

Get started as we follow 3-year-olds on their path to a Zoetis AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenge.

By Larri Jo Starkey

During the fall, Matt Koch was able to ride Smart By Starlight outside on cattle.



BRIANNA KOCH

MAKING COW HORSES

LET'S SAY YOU HAVE A NICE PROSPECT FOR A ZOETIS AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenge. He was bred by an AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeder and he's a nice, athletic horse, 3 coming 4.

And let's say you want to get that horse ready for the 2015 challenges and earn your share of the estimated \$100,000 payout.

How do you prepare your colt?

The *Journal* went to the experts to find out, and for the next year, we'll be following along as horse trainers prepare ranch-bred 3-year-olds for the 2015 competitions.

Our two trainers are Matt Koch of Wagonhound Land & Livestock in Douglas, Wyoming, and Chance O'Neal of the Four Sixes Ranch in Guthrie, Texas.

The two ranches have different foaling dates and different work schedules, and both horse trainers are experienced in Ranching Heritage Challenge competition.

They've agreed to open up about their training timetables and how they prepare their horses for the big dance.

While Matt is prepping several horses for 2015, he has his eye on one horse in particular that he'll be featuring: Smart By Starlight, a 2011 bay stallion by WR This Cats Smart and out of HR Smiling Light by Grays Starlight. "Smirk" was bred and is owned by the Wagonhound.

Chance has three horses that he thinks might make the cut: Turbo Transition, a 2011 sorrel mare by Mr Playinstylish and out of Turbo Chick by Shot O' Gin; Paddys Ginnin Lady, a 2011 bay mare by Paddys Irish Whiskey and out of Valliant Gin by Tanquery Gin; and Paddys Wimpy, a 2011 buckskin stallion by Paddys Irish Whiskey and out of Wimpys Six by Wimpys Little Step. The three prospects were all bred and are owned by the Four Sixes, which is also a Zoetis AQHA Best Remuda winner.

The *Journal* spoke January 14 with Matt and January 22 with Chance.

Matt Koch

Smart By Starlight

I'VE BEEN RIDING THAT BAY HORSE SINCE MARCH (2013). HE had about 45 days on him before I started riding him. The other cowboys called him Smirk because he has a full brother they called "Smiles."

I picked him as a prospect because he's got some size to him: big bones and real proportional. He's got a lot of cow and a lot of grit to him. He's a really good ranch horse, but he's extremely talented, also.

I like a horse who has enough bone to go do a day's work if you need to use him, but then he should also be built so he

can move around and be handy enough.

He has a good foundation. He can run and stop a little bit and turn around. We've tracked some cattle on him in break-away. I've doctored a few cattle outside on him. We've been working out of the herd.

Since we had him going pretty good last year, I branded a few calves on him, and this summer, I used him to move yearlings outside. In the fall, I used him to doctor a few, and then when we preg-checked cattle, I'd take him with me and when we got done preg-checking, we had all those cows around, so I'd work him on a cow.

This time of year, because of the weather, we have to work indoors, and he's getting about 30 minutes of work a day. We try to re-enact ranch work inside as much as we can. We're cutting on him some and I'm roping the roping dummy on him occasionally. We might kick a roping steer into the arena and just track it around or head it.

I'm just trying to keep him as fresh as I can by doing other things on him.

We're hoping to get him ready for the (National Reined Cow Horse Association) Snaffle Bit (Futurity in September).

Right now, he's pretty good in his circles. He struggles a little bit in his lead changes still. We haven't pushed it too much. We're trying to get him as broke as we can. He's got a good turnaround and really wants to stop. We're on our way, anyway.

Chance O'Neal

Turbo Transition, aka "Lexus"

Paddys Ginnin Lady, aka "Piñata"

Paddys Wimpy, aka "Mojo"

WHEN WE WERE BREAKING THESE HORSES OUT AS 2'S, THE FIRST thing I looked at was their athletic ability, the way they moved in the round pen when they were loose. Then after we started working with them, I looked at their mentality, their disposition and their willingness.

When I'm working with a horse that we intend to show, he has to be trainable, and I think these three will be.

I feel like I'm a little bit behind right now, because on the ranch, we spend a lot of time getting ready for our two sales each year, the Best of the Remuda sale (in January during the Fort Worth Livestock Show in Fort Worth, Texas) and the Return to the Remuda sale in the fall (at the ranch in Guthrie).

We've been prepping our sale horses, and we have to spend enough time with them that they are broke and the people who buy them are satisfied customers.

But it always feels like I'm behind in January, and I've learned from the past that I can't worry about being behind. In the past, I'd try to rush a horse, and you just can't do that. You have to go at their pace.

We start some horses in January, and some might not get started until April. I started Mojo in May. I can

usually narrow down my show prospects pretty quickly, but I keep about five or six up and get them ridden in rotation. I can't eliminate one too early, because some horses might mature a little later.

The horse I had planned on showing (at the AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenge) in Fort Worth this year, didn't mature as fast as I thought she would have. She's got all the parts there – it's just maturity and her mind.

One of the luxuries of working on the ranch is we can wait on the horse. Like Royalty Return (the horse that he won the Battle in the Saddle Ranch Remuda competition on in 2011). We didn't start showing her until late in her 4-year-old year. We can wait. I've won a lot more on her after she turned 5. She's a sound horse. We don't even have to train her now, just keep her in shape.

What I've done throughout the year (with these prospects) is riding them outside and putting miles on them, through the cedar trees and mesquite trees, and up and down them old rocky hills. I'm working on getting them to yield to my legs, getting them to soften in the face, getting them to stop and back up, and I do all that out there while we're just trotting, so it's not an intense training. When they were 2, I might have ridden them two or three times a week.

I was really impressed with them today, because they had been turned out for three weeks while I was getting ready for Fort Worth. I just got them back up and saddled them up and got on them, and they were just soft in my hands. I loped them off, and they picked up their leads, and they followed their noses and loped pretty circles. When I took my legs off them, they stopped. When I picked up on them, they backed up.

That doesn't sound like a whole lot, but I've also been tracking cattle on them. I started in December, and I've been able to get them hooked up on a cow. My next step in the coming months is to start working them more on a cow. ☐

Larri Jo Starkey is an editor for The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment or suggest a question you'd like these two trainers to answer, write to lstarkey@aqha.org. To learn more about AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeders, go to www.aqha.com/ranching. To keep up with the 2014 Zoetis AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenges, check weekly at www.aqha.com/showing, your first stop for industry news.



Daily work can cut into your horse's training time, but it's important not to get in a hurry and skip steps, Chance O'Neal says. Turbo Transition, left, and Paddys Ginnin Lady are ready to prepare for a Zoetis AQHA Ranch Heritage Challenge with Chance.

TERRI O'NEAL