Betting *on* Horses

South Dakota's Schaack family has triumphed over personal tragedy and dared to live their dream: to operate a top-notch horse breeding and training program.

Story by KATE BRADLEY
Photography by DARRELL DODDS

TOP: It is a family affair on the ranch. From left, Tres, Paula, Tim and Treg Schaack all pitch in to ride horses, chuck cattle or perform other ranch chores.

INSET: While at Haythorn Land & Cattle Co., Tim Schaack competed in ranch horse shows. In 2003, he rode Watch Four Me Jack to the Ranch Horse Association of America cowboy horse division reserve championship.

A FADED WOODEN SIGN that reads "Fairytales do come true" sits on the window ledge in the Schaack family's kitchen. It's an uplifting reminder that hope can conquer some of the darkest times in life, and dreams can become reality. For this South Dakota family, those hopes are pinned on a promising young buckskin stallion and a band of well-bred mares.

Their path to happily ever after may not be paved in gold, but the Schaacks have proven they can persevere. They have a small and growing horse breeding operation along the Cheyenne River, northwest of Edgemont. The family maintains a herd of roughly 120 Black Angus cattle, and everyone does their part to keep the cattle ranch and horse breeding and training program running like a well-oiled machine.

It started with one man's determination. From an eastern South Dakota dairy farm to the famed Haythorn Land & Cattle Co. in Nebraska, and finally to his own place, Tim Schaack did not waiver from his life's calling of being a good stockman and handy horseman.

RAISING THE STAKES

Growing up in Henry, South Dakota, the son of a dairy farmer, Tim Schaack knew he did not want that lifestyle.

"I despised farming," he says. "My dad was a good horseman as a young man and he was a good stockman. My dad helped me start a colt when I was 9 years old; by the time I was 12 until I went to college I milked cows in the morning and spent the rest of the day starting colts."

As a young man, Tim roped and worked horses as often as he could, though he knew that being a cowboy was a tough life. After he married his first wife, Carrie, in 1989, he attempted to settle into a life that would support the newlyweds, trying his hand at selling health and life insurance. He soon had two sons to support, Tel and Treg. Though his job provided the growing family a good income and allowed Tim the time to compete in rodeos, he did not find the same sense of accomplishment that came with starting a young horse.

Tim finally gave in to his desire to work with horses after a little divine intervention.

"I had a man of God ask me why I kept trying to get away from something I knew felt right," Tim recalls. "That was kind of a wake-up call for me. When I decided the horses were going to be our livelihood, everything was good."

Four Chex Classic and her 2015 colt by Whoza Your Daddy represent the future of the Schaack breeding program.

Purchased in 2007 from Haythorn Land & Cattle Co., Four Cash 21 is by Nu Cash Cow, who is by Nu Cash. Her 2015 filly is by Whoza Your Daddy.

Refocusing on horsemanship, Tim sought opportunities to ride with legendary horsemen like Ray Hunt and Buck Brannaman. Hunt offered clinics in Tim's home state, and Tim first attended Hunt's colt-starting demonstration in Yankton, South Dakota, in 1996. Hunt's teachings influenced Tim's colt-starting methods and provided the young horseman with high expectations for his own horsemanship.

"Ray rode so correct, his cues so slight, that you couldn't see what he was doing," Tim says. "I still strive for that today: first to get the horse to want to be with you, secondly to operate off of feel. It is not an easy task. Ray would say the last thing you learn is the first thing you need to know, and that is true."

Tim found starting young horses to be a roller coaster of a career. He leased barns around eastern South Dakota, looking for a place that offered a viable horse population to work with. In 2001, Tim saw an opportunity to parlay his struggling business riding colts for the public into a full-time job with Haythorn Land & Cattle Co., located in Arthur, Nebraska.

He called Craig Haythorn to inquire about an ad the ranch had placed—they needed cowboys. After speaking with Haythorn on the phone, Tim landed a weekend riding interview with the rancher.

"When I interviewed, Craig caught me a horse that was a 4- or 5-year-old that hadn't been ridden in a year or two," Tim says. "The horse had learned to run off with the boy who rode him before. Well, the guys all took off at a lope to test me; I kept working the horse until I had him in hand. I was trying to hold herd while they sorted Hereford cows. The entire time, I worked on that horse, building respect. By the time we rode home, he was swinging his head and going easy. When we unsaddled, [Craig] offered to let me ride horses—no chores or hay—just ride horses."

Tim and Carrie moved Tel, then 9 years old, and Treg, 5, to the ranch in 2001. In 2002, Tres was born, completing a trifecta of Schaack boys. Carrie, a trained pharmacist, commuted to Ogallala, Nebraska, daily for her job. Through the years, Tel and Treg rode with their father to gather cattle, helped drag calves to the fire at brandings and pitched in to help with ranch chores. In addition, the boys became fixtures at the annual Haythorn horse sale, riding horses in the sale preview and into the sale ring.

