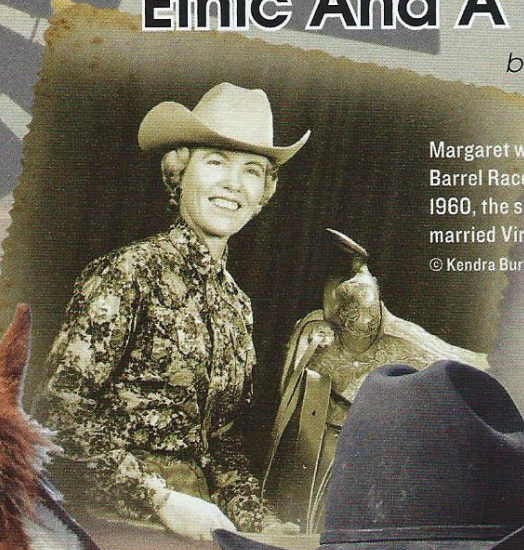


MARGARET HAWKINS

A Life Based On A Strong Work Ethic And A Deep Love Of Horses

by Joyce Loomis Kernek

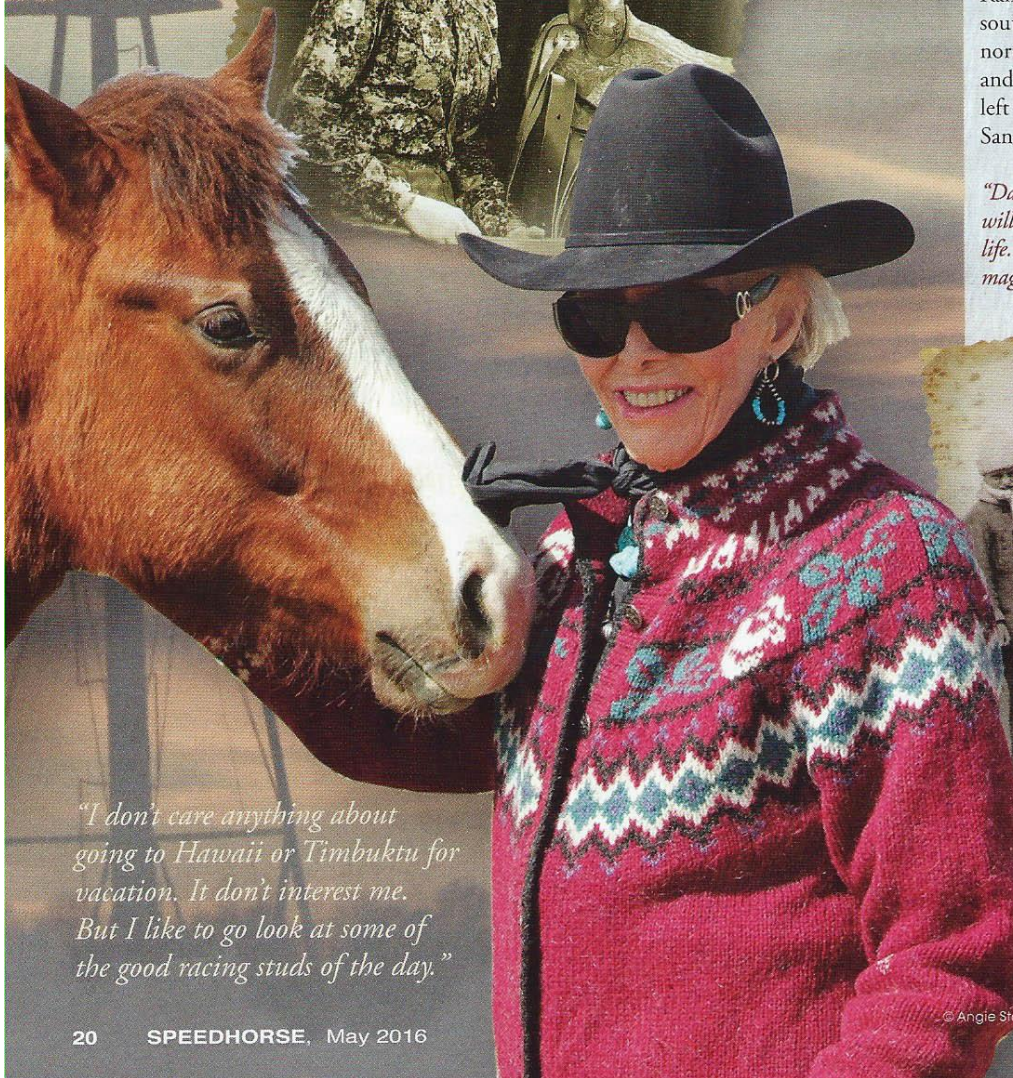


Margaret was the NCRA Barrel Race Champion in 1960, the same year she married Virgil Hawkins.

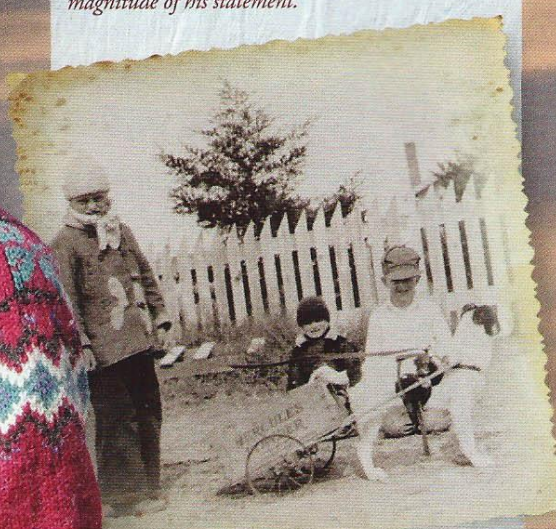
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Margaret Chamberlain was born on Friday the 23rd of December in 1927. She was the first of three children born to James L. "Jim" and Irma Chamberlain. She grew up on the Figure 2 Ranch, which was started by her grandfather southwest of North Platte, Nebraska, and north of the former town of Dickens. Margaret and her siblings, Walt and Beverly, have all left their mark on the history of the Nebraska Sandhills cattle and horse industries.

"Daddy said you should learn to like to work. It will be the source of the greatest pleasure in your life. I had to get older before I could appreciate the magnitude of his statement."



"I don't care anything about going to Hawaii or Timbuktu for vacation. It don't interest me. But I like to go look at some of the good racing studs of the day."



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Margaret, her brother Walt, sister Beverly, & dog Jack in a harness pulling a cart Margaret made from a dynamite box and an old bicycle.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Margaret and her siblings learned their ranching skills firsthand from their father. The family crossed draft stallions with wild horses that they broke for utility horses before becoming involved in the U.S. Army Remount breeding program. The remount stallions that added to their breeding program were a Morgan, named Orient, and several Thoroughbred stallions, including Reviewer and Infidox. Margaret's father also did some outside breeding at various times to make extra money during the tough times of the 1930's. He and several of the horses that he handled are listed in the book "War Horse" by Robertson & Livingston.

"Daddy stood remount stallions. And daddy took care of the horses just like the U.S. Army told him to. Back in the '30s we got \$500 in service fees, and that paid the haying bills. That's when a hamburger cost a nickel, and so did a candy bar. Daddy got us kids up at daylight every morning to run in our mares. We'd tease mares from the first of May until the first of July."

Margaret's father excelled in the Army Remount program. This enabled him to have his pick of the remount stallions that he could bring to the ranch and breed. The Army had strict rules on how they wanted these stallions cared for, and great racing stallions were often donated to this program: Minesweeper and Dry Moon are examples of donated stallions that Chamberlain selected. The Army required that they be hand-bred, have their own corral, have grain 2-3 times daily, and water 24/7. Margaret learned at an early age to care for horses, handle stallions, and plan breedings to produce the type of horses needed to ride and run the ranch.

The offspring of the breedings were trained for the army. The larger ones were trained to pull a wagon, and the others were broke to ride and

Margaret in 1953 aboard an Appaloosa gelding sired by Teeoh, a son of King P-234 that was the first Quarter Horse her father ever purchased.

to be used in the Calvary. When the remount program sent inspectors to the ranch to select the horses they wanted, Margaret and her siblings would demonstrate the horses to them, often jumping them over large obstacles bareback.

