



# Breeding Champions

In a relatively short time, one woman's dream of owning performance horses has taken her to the top of the industry. *By Jill J. Dunkel*

**A** girl can dream. And that's what Nancy Crawford-Hall did. Raised on a ranch in the Santa Ynez Valley, north of Santa Barbara, Calif., she dreamed about owning horses of her own. In her mind, they were the most

magnificent creatures ever created.

"I was always determined that, one of these days, I would have a horse of my own. That's kind of where it started," she said.

Humble beginnings with one horse when Nancy was 42 years old

have now blossomed into a large breeding operation called Holy Cow Performance Horses. The ranch, known for producing quality reining, reined cow and cutting horses, maintains facilities in both Santa Ynez, Calif., and Weatherford, Texas.



## Searching for stock

Nancy's first performance horse was Fannys Dry Chick. The Fannys Oscar son out of the fifth-highest money-earning daughter of Dry Doc, Dry Priscilla, finished fifth at the 1992 National Reined Cow Horse Association (NRCHA) Snaffle Bit Futurity. Competing through 1997, the gelding earned \$13,385, according to **Equi-Stat**.

Fannys Dry Chick's heritage prompted Nancy to think about getting into producing horses. "Originally, I thought, 'Oh, you could have a stallion and make a fortune in the horse business.' And I would read all the magazines and think, 'These people have tons of horses and that would be heaven,'" she says. But then reality made Nancy do a double-take.

"There are a lot of really good stallions out there, and that was a really tough end of the business to be in."

With that in mind, and considering her love and experience with cutting and reined cow horses, the entrepreneur thought maybe her niche would be to develop a first-rate broodmare band. With that task at hand, Nancy and trainer Sandy Collier headed to Texas to find a nice mare, looking for a young horse that could compete at the Snaffle Bit Futurity and then go on to be a producer.

Their first trip to Texas resulted in the purchase of Lipschic, a 1996 Smart Chic Olena daughter out of the Freckles Playboy mare Beckys Playin. During her career, the mare was fourth at the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) World Show in working cow horse and was a year-end hackamore champion in the NRCHA, in addition to other accolades. Bred by Paula Loseke, of Gainesville, Texas, Lipschic earned \$15,380 according to **Equi-Stat**.

Lipschic has produced four money-earners who have earned a combined \$78,892 in cutting, reining and reined cow horse. Her first performing offspring, Kiss My Shiny Lips, by Shining Spark, earned \$40,512 in reined cow horse before producing the 2010 CD Survivor gelding Survivors Kiss, who earned \$6,246 at the 2013 NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity.

Lipschic's 2008 daughter by CD Survivor, Survive These Lips, has an **Equi-Stat** record of \$14,890 in reined cow horse. Wimpys Playin Smart was sired by Wimpys Little Step and born in 2009, and amassed an **Equi-Stat** record of \$19,929 in reining for owner Alain Longatte. And



**Fannys Dry Chick was Nancy Crawford-Hall's first Western performance horse, and the beginning of Holy Cow Performance Horses.**

—Photo by Midge Ames



**Lipschic's first money-earner was Kiss My Shiny Lips, a \$40,000-plus earner who is showing promise as a young broodmare.**

—Photo by Primo Morales



**Sheza Roo, out of Holy Cow foundation broodmare Sheza Shinette, and Erin Taormino won the Limited Open Bridle at the 2013 NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity.**

—Photo by Primo Morales

the 2010 mare Shady Lil Lips, by Shady Lil Starlight, has already earned \$3,561 in the cutting arena.

The next year, Nancy and Collier went on their search in Texas once again, looking at 35 horses in a single day. "It about killed us," she laughs. "The last horse we saw, the sun was about to set when we got to this barn. Sandy rode this pretty little palomino mare, and as she rode her around, she happened to go through this shaft of sunlight that came through the top of the arena. When I saw that, I could hear applause and I just knew she was going to be a champion."

Nancy was right. The pretty palomino

was Sheza Shinette, by Shining Spark and out of Chicks And Chex, by Smart Chic Olena. The women nicknamed the mare "Norma Jean," the blonde bombshell, says Nancy. Collier and Norma Jean won the prelims at the Snaffle Bit Futurity by seven and one-half points in 2001, but lost a cow in the finals. However the following year, she redeemed herself earning the AQHA World Championship in Junior Cow Horse.