Tim was horseback daily, working colts and advancing older horses' training. The Haythorn crew participated in ranch horse versatility shows, and Tim prepared the horses for the show arena.

"Tim showed a lot, and we were pretty successful showing when we went," says Haythorn. "I'd sure say his showmanship skills improved. The more you show, the better you get. He was an awful good roper when he [came to work for us], and we made quite a few rope horses, so that was a plus. He taught those boys to be pretty good ropers, too."

The ranch was an ideal place for a man to make his living horseback. However, in 2003, the Schaacks' world was rocked when Carrie was killed in a car accident. Faced with raising his three

Tres Schaack, 13, likes spending time with foals, like this 2015 filly by Whoza Your Daddy and out of Four Seventy One, by Figure Four Chex.

boys while working at a demanding ranch job, Tim was forced to reevaluate his priorities. Eventually, he decided to leave the ranch in search of his own place to run cattle and raise horses.

The 2007 Haythorn horse sale was the last that Tim and his sons worked. When he left the ranch, Tim purchased several horses, including three broodmares that became the bedrock of his own breeding program.

PLAYING A NEW HAND

In 2007, it seemed like déjà vu for Tim, leasing barns and riding outside horses to make a living. However, this time he was parenting three young boys on his own.

Meanwhile, Tim's future wife, Paula, was raising her two children as a single parent. A native of Edgemont, Paula was raised on a cattle and sheep ranch. She divorced when her son, Josh, and daughter, Whitney, were young. A successful hair salon owner, Paula was content with her life. Then Tim showed up.

Friends and fate stepped in to bring Tim and Paula together in August of 2008.

"Tim and I met where we are living right now, on this ranch [south of Edgemont]," Paula says with a laugh. "Tim and I had a mutual set of friends that lived here, and they had Tim and his boys out to rope the same time that my son and I came out. I didn't want to meet a guy then, but I came. We met the first part of August and were married in late November."

The Schaack household became a family of seven. Mutual love for rodeo and horses glued the new siblings together; every weekend saw six or seven Schaacks travel to a rodeo where many of the children would compete. Though in tight quarters, the family had fun. The white wood barns and small ranch house that sit beside the railroad tracks just northwest of Edgemont became a hub of activity, with Tim bringing in outside horses to train, the boys practicing roping and Paula managing a hair salon in town.

Paula's two children were the first to leave home, with Whitney, 29, marrying and moving to Sturgis and Josh, 26, purchasing his own small ranch south of town. Today, 25-year-old Tel trains rope horses and starts colts in eastern South Dakota; Treg, 23, attends West Texas A&M University in Canyon and is studying mechanical engineering while also competing in college rodeo and coming home to the ranch when he can. Only Tres, 13, is home to work with his father on a daily basis.

Just as the children were moving out, good hands were needed more than ever around the Schaack ranch. Paula sold her salon and began to reacquaint herself with the skills required on a working ranch.

In 2012, after years of internal debate as to whether he wanted to own a breeding stallion, Tim took the leap and purchased a weanling colt.

ACE IN THE HOLE

Each morning, Tim Schaack looks out his kitchen window at an iron-fenced corral that holds his future. Some mornings, the waves of fog that roll off the Cheyenne River don't allow him to clearly see the beautiful, athletic and personable buckskin

Using techniques he learned studying at Ray Hunt clinics and riding with Buck Brannaman, Tim Schaack guides a 2-year-old colt in pre-riding exercises.

horse that weanling grew into, but Tim knows he is there.

Whoze Your Daddy, by Paddys Irish Whiskey and out of Frenchmans Violet by Frenchmans Guy, is the embodiment of the Schaacks' hopes and dreams for the future. Every decision made since purchasing "Whiskey" has been calculated, working toward one goal: to raise arena-type horses that can be used on ranches and make it in rodeo.

South Dakota is home to several well-known Quarter Horse breeding programs, including Frenchmans Quarter Horses in Hot Springs. Owners John and Lis Hollman are at the helm of a long-established line of producing broodmares that go back to the magic cross of Laughing Boy on Casey's Ladylove. Hot Springs is a stone's throw from Edgemont, and horse people tend to gravitate toward one another. In 2012, the Hollmans' trainer, Gideon Lucey, called his friend Tim about a weanling colt.

"Gideon said that they had an own son of Paddys Irish Whiskey out of one of their good mares," Tim recalls. "Paula and I drove over; I knew after the first look that it was a mistake to go see this horse. I was hooked. He was about 200 yards away from his mother in a pasture and he just came right over to us. You could tell, even as a weanling he was people-oriented, and he was just striking."

The colt had the bloodlines to go many directions in the performance arena. Paddys Irish Whiskey is a National Reined Cow Horse Association all-time leading sire and Equi-Stat all-time leading reined cow horse sire. Frenchmans Violet is by leading barrel racing and roping sire Frenchmans Guy, and is out of a half-sister to Frenchmans Guy's dam. Her dam, Frenchmans Topaz, is by Leige Lord and out of Casey's Ladylove.

