

Q & A with Dennis Kuehl, Draft Horseman Extraordinaire

BY ALLISON SCHULTZ

How long have you been involved with horses?

Jean [my wife] and I have been involved with Belgian Draft Horses since 1977, when we bought our first pair of Belgian Mares named Bonnie and Belle. Since both of us were raised around horses, it seemed like a 'no brainer' that we get involved as soon as we got our feet on the ground after moving to Colorado in 1972.

How long have you been in Boulder County?

We moved to Boulder County quite by chance. Since the sale of our property in Weld County was imminent, our realtor showed us potential horse properties in Weld and Larimer Counties regularly and finally convinced us to look at property in Boulder County. Since we already owned 15 head of horses, we had quite a few needs. Most were too big or not accommodating enough. After we said 'no' to the last property viewed in Boulder County, our realtor (in desperation) thought our present property might be available, so he checked. He brought us out here, and we immediately wrote a contract. We've been here since 1998.

What has been/is your involvement with horses and the horse industry today?

We have a policy of using the horses at home before they can be hitched for parades, shows or hayrides. The essence of this policy is that in the last 30 years of Draft Horse history in Colorado, we have driven the Greeley Stampede Parade all of those years. We've driven most of the Larimer county fair parades as well, and have been showing at most of the Front Range Draft Horse shows. We have shown Belgian horses at the National Western Stock Show for the past 20 years. Jean and I, with our two sons Brady and Cody, have driven and shown multiple hitches for the past 25 years. We have been members of the Colorado Draft Horse Association since it was organized, the Belgian Draft Horse Corporation, the Belgian Youth and Education Draft Horse Corporation, Draft Horse Association of America and the Boulder County Horse Association. Either Jean or I have held offices in some of these organizations at one time or another. Finally, in 1979, I was delegated to approach the

NWSS to have a Draft Horse Show which has turned out to be a great National show that I have always been a part of.

How did you get into Drafts?

Historically, both of our families both used horses on their farm till the late 40's, so it was natural. Jean was given horses to ride on a regular basis to help her Dad. I was told by my mother that if she needed to find me, she simply went to the work horses, whether in their stalls or on their work routine. After we moved to Colorado, we attended Cheyenne Frontier Days and became enthralled with the Belgian Draft Horses that were part of a Forty Horse Hitch. That day it was decided we would own Draft Horses because we could enjoy the ownership of horses and use them productively on our acreage.

Is there a heritage/history surrounding the draft breeds that you feel moved to preserve?

Draft Horses have a unique history in the world, which is mostly about their attitude and heart for which we think especially of the Belgian Draft Horse. Although the Percheron, Shire and Clydesdale have a longer history in the settling of America, when the Belgian Draft Horse was introduced in the late 1800's, it became a very popular horse because of its manner and willingness to work. Even today, their work habits can fit into the needs of many small farms and acreages, as well as the other breeds.

How do you use your animals today?

We do field work with them, demonstration workshops, hitch them for shows and parades, raise colts and even compete in halter classes with them.

How big is your current herd?

We try to maintain a number of 20 or less. Presently we have about 10 mares that serve us in work and breeding. These are the same horses that we use to hitch with, usually up to six. We also have 4 yearlings, 4 two year olds and two stallions.

Have you had any especially remarkable horses (characters) in your life or notable stories?

We raised a gelding that has become a very popular vaulting horse in North America. We get calls regularly to clone him.

We once owned a mare named Sunny who was used in the lead of our hitch for years. Well known throughout the region because she had lots of attitude and action. When we arrived home from a show, we had to feed her first or she would buck, stomp and run around until we did. Recently, we showed three full sisters in halter classes at the North American Belgian Championship in Indianapolis, IN, that all placed in the top ten in huge classes of horses from all over North America.

Do you see yourself as an ambassador for the breed?

Jean and I really believe that only history will tell you if we were ambassadors for the breed. We have never regretted being involved with the Belgian Draft Horse and take many opportunities to demonstrate their versatility. We enjoy the opportunity to teach people how to drive these horses through one-on-one instruction, scheduled workshops and often as a part of the sale of one of our horses.

Is the entire family involved with the horses?

We have all been involved and have enjoyed many unique experiences with them. Our sons have grown up with the Belgian Draft Horse, so they still play with us as much as they can. When the boys were younger we took them to a promotion, and their question was 'Why are these people all looking at our horses?' - not fully understanding that many people would never have the opportunity they had.

Have horses always been part of your day job?

We are and have been educators since we moved to Colorado. After teaching all day, we often found it rewarding to work with the horses through the evening. Presently, I am a stay-at-home horseman and Jean is still teaching.

Do you incorporate any "green" practices into your horse keeping routine on your property?

We do not own a tractor, so that should have helped our carbon footprint quite a bit. We use all of our fertilizer on the fields, but we do custom hire the baling of hay.

