



Stan Weaver



These 2-year-olds bearing the Weaver Ranch brand are destined for work on the ranch.



Nancy and Stan Weaver

American Quarter Horses are in the blood for this Ranching Heritage Breeder.

By Larri Jo Starkey

Photos courtesy of Weaver Ranch

ABOUT 30 MILES FROM BIG SANDY, MONTANA, SNOWY WINTERS demand tough horses and tough cattle.

Broodmares spend the winter outdoors, foaling outside in April then fattening up on summer pastures before the fall weaning. Then comes winter and the whole cycle starts over again.

That's how it has been on Weaver Ranch since the 1880s, when the first Weavers entered the state. That's where Stan and Nancy Weaver ranch now, first teaching their three children and now their three grandchildren the same ways they were taught by their parents and grandparents.

A goodly portion of that education and that work – both the teaching and the learning – has been from the back of an American Quarter Horse.

“Our grandkids are the sixth generation of Weavers to ride horses with our brand,” Stan says. “My granddad bought the ranch that I live on in 1925, and I’ve lived on it all my life. It’s a family deal. We do everything. It’s just a typical ranch, I guess. We worked hard to make it and keep it going.”

The ranch runs 500 Angus cows with Hereford bulls, 80 mares and five stallions with cow horse pedigrees. The Weavers farm about 3,000 acres of wheat and have an annual horse production sale the third Saturday in September that through the years has sold horses to people from all 50 states and quite a few Canadian provinces, not to mention Germany, Australia, South Africa and Mexico.

Some of the horses bred on the ranch make their way into

the spotlight. Ima Tuf Missy, a 2004 black mare, was the 2009 reserve world champion in junior heading. That same year, she was the all-around high-point mare and high-point junior horse. Weavers Smokin Boon, a 2006 bay mare, is currently in the top 10 of the National Reined Cow Horse Association's open hackamore standings.

Other Weaver-breeds are performing well in cutting, reined cow horse, team penning, ranch sorting and roping events.

"The greatest compliment my program has ever gotten," Stan says, "is one time a lady said that her husband had worked for my granddad when he was a young boy and she said, 'Your granddad would sure be proud of what you've done with your horses.' That meant a lot to me."

This year, AQHA established the AQHA Ranching Council, a group designed to promote AQHA's ranching breeders, and named Stan the chairman.

One of the group's first actions was to approve the AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeders program, giving that designation to ranches that are in the cattle business, keep a remuda to handle those cattle and have been breeding American Quarter Horses for at least 10 years.

The *Journal* talked a bit with Stan about the Ranching Heritage Breeders program and where he sees it going in the future, in between talking about the good horses he raises and the good life he's leading in Montana.

What is a typical day for you? I guess we get up early and go to work. We live on a ranch, so it's very seasonal. I do quite a bit of order buying for feedlots in the Midwest, and we're shipping cattle right now (in October).

The word that best describes me is ... Conservative

Why is the Quarter Horse the breed for your ranch? Well, for me, it's two things: the mind and the athleticism.

When did the ranch get its first Quarter Horse? My dad bought our first Quarter Horse in 1959, so I can barely remember it. Pretty much since then, we've run Quarter Horses. When I was a kid growing up, we'd have four to five mares and a stallion. The first Quarter Horse that I (person-



Stan wears the Weaver brand on his spurs.

ally) owned would have been about 1971.

What do the words "ranching heritage" mean to you?

I guess the history – what we've gone through to get where we are today. Everybody has their own story. We have a great breed to promote but it has taken a lot of hard work to get there, and the ranching heritage is not only horses, it's the cow end of it, too.

Where would you like to see the Ranching Heritage Breeders Program go?

I think it's just going to grow more and more once all the ranchers realize the opportunities we have, that it's not only the shows, it's the awareness of being in the program. I think that once the buying public learns about it, they're going to start wanting these horses more. We're in a growing phase. Nothing happens overnight. It'll take three to five years, I think, to get really accepted by the public, and when we do, I think it will be a bonus to these people who got in early and have several years of their colts in the program.

If you could invite any three people, living or dead, for an evening meal around a campfire, whom would you invite?

John Wayne. Our family has been big John Wayne fans forever. *Albert Mitchell.* It would be fun to sit down with him and be able to tell him where AQHA is now. It wouldn't have been here now if it

At the end of a lush summer, Stan and his family trail the foals and broodmares home.





Stan and Nancy Weaver share the workload on the ranch.



The Montana pastures near Big Sandy are home to the Weaver broodmares and foals.

wasn't for him. He worked hard getting it going and got it through some hard times. I guess I'd like to let him know that he was successful in what he done. And then my granddad, *Elmer*. I was 2 months old when he died, but he was the guy who pretty much put our ranch together and worked hard. When he was a young boy, he used to break horses and trail them to Canada and trade them for unbroken horses and bring the unbroken horses back and that's how he made his money.

How old were you when you broke your first colt? I'm going to say 10 or 12. Boy, I've been riding forever. When I was 3-4 years old, my dad used to take me and lead my horse behind him, and I've done the same thing with our kids when they first started riding. I guess I can't remember not riding.

If I weren't a rancher, I'd be ... involved in sports somewhere. I coached boys' high school basketball here in Big Sandy for a while.

My favorite nonhorse-related pastime is: My wife and I are both alums of Gonzaga University, so watching Gonzaga basketball games.

What do you treasure most? My family memories

What's your greatest extravagance? Probably going to the NFR every year

The talent I most wish I had ...I've ridden all my life, and I show horses. I guess I wish I were a better rider to show horses. I work at it, but like everybody, I need to get better.

Where would you like to be in 10 years? I guess anticipating my next colt crop, and Nancy and I going to our grandkids' activities.

What achievements are you most proud of? The acceptance our horse program has had. We've had horses that have done really well, and then we've had horses that people just ride on the ranch, but we get emails from them and they just love (those horses).

Finish this sentence. People would be surprised to know that I ... am a Civil War buff. I enjoy reading about the Civil War. Anything about Gettysburg is my favorite.

What's the best advice anyone's ever given you? Work hard and be fair with everybody. My mom, Betty, always said, "Treat everybody fair."

What's the best advice you'd give someone seeking ranching success? It's just a different world out there. Work hard and watch your expenses.

What's your idea of perfect happiness? Just being with the family 🐾

Larri Jo Starkey is an editor of The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to lstarkey@aqha.org. To see a complete list of Ranching Heritage Breeders and learn more about the first competition in January, go online to www.aqha.com.



The Weavers like to show mares that will then return to the broodmare band with money on their records.