



# The Heart of Our Industry...

**Concealed deep in the American heartland, where fence posts far outnumber the streetlights, a solitary farm rests in the midst of hundreds of acres of lush, green cornfields.**

By Kelly Barnes and Janet Forbes, Photos by Kelly Graphics





**The McWhirter's—Daniel, Carol, Dan and Roy Rogers, their Corgi.**

The owners of this legendary 1200-acre working farm in Doniphan, Nebraska also grow corn and soybeans like most of their neighbors. But their claim to fame has come from an entirely different cash crop. These hard-working farmer/ranchers have grown some of the finest pleasure horses, sires and producers in the world.

Since 1985, Dan McWhirter Quarter Horses began practicing a determined breeding philosophy that has since made an extraordinary impact on the nation's pleasure horse industry. Dan and Carol, along with their 17-year-old son, Daniel, have meticulously bred and raised some of the most influential sires of today's leading pleasure horses. A multitude of winning pleasure horses in the showing today can trace their pedigree back to either a mare or stallion that was bred, born, and/or raised by the McWhirter's.

After meeting this kind, humble, industrious family, it's hard to believe they are responsible for such a dramatic improvement in the modern pleasure horse industry. Make no mistake, it's not by chance or luck that the McWhirter's have achieved

such a prestigious position among the vast assortment of the nation's pleasure horse breeders. They have a specific plan and they are very serious about breeding the perfect pleasure horse. They quote past NSBA president Darol Rodrock, "To get where you want to go, you've got to have a picture on the wall of your ideal". 23 years ago, they set out to breed that "ideal" pleasure horse. One with a strong, driving hock, a flat knee, cadenced, clean rhythm to the gaits, correct length of stride with natural suspension at the lope, and a level neck that does not bob, because the horse is upright in the withers.

After the untimely death in 1986 of their first stallion, *The Big Investment*, McWhirter's searched for a replacement, and purchased, in partnership, the legendary sire, *The Investor*. Their program shifted into high-gear. Four of the stallions currently ranked on AQHA Leading Performance Sire's List can be traced back to *The Investor*. The stallion's incredible breeding sons, grandsons and great-grandsons include *Impulsions*, *Investment Asset*, *Principle Investment*, and *Potential Investment*.

Today, the McWhirter's continue to produce the industry's most influential stallions that pass along the majority of desirable traits in the modern pleasure horse. And, with the passing of each great sire they have been fortunate to have owned and promoted, there has always been an up-and-coming star being prepared and promoted for their time to shine. All of the stallions remain the same in at least one main trait: the all important level topline, the basis for their "*Designer Genes*." breeding program.

"We prefer all of our horses to be level and preferably higher at the point of the withers compared to the point of the hip. If the topline is correct, then a horse will have overall balance." The yearlings raised at the McWhirter's usually stand out from the crowd in looks and movement because of their balanced toplines. With every mating they plan, not only do the McWhirter's breed their horses to be level over their back at maturity, but also they expect them to stay level as they grow. "Most young horses grow one end at a time in a teeter-totter fashion. This up-and-down growth pattern can negatively affect their movement, especially if you are planning to campaign a yearling or two-year-old. A hip-high growth



**Dan with up-and-coming Sire... Absolute Asset**





**The "Boys Dormitory" houses all the Breeding Stallions.**

seasons, until he was purchased in part by Richland Ranch from then-owner, Darrel Saul. Dan and Carol bred *Zippos Mr Good Bar* to *Investment Asset's* dam Miss Rebel Rita, whose sons and daughters and their foals have earned over 16,000 points, and more than \$800,000. That mating produced *Good Asset*, the sire of numerous Congress Champions, and World Show Top Ten Finalists. 22 of *Good Asset's* foals are currently qualified for the 2003 AQHA World Show in 17 events!!! He stands at McWhirter's, in the "Boys Dormitory" (as it is referred to), along with their other great stallions; *Absolute Investment*, *Investment Creditor*, *Pine Interest*, *Iota Invest*, and *Absolute Asset*, carrying on the farms' amazing tradition of excellence.

The philosophy of the McWhirter's breeding program, which is followed closely with every mating, is to breed 'form to function'. "Bone structure and overall balance is the foundation for outstanding pleasure horse movement, and both are highly inheritable traits as well," states Carol. "A horse can only move in a way it's bone structure allows it to move." They believe that a pleasure horse should move well naturally and that a trainer should not have to change what the horse is made of, but school the natural talent within.

Enormous emphasis is placed on the superior mares they breed to their stallions. "All of our breeding horses are out of the

spurt at futurity time can make the difference between a championship and not placing."

Another legendary sire that the McWhirter's had great influence with was *Zippos Mr Good Bar*. The much-admired roan stallion stood at the McWhirter's for his first four breeding

best dams because it is our belief that a stallion breeds back to his mother." At the farm, seventy broodmares graze on 220 acres of lush pasture with weanlings by their sides. The breeding manager, Joe Hockensmith, diligently looks after the herd and accounts for each mare and foal daily. Every foal is imprinted at birth, which is evident when you witness how all of the babies love to be handled. By July, the weanlings from the previous year, now yearlings, are prepared for the annual Breeder's Classic Sale held at Gordyville in early September. Each fall, the foals are weaned and placed on necking donkeys briefly to halter break them, then they are separated by gender. All foals are all given a precise diet of Purina Strategy®, grass hay, and Buckeye® Mineral for optimum growth and condition. By February 15th, the high-tech breeding operation is in full-swing and as soon as spring arrives in Doniphan, the hands-on foaling duties commence once again.

This successful, organized operation is in a gorgeous location run by honest, knowledgeable people. If you ever have the opportunity to visit the farm in Doniphan, Nebraska (just a few miles outside of Grand Island) be sure to stop by for a tour, because you won't find the McWhirter's traveling to many horse shows—their farm and ranch duties are a priority.

But, you certainly won't miss the products of their efforts in showpens all over the World!

**A BALANCED  
TOPLINE IS  
DEFINITELY  
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**Above, Good Asset playing. Above right, Carol handling the babies.**