares, and they are boarded and foaled out in Missouri. It's cheaper than keeping them at home. We just have a few young horses here," Richard stated. "We now only go to about five shows a year."

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