Despite the fact that Sheza Shinette almost died of shipping fever on the way home from the World Show, she has gone on to compete again, with an **Equi-Stat** record of \$53,738, and be a great pro-





**(Above) Phil and Nancy took home some nice awards for Sheza Shinette's status as 2010 AQHA Leading NRHA Dam.**

—Photo by Stephanie Duquette

**(Right) Jake Telford and CD Survivor, an earner of \$152,723 whose performance and sire career was cut short due to a fatal trailer wreck.** —Photo by Susan Morrison



ducer. The mare has already produced 12 money-earners that have combined lifetime earnings of \$495,087 in cutting, reining and reined cow horse.

Among Sheza Shinette's leading daughters are Sheza Roo, a reined cow horse earner of \$56,292, sired by Gallo Del Cielo; Sheza Dancingdiamond, a reined cow horse earner of \$43,944, sired by Diamond J Star; CD Shines, a cutting earner of \$11,164, sired by CD Survivor; Sheza Sparklin CD, an earner of \$10,458 in cow horse and cutting, sired by CD Olena; and CD Shinette, a reined cow horse earner of \$9,449, sired by CD Olena. Sheza Shinette's top four money-earners – Hes Shinettes CD (\$124,772), Heza Shiny Kodo (\$87,938), Heza Diamond Spark (\$77,789) and Once A Von A Time (\$70,143) – are all stallions. Hes Shinettes CD, Heza Shiny Kodo and Once A Von A Time are all slated to carry on their dam's legacy at Holy Cow Performance Horses, while Heza Diamond Spark is still competing in cow horse and team roping and breeding mares for owner Michael Garver.

"She has really been the biggest asset to my whole breeding program because she has produced champions in the reined cow horse, reining and cutting," Nancy says.

From those beginnings, Holy Cow Performance Horses got its start. "It sort of has built upon itself. I purchased mares





**Jake Telford rode Shady Lil Starlight to World and National championships in the National Reined Cow Horse Association.** —Photo by Primo Morales



**Jake Telford and Once A Von A Time, winning the Open Bridle at the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity.** —Photo by Primo Morales



**Showing the versatility of Holy Cow-bred horses, Once A Von A Time started his career as a top reining horse with trainer Craig Schmersal before moving to the cow horse arena.** —Photo by Primo Morales



**Phil and Nancy with Shady Lil Starlight, ridden by Jake Telford and his daughter, Shawny.**


—Photo by Katie Tims

here and there. I've bred quite a few of the horses that we show now."

### **Stallion power**

The next few years, she couldn't find a mare that met her standards, so Nancy purchased two young stallions instead. The first was CD Survivor. Sired by CD Olena and out of the Peppy San Badger mare Hav A Lil Lena, CD Survivor brought grit, talent and beauty to the reined cow horse arena. Ultimately, the stallion won \$152,723 in reined cow horse money before he was fatally injured in a trailer wreck. His offspring are just hitting the show ring.

The second stallion, Shady Lil Starlight, is a Grays Starlight son out of Shady Little Cat, a High Brow Cat mare.



Nancy relishes in the idea of either breeding her stock or purchasing them at a young age, where they can prove themselves in the performance arena. Bought as a 3-year-old, Shady Lil Starlight is an NRCHA World and National Champion and an NRCHA Supreme Reined Cow Horse. He has a lifetime **Equi-Stat** record of \$84,681 and has won multiple bridle championships.

Nabisco Roan, also purchased as a 3-year-old, is by Boonlight Dancer and out of the cutting mare, Crackin, by Smart Little Lena. The stallion was the 2013 AQHA Reserve World Champion Senior Cow Horse, the Celebration of Champions Open Two-Rein Champion, and captured many other top honors. He currently has an **Equi-Stat** record of \$51,108.

Homebred Once A Von A Time is one of the first foals out of Sheza Shinette, and is by Von Reminic. "Von" was originally trained and ridden by Craig Schmursal and was a National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) Futurity and Derby Open finalist. In 2010, Jake Telford expanded the stallion's education to become a finished cow horse. He was the 2013 NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Open

Bridle Champion, Reserve Co-Champion of the Hackamore Classic Open and a finalist in World's Greatest Horseman with Telford. His **Equi-Stat** record stands at \$70,143.

With a firm foundation on both the stallion and mare side, Holy Cow Performance Horses has quickly become a major force in the Western performance horse industry. They are perennially at the top of the reined cow horse owner statistics, and currently rank No. 15 on the list of all-time leading reined cow horse breeders, with \$498,097 in earnings. These stats are a testament to the success in the industry considering Holy Cow first opened its doors in 1999, and wasn't breeding horses until a few years after that.