"We had 20 miles of windmills, and us kids rode them every day. Daddy wouldn't send us alone. I think it would have killed my dad if something would have happened to us kids."

Margaret's father died of cancer in 1946 when Margaret was 17. Her brother Walt was 15 and her sister Beverly was 14. After his passing, the siblings helped their mother run the ranch. Margaret remembers she, Walt and Beverly getting up before dawn and wrangling mares every morning to tease and breed. They also put many miles on the horses, riding to check the cattle and water on the 20-section ranch.

"There are certain people that have a love for the land. And to other people, it's just dirt. But that love of the land and love of a horse, I think it is inborn."

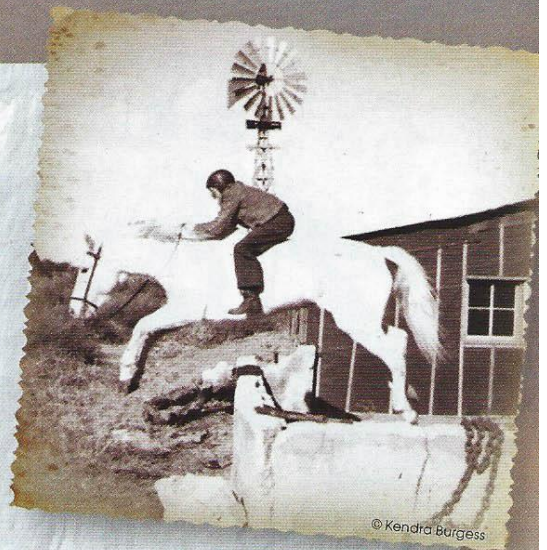
Margaret states that her mother, Irma, was a smart, industrious and hard-working woman with a great deal of common sense. Margaret said her mother could live well on less than anyone she has ever known, raising chickens, ducks and geese, tending a big garden, and canning their food. She also handmade their clothes and passed those skills on to her girls. It was unusual in those days for a woman to run a ranch and even more unusual for women to handle stallions, but she and her children continued breeding horses.

All of the skills and strong work ethic she learned from both of her parents would serve Margaret well in what was to come later in her life. Margaret's father told her he wanted her to learn to ranch because he had seen women who had lost their husbands and didn't know how many cattle they had or even where they were. The family learned to survive in drought and every other situation that ranchers face. They learned how to be innovative in order to keep the ranch intact.

The children rode to school every day, no matter what the weather was like. They also trained dogs to be used on the ranch – a skill that is continued on Margaret's ranch to this day.

"The most important quality dogs, horses and humans can have is loyalty. Horses that will try their guts out when a herd runs at them are the same horses that will win a race with a sore leg."

Many of the horses that Jim Chamberlain bred still show up in the lineage of the horses on the ranch today. Selnur, a 16 hand Polish-



Margaret and her siblings demonstrated the horses that they bred for the Army Remount program, often jumping them over large obstacles bareback.

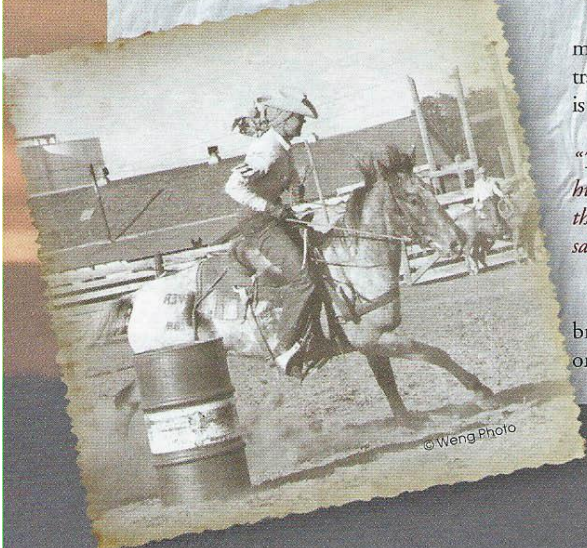
bred Arabian, and an American Saddlebred son of Rex McDonald were used previous to the introduction of Quarter Horses. The first Quarter Horse Chamