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The Double Dollar Breeding Program



As team ropers, it's easy to daydream about a horse like Matt Sherwood's Nick, Travis Tryan's Walt, Randon Adams' Diesel or Rich Skelton's Chili Dog. The simple truth is that those horses are special and few and far between. What's more, people who rope every day ride those horses all the time. Those horses aren't the kind of mounts built for the average amateur roper who works all day and then saddles up in the evening for practice or a jackpot.

Nonetheless, there remains a sizeable market for horses that do fit the hobby team roper. Greg Kesler, owner of the Double Dollar Ranch outside of Holden, Utah, saw that market and has developed a breeding and training program geared around developing horses that fit that bill.

"We aim our training program for [USTRC numbered] 4 to 6 ropers, because that's who's willing to spend

the money to buy a nice horse," Kesler said. "We want them real calm, pretty, we're looking at a horse that's 15 hands and 1200 pounds, we want them with sufficient speed and a lot of gather and stop. We want them really soft and good-minded. Not all of them make it."

The Bloodlines

For years—and even today—a great deal of horses come to the roping arena as rejects from other disciplines. Burned-out cutters and cow horses—or ranch horses with a clear gift—have a long-standing reputation for making solid team roping horses.


An industry-wide breeding program has never taken hold in team roping despite being one of the largest western disciplines.

Kesler, however, has only one goal with his band of 50 mares and three studs: making roping horses. The mares are bred for cow sense, from Doc's Oak, Bueno Chex and Mecom Blue bloodlines.

"Everything is geared toward being a roping horse, and every one of our mares looks like a fancy roping horse," he said.

The ranch's top stud, Trace of Frost, is by Pat Cowan—a brother of the famous Bozo—and out of a Hancock mare named Trace of Roan. The stud is a red roan, big, stout and hard running with a fast walk and big stop. The 10-year-old has won over \$80,000 for the Keslers and they are building their mare herd around him.

"We took him out of the mares one afternoon, cleaned him up and hopped him in the trailer and hauled him



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The Double Dollar Breeding Program

to Paso Robles, Calif., [for the USTRC's West Coast Regional Finals] and won the No. 15 and No. 13 preliminary heading on him and took sixth in one and third in the other one."

Kesler feels the stud's greatest attribute, however, is his ability to throw colts that carry his traits.

"Every single one of them walks fast and has got tons of try and tons of speed. Putting him back on these cow-bred mares and then putting them back on his daughters, we're kind of tightening up our program."

The ranch has two other studs as well: a son of Checkernic out of a Zan Par Bar mare and a son of Shining Spark.

"I try to focus on nice horses," he said. "One of the things I found that doesn't work is the running horse deal. Everybody was chasing that, but I was not able to make that work at all. They've line bred these horses to stick their noses in the air and outrun whatever is next to them. They're pretty much straight thoroughbreds. Then we expect them to be calm and supple and have a good mind and get their butt up under them. I've gotten to where if they've got any running blood anywhere on their papers I won't have anything to do with them. I can find plenty of run in the Quarter Horse industry without going to the racing bloodlines."

Kesler also has little tolerance for horses that don't produce. If a mare throws a colt with conformation or disposition that he's not happy with, both the colt and the mare are out of the program. Out of the 50 mares, 8-12 are culled each year to make room for the up-and-coming fillies. Additionally, he typically only keeps a mare until she's eight.

"We just keep tightening up on our standards," he said.

The Training

But bloodlines don't automatically generate exceptional horses. The training program at Double Dollar is aimed at creating horses solid beyond question.

As two-year-olds, the fillies have 60 days of training, followed by a culling process to determine the best 8-12 to go into the mare band. The geldings, meanwhile, are also put through 60 days of training followed by

another 30 days of work in the ranch's 4,000-head feedlot. They're also exposed to the outside world in the form of sand dunes just beyond the ranch's headquarters.

The three-year-olds become the ranch's cattle-working string and are used exclusively

for the cow work on a registered Angus operation and 600 Corriente cows that Kesler leases the calves from to

more ▶▶▶

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Greg Kesler



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ROPING BETTER

ropers in Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado and Arizona in the winter.

"Their three-year-old year we get them really off their bridle and really soft, bend and flex and get started turning around really solid and sliding into the ground," he said.

In their four-year-old year, they go into the ranch's training facility, which consists of 90 stalls, two outdoor arenas, an indoor arena, cutting pens and calf roping alleys.

"As four year olds they go into our roping program," Kesler explained. "Unless we're gone, they get ridden six days a week. We first start cutting on them for two weeks to two months to lock them on the cows, then go to the roping pen and start real slow and spend a ton of time getting them to get their foot work right with their hips up under them. We make our horses off-track going down the pen. A heading horse tips to the left with his shoulders off to the right, where he's off-track so they learn to move that hip. We probably do that for three to four months. Left lead with their nose cocked toward the cow. We do the same with the heel horse, but off-track them the other way. We want to be able to move their hip wherever we want by just touching their leg at any speed."

The goal is to create a horse that knows his job so his rider can focus on roping, be competitive and enjoy his hobby.

"We focus on having a really strong foundation on these horses," he said.



Greg Kesler's top stud, Trace of Frost, has earned the family over \$80,000 in the arena when he's not turned out with mares.



The Double Dollar brand has become a sign of a good horse and at about any roping in the West, you'll find a horse wearing it.

"Our deal is that you can't screw them up bad enough that we can't fix them in a week—if not in a couple hours. Occasionally we'll find one where that horse just doesn't want anything more to do with that person but they work for anybody else."

The Sale

At the end of their four-year-old year, they're ready for the annual Double Dollar production sale at the South Point Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nev. This year, the 11th annual sale will be Dec. 10 and 11—with previews on Dec. 9 and 10—and there will be 92 horses up for preview and auction.

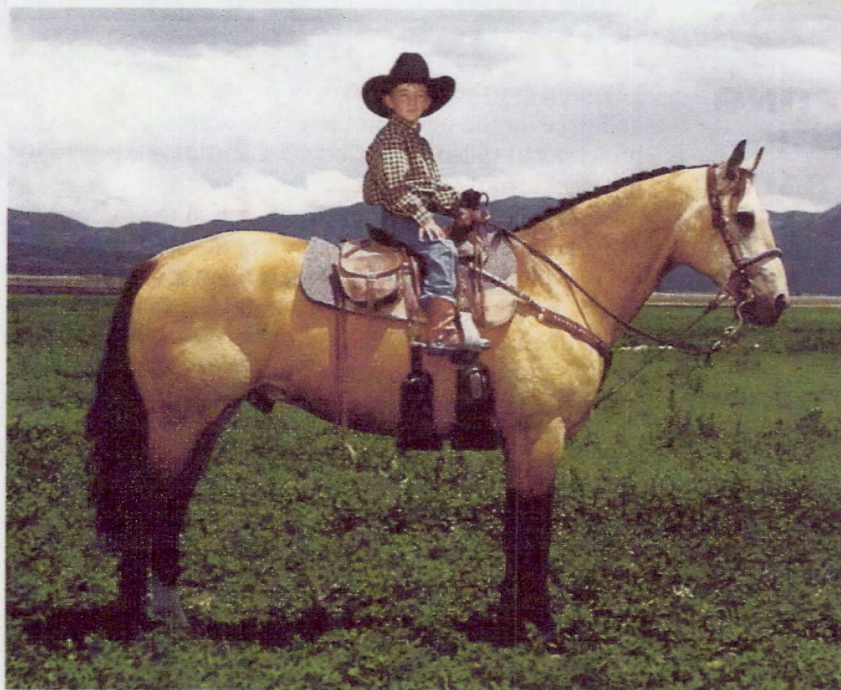
Last year's top 10 rope horses average \$28,230. The highest-seller of all time at the sale was in 2007 when a black gelding consigned by Siggins Horse Company, Colonel Concho Villa, brought \$80,000.

"There are some real steals at the sale," Kesler said. "With so many nice horses there, there are some horses that should sell for \$10,000 or \$15,000 that go for \$6,000 to \$9,000."

While the price of the horses is important to Kesler, the happiness of his buyers is the key to success.

"The biggest thing I try to do is I have an open deal where if that horse isn't right, send him back," he said. "We preview the horses, but then every consigner gets up and tells anything that needs to be told about that horse. Not just soundness, but if

The Double Dollar Breeding Program



Double Dollar is a family operation and Greg and his son, Quinn, now 16, head up the training and breeding program—and do a little roping on the side.

there's little quirks or idiosyncrasies; things that if you were selling the horse to your best friend, you want them to know. They're responsible to tell that. Then we sell them and we hold everybody's checks for two weeks and the buyers get to take them home and if they find anything that should have been told that wasn't, they don't own them."

At that point, the seller owns the horse and is never invited back to the sale again. The consigners know that going in, fork over a sizeable deposit and must sign a contract Kesler says he wouldn't sign that gives him full rights to make any decisions about whether the seller was truthful.

"I call all the buyers and make sure they're happy with their horses," he says.

The result? Kesler puts it simply, "You can't hardly go to a roping anymore—at least in the West—without seeing at least a couple Double Dollar horses." **SWR**

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