

Buck Is Prominent Name In Horse World

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Actually the mimicker for Leland William Keister Jr. came from rabbits.

"I don't remember the details, but I had rabbits when I was 12 years old. The man I stayed with called me Buck, after buck rabbits I guess, and it just stuck," Keister reminisced. "Everybody now just knows me as Buck."

It all began when Keister rode a horse three miles to school from the foster home where he lived in the mid-30s near Kenesaw, Neb. "My mother died when I was four, and my dad couldn't take care of us six children in those Dust Bowl days," Buck remembered.

Living with various families, Keister pretty much had to make his own living. "I was driving a team on a cultivator when I was eight, drove horses hauling water to the steam engine when I was nine and was working four-horse teams by the time

I was 12," Buck contended.

It was at that point in life that Keister made a decision. "I didn't know exactly how I was going to do it, but I decided then that I was going to raise and train horses," he recalled.

Active in 4-H work with cattle and also excelling in sports and academics, Keister graduated valedictorian of his high school class. "I went to the University of Nebraska and worked at the beef barn," Buck said.

Before long, Keister got a call to help in the horse department. "That was just what I wanted, so I went to work there for Hank Kopf. I also met my wife Patricia, who is Hank's niece," Buck noted.

Working for the university, Keister's horse knowledge expanded. "I helped other horse owners too and spent one summer breaking horses in Wyoming," Buck elaborated.

Admitting that his philosophy has changed a lot,

Keister explained, "Most of those horses were four years old when we started them, and if they didn't buck, we'd spurt them until they quit. It was common opinion at the time, that the horse had to have the buck taken out of them or they wouldn't be broke."

"Of course, now I realize there are easier and better

ways. Hopefully now a horse never bucks," Keister continued.

Rodeo was part of college activities, and Buck competed in the rough stock events as well as roping and bull dogging. He was also enrolled in the Reserve Officers Training Corps, and upon graduation, Keister was commissioned as a second lieutenant to start his U.S. Army career.

"I had to sell my horses, but I always stayed close to horses wherever I served," Buck emphasized. His nearly 22-year Army career, mostly as a helicopter pilot, took Keister around the world starting in the Korean War and ending after the Vietnam War.

With several years at Ft. Riley and ending his career in Ft. Leavenworth, Buck started looking at horses be-

fore retirement. "I knew what I wanted, and I had to look quite a bit before I found her," Keister verified.

The mare was Harla Q Beaut, a 1970 buckskin daughter of Harlan he got from Morgan Freeman in Oklahoma. "I bought her in 1972 and showed her successfully in registered Quarter Horse shows," Keister indicated.

Upon retiring as a lieutenant colonel, Buck and Pat and their two sons operated a public horse stable at Leavenworth. "I soon found out that wasn't for me," Keister admitted. So, they bought their 200-acre Rocking K Ranch, and Buck went into the horse breeding, training and showing business full time.

A stallion is key to a breeding operation, and Keister acquired Judge

Crocker. "I knew the first time I saw Judge that he was the best horse I'd ever seen," Buck recognized.

The stallion was 15 years old and a producer of registered Quarter Horse performers when Buck bought him from Virgil Layman in Nebraska. "However, Judge had not been handled very well, and I had to work a lot to get him in shape," confirmed Buck, who exhibited the stud in registered competition.

Judge Crocker, intensely Peter McCue bred, was a son of Wimpy II, by Wimpy, the first horse registered by AQHA. His dam was Miss Adams 29, by Adams Mator of the Adams Ranch at Maple Hill.

"He sired some good horses," Buck is quoted, in memorials to the sire of 207 foals. His 25 point earners

collected 1,084.5 American Quarter Horse Association points. On the leading sires list of show Register of Merit qualifiers, Judge also sired cutting horse winners and many ABRA point earners.

"Everybody thought Judge had to be a Buckskin because I owned him, but he was a sorrel and produced mostly sorrels, but he also sired Buckskins, including the seven out of Harla Q Beaut," Buck tabulated.

Judge continued to be fertile until he was 30 years old. "When he became incapacitated, I had to put him down in 1989," Keister related.

Most of Keister's dozen and a half remaining horses go back to Judge and Harla Q Beaut. "I still have four daughters of Judge, but only one of them is in foal this spring. They'll all live out their years here," Buck insisted.

Active in Buckskin activities leadership, Keister was instrumental in getting the Buckskin World Show started at Topeka in 1988. "After that, the Buckskin shows started picking up in size, and more people became interested in owning Buckskins," Buck stated.

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standing four stallions. In addition to Judge, Buck has stood several of Judge's sons and grandsons, as well as a son of Harlan, along with stallions owned by other breeders. "Some years, I'd breed as many as 40 mares. It was all done by hand. I never pasture bred any mares," Buck remarked.

The Rocking K operation was at a peak of 12 mares and foals a year, but Keister always kept a number of horses in training. He also judged shows and conducted horsemanship clinics.

While most of his horses haven't been Buckskin, Buck has always had a deep interest in buckskin and dun horses and has done considerable research on color genetics. "I believe that the dun color was the original equine color, starting back with prehistoric animals. I feel that there may be a connection with dun and the color of all horses," he summarized.

Critical of horse selection principles, Keister described, "There are three elements in judging: the hide and hair, muscle and condition, and most importantly the skeleton.

"Hide and hair and muscle and condition can all be altered by man, but the

horse's skeleton is set when a horse is born. That's what we need to consider, and today I think many judges don't look at a horse for its ability to perform," Buck declared.

Having sold horses throughout the country, Keister clarified, "The horse market is down now, because there is an overpopulation of common horses. Not enough attention is

being paid to conformation and pedigree. About the only thing that sells strong now is well-broke ranch horses.

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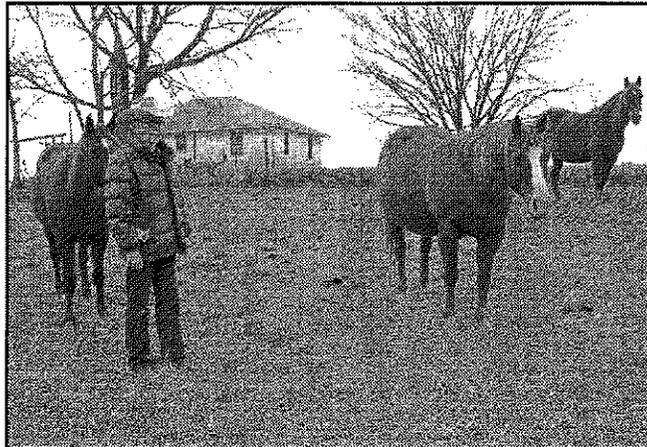
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With a new home being constructed nearby, and to be moved into this year, Keister is continuing to slim down his horse operations. "I'd like to get down to just a handful of mares and then lease them out. I just want to keep a couple horses here to fit for futurities and sale," Buck concluded.



Buck Keister still has four daughters of the stallion, Judge Crocker, included in the remaining broodmare band on his Rocking K Ranch near Leavenworth. Only one of the Judge daughters is in foal, but the others will remain on the ranch for the remainder of their lives.