

Lightning in a Bottle

Katie Starlight's legacy in the arena is mirrored in the breeding shed.

By Megan Arszman

Trainers and exhibitors will tell you a classic reined cow horse has the ability to get down to the cow, physical correctness and longevity. All are traits that a gritty chestnut mare named Katie Starlight passed down to her foals, with six money-earners boosting her to the No. 7 ranking on the **Equi-Stat** Lifetime Reined Cow Horse Statistics Dams chart.

Nicholas Arismendi bred the mare (Grays Starlight x Colonel Gunsmoke x Colonel Freckles), in California. She was trained and shown by Sandy Collier as a 3- and 4-year-old. Then she made National Reined Cow Horse Association (NRCHA) history with Ted Robinson in the saddle as a two-time winner of the World's Greatest Horseman for then-owner Paula Hunsicker.

"As an athlete, she had a lot of expression on a cow," Robinson recalled. "She was a pretty little thing, with a lot of cow."

Those traits are what Robinson has seen Katie Starlight pass on to her foals.

"For me, 'Katie' has the real cow horse breeding, which is the Grays Starlight, the Gun Smoke and the Colonel Freckles," Robinson continued. "Those horses are all good-boned, cowy, and just real hard-knocking horses that can stay with it – they're not little and fractious. They're just good-minded with great athletic ability."

Rick Ford's Cinder Lakes Ranch, in Valley View, Texas, purchased Katie Starlight after the last World's Greatest Horseman win. Ford says that while breeding Katie Starlight presented some difficulty – Katie tended to retain a lot of fluid, which made it difficult to harvest embryos – the results were always worth it in the end.

"It says a lot about her that time after time, it wasn't just one foal that won money, but several of her foals have won lots of money over and over again," he said. "We're really proud of that fact that she's not a one hit wonder."

Some of those foals who have been winning in the pen include This One Time (by One Time Pepto), shown by Todd Bergen to

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Katie Starlight and Ted Robinson in 2001

earnings of \$149,769, Nu Circle Of Light (by Nu Circle N Cash), with \$103,683 in earnings and Katies Kitty (by High Brow Cat) with \$30,140 banked under Jake Telford.

Katie Starlight was actually in foal with Nu Circle Of Light when she won her second World's Greatest Horseman title in 2001. Robinson remembered that, as a yearling, veterinarians suggested to not spend the time breaking and training the colt due to a bone spur. In 2005, Robinson rode him to the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Open Championship. Robinson later rode his full sister, Nu Circle Of Life, to the Open finals.

There doesn't seem to be a stallion cross that didn't seem to work well with Katie Starlight. Ford has enjoyed seeing success with the One Time Pepto crosses and hopes the same will be true for the Very Smart Remedy cross being shown by Bergen.

Even though the two horses he's ridden are by different studs, Bergen sees similarities, and he attributes that to Katie.

"Probably the biggest thing that I've noticed in both colts is that they're both big

stoppers and they try hard. They're pretty serious about their work," he said. "The other thing I've noticed is that they're good conformation horses. They're by two different studs, with totally different breedings, and both of those horses are what you look for as far as a stallion, conformation-wise and how they use themselves. I'd definitely attribute that to Katie. They really use themselves the right way that you need for a cow horse."

Bergen and This One Time were Reserve Champions at the 2012 NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Open, 2014 NRCHA Stakes Open Champions and Reserve Champions in the 2014 NRCHA Derby Open. Now 6, the stallion has completed his first breeding season and is back in training. Eventually, he may follow in his dam's hoof prints in the World's Greatest Horseman competition.

Finding a mare that is as accomplished in the breeding pen as she was in the show pen (with \$126,170) is like catching lightning in a bottle.

"We'd like to see more mares like that in our industry, but we just don't get them," Robinson said. "We were lucky to have her there and I was very lucky to get to show her."

Katie Starlight was laid to rest in the fall of 2014 in one of Cinder Lakes' picturesque pastures after a long battle with carpal arthritis causing joint collapse in her right front leg. She was 21. Her last foal, One Timin Katie, is listed the NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity Sale in Reno, Nev. The red roan filly, by One Time Pepto, reminds Ford a lot of her mother.

"You look at her and you see Katie Starlight all over – in her face and her attitude," he said. "It's hard to sell her, but at the same time it's time to move on and hope you can do it again. I hope whoever ends up with her has as much luck with her as we did with Katie. It won't be the last of the legacy she's got."

"[Katie Starlight] will be a hall of famer soon," Robinson predicted. "She deserves it. She's done a lot for cow horse." ★