

Mountain Pleasure Horses

*"The Boy
Scout Breed"*

BY MARGARET LAYTON

Ed Earlywine, of Paris, KY enjoys his registered Mountain Pleasure Horse gelding despite the rainy conditions of a Christmas Parade, 1990



Mountain Pleasure Horses? "They're the 'Boy Scout Breed' of horses...honest, loyal, trustworthy and reliable," describes long-time breeder Alfred Prewitt.

"And then when you add in smooth riding, hard working and great disposition, people begin to understand why I'm so crazy about these horses," concludes Prewitt. Prewitt is a native of Kentucky, transplanted to North Carolina in the early 1950s. Kentucky's Mountain Pleasure Horses also found a home in the Tar Heel State soon after.

"My father had these horses all his life and after I moved here I brought a few to Fayetteville. After he died in 1984, I became even more interested in preserving these horses," explained Prewitt, a prominent insurance executive and real estate developer.

In 1990, a group of like-minded Kentuckians, including Prewitt, founded the Mountain Pleasure Horse Association.

Kentucky has been very prominent in the development of American Saddlebreds, Walking Horses and other gaited

horses, and descended from some of the same stock as these well-known breeds is the group of easy riding horses now known as "Mountain Pleasure Horses."

The Mountain Pleasure Horse is the result of years of breeding by savvy Kentuckians who mated mare to stallion, seeking their ideal horse that was easy riding, but would step out and cover some ground, which they could ride all day and had the temperament to do anything required.

The resulting horse is, to this day, used to pull the plow or mower on steep slopes and provide hours of sure-footed riding enjoyment in places you'd swear a horse couldn't go. These breeders couldn't afford the luxury of having one horse to work, another horse for the children to ride, and yet another horse for their personal riding enjoyment—so they bred the horse that could do it all. This horse is a curious mixture of family pet and farm implement.

The current population of Mountain Pleasure Horses is small compared to that of 50 years ago. "It used to be that cars and gasoline were scarce and there wasn't much in the way of roads here in the mountain country," explains 79-year-old

Marion Stamper, of Hazel Green, Kentucky. "Back then you could find about any kind of good saddle animal you wanted up any of these roads around here. Then the drummers (salesmen) and big money people started coming in from Virginia and Tennessee and such and bought these horses up until you can't find them much anymore."

"Why, you could get \$1,100 for a good saddle horse back then and you could turn around and buy a good little 'hill farm' for that. With prices like that, we just couldn't keep that many of the good horses around, but there have always been some of us who just had to be raising and trading horses, and most of us have worked them, too, all our lives," recalls Stamper.

Stamper's family tree typifies the loyalty engendered by this special strain of horses native to Eastern Kentucky. His father, Tom, owned the dam of the "Gobel Horse," the stallion spoken of, to this day, in reverent terms by the oldest aficionados of Mountain Pleasure Horses. And Stamper's son, Paul, is one of the founding directors of the Mountain Pleasure Horse Association.

"But these horses have always had to pay their own way. If they wanted to eat, they had to work, and 'work' meant pulling a plow," recalls Marion Stamper. That forced practicality is another factor limiting the current Mountain Pleasure Horse population, because past breeders have raised only enough horses to satisfy their personal riding/work requirements. A good riding mare was not bred if she was needed for working and the family had no need for an additional horse at that point. As a result, the population of horses has not grown because there's not been an economic incentive to take the mare "out of commission" by impregnating her. (The Association has, however, registered almost 700 horses in its first two years of registration.)

Furthermore, good stallions may have serviced only five or six mares a year because there was no exchange of information about the stallions available. Currently the owner of a mare breeds to a stallion owned by his next door neighbor or, indeed, a stallion he owns himself. While there is an amazingly broad population of these horses throughout Eastern Kentucky, there has been relatively little cross pollination of bloodlines.

E.R. "Buddy" Davis has, however, been an exception to that rule. Davis and his wife, Aleitha, are two more of the founding members/directors of the Mountain Pleasure Horse Association and live in Central, rather than Eastern, Kentucky. Buddy Davis has trailered his mares as much as two hours to breed to some of the foundation sires of Mountain Pleasure Horses.

"I probably bred two or three mares to Cable's Rex in Campton back in 1959 to 1962, and that was before the Mountain Parkway, so it was about a two-hour drive from Paris on mountain roads. And I bred to Tobe, at Sam Tuttle's near Irvine, at about the same time," recalls Davis.



The disposition Mountain Pleasure Horses is demonstrated by the willingness of Moon, a 12-year-old stallion, to perform his tricks for an admiring audience at a Kentucky horse show last summer. Moon, owned by Paul E. Stamper, Maytown, KY, was bred to over 60 mares last year and is the sire of more Mountain Pleasure Horse registered offspring than any other stallion in the registry.



Continued on page 54