With their hopes resting on a young stallion, it has become a waiting game for the Schaack family. They grew their small broodmare band to include mares with complementary bloodlines to fit Whiskey. Today, the Schaacks own seven broodmares, carrying the blood of Figure Four Chex, Nu Cash, Lone Drifter and Handy Eddie Cinco.

"Every one of [Figure Four Chex's] colts that I rode at the Haythorn were quick-footed, cowy, and had a lot of speed. You could do anything on them," Tim says. "Two other mares are daughters of Lone Drifter, a horse Mel Potter owned that is by Driftwood. Those mares are ones that raise great babies."

The Schaacks have five coming 2-year-olds by Whiskey to start in 2016. In 2015, they bred outside horses as well as their own mares; the 2016 foal crop could bring the total number of Whiskey offspring to 25.

"Not too long ago, when you found out about a great stallion, it was 14 to 16 years old; it took that long before he was proven," Tim says. "We bred Whiskey [as a 2-year-old] so that we can get some

performers going when he is young. The great successes of the horse industry in South Dakota, to me, were people that got their young horses into the hands of the right people early on."

LET THE CHIPS FALL

Together, Tim and Paula step outside before dawn to start the many tasks that must be completed to keep a successful horse training and breeding program, and a cow-calf operation, running.

"Paula is a godsend. She owned the beauty salon in Edgemont for 28 years, and now she leaves the house at 5 o'clock with me and gets back at dark," Tim says. "Without her, nothing gets done around here."

There are between seven and 10 outside horses to ride daily, broodmares to care for, feed to be purchased and, during breeding season, daily 200-mile trips that Paula makes to the post office to ship semen to clients around the state and the country. When not in school, Tres rides the horses Tim feels are far enough along to be safe for him. It is truly a team effort.

For young Tres, it is the best life he could ask for.

"I like how a horse can affect a person's life, how fun they are to be around and that horses listen to what you say," Tres says. "One day I want to breed a horse that runs at The American [rodeo], but right now I'm riding horses that dad gets kind of safe."

Tres is what Tim dubs a horse whisperer, having a talent that makes him the favorite human in the mare and foal pasture. His innate sense of feel for how fast or slow to move around a horse also transfers to riding the horses his father assigns him in the colt string.

Tim puts anywhere from 15 to 45 rides on a 2-year-old before turning it out until the horse's 3-year-old year. Then, he starts to use the horse around the ranch. When it isn't breeding season, Whiskey is in the riding string, with Tim preparing him to show at ranch horse competitions in the north-central states. The horses on the Schaack ranch cover many miles on a weekly basis.

"Our cows probably get looked at more than anybody else's in the country because we are always horseback," Tim says. "We are convinced that if you can take a young horse, get it cross-country and give it a job moving cattle or checking fence line, that beats arena time. Cross-country riding gives a horse a better foundation in the years to come.

"I don't believe in luck in the horse business. Horse programs are a life's work. We may be just starting out, but we have many years of breeding behind us."

A few years back, the Schaacks laid it all on the line in hopes a well-bred and athletic young stallion could make his mark in an ever-evolving horse industry. Now, they rely on hard work and experience to see them to the finish line.

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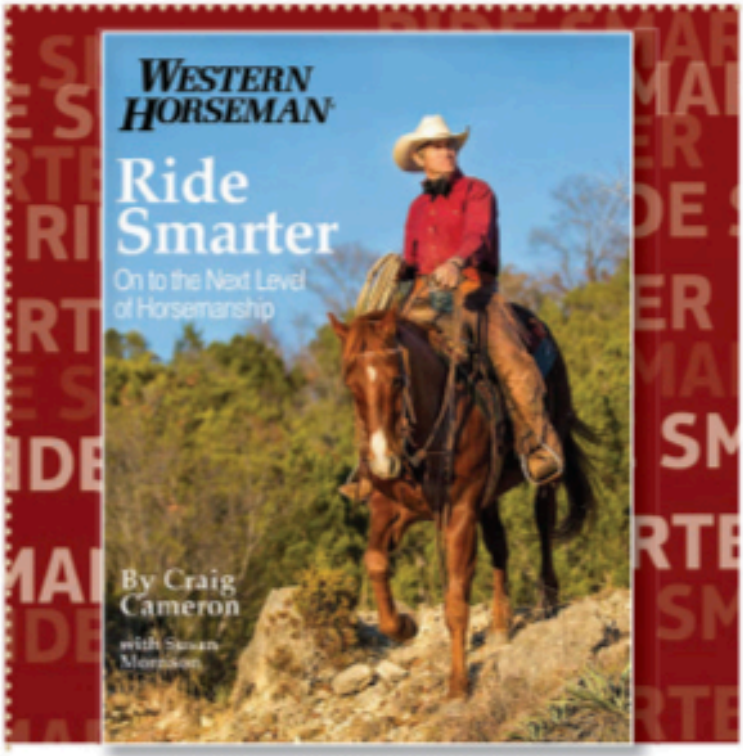

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