### **Diversity in the show ring**

While many breeders focus on one event, Nancy enjoys producing horses that can take multiple career paths. "I love being diversified. Since I rode cutting horses, I know what goes into those and how they feel to ride. I love that. I also did a little bit of reined cow horse. I know what's required there, and then there's the precision necessary for reining. It's amazing."

Holy Cow Performance Horses utilizes

three different trainers, specialists in each of their fields, to show their horses. Jake Telford pilots the reined cow horses, Morgan Cromer rides the cutting horses and Todd Bergen takes the reining horses. Both Cromer and Telford competed in the 2013 World's Greatest Horseman, and Nancy says they will likely do so again on two of the ranch's stallions, Once A Von A Time and the CD Olena son Hes Shinettes CD, both sons of Sheza Shinette.

Another Sheza Shinette son currently in the show pen is the 2006 stallion Heza Shiney Kodo. "Kodo" is currently being shown by Todd Bergen in reining, and has an **Equi-Stat** record of \$87,938. Both he and Hes Shinettes CD, the top two money-earners for their dam, will eventually be added to Holy Cow's breeding lineup. A host of other Holy Cow horses can be seen performing in reining, cow horse and cutting events across the country.

### **Giving back**

Throughout her years of success in the horse world, Nancy has been quick to give back to many segments of the equine industry. "I try to sponsor a lot of things because I've been very blessed with some





**Hes Shinettes CD is one of several money-earning sons of Sheza Shinette who will be carrying on her legacy in the breeding shed.**

—Photo by Big Daddy Photography

really good horses, and some really great trainers. They've brought me a lot of accolades that have been heaped on me, which really isn't quite fair because I didn't do anything but pay the bills," she says.

Nancy participates in six different organizations – NRCHA, National Stock Horse Association (NSHA), NRHA, National Reining Breeders Classic (NRBC), National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) and Breeders Invitational – and likes to sponsor various things within those groups as well as events along the Pacific Coast circuit.

One such sponsorship is in memory of CD Survivor, her stallion who was injured and ultimately put down because of a trailer wreck. Nancy established the \$50,000-added CD Survivor Open Bridle Spectacular at the NRCHA Derby. The class has become the NRCHA's richest event for bridle horses. In addition to the lucrative payout, the champion's name is engraved on the CD Survivor Memorial Trophy that resides at Holy Cow



Performance Horses.

She also enjoys sponsoring new events or programs her horses are not involved in, but others are and they need support.

In recent years, Nancy started making jewelry, specifically minuscule bead work. "It's been fun for me because it gives me something else to focus on and keeps me from going insane," she laughs. "I make jewelry and necklaces to donate to various horse organizations."

She is also a big supporter of youth.

"They're the future of the industry, and I'd like to see the industry continue and grow. There's really something special about humans' relationships to horses, and I think that it's something that teaches you a lot about yourself and other people. It's a valuable tool for young people."

### Expanding east

In December 2012, Nancy opened Holy Cow Performance Horses Texas, LLC., in Weatherford. Nancy and her husband, Phil, reside there much of the year.

Although the championships her horses have earned are many, Nancy has several goals she is still working to attain.

"I'm relatively new to the cutting horse world, and I've not won a major event there yet. I would like to do that. I haven't won a huge futurity other than Pacific Coast yet," she says. With multiple top 10 Snaffle Bit finishes, Nancy's horses have not won the Snaffle Bit Futurity, and that's definitely on her bucket list as well.

Nancy and Phil enjoy watching their horses perform. Phil accompanies Nancy to all of the shows, documenting their equine success through photography. If you see Nancy at a show, you might be surprised to know she isn't hollering for her horses when they are in the ring.

"I don't make any noise at all when my horses are showing because I'm holding my breath. Several people ask why I'm not yelling and screaming. I tell them you can't yell or scream when you're not breathing," she laughs. ★

**(Top) Nancy's newest project is jewelry making. She donates some of the beautiful necklaces she makes to various horse organizations for fundraisers.** —Photo by Stephanie Duquette  
**(Inset) One of Nancy's creations** —Courtesy of

Nancy Crawford-Hall

**(Bottom) Phil and Nancy, pictured at the 2011 National Reining Breeders Classic, are active in several equine associations.** —QHN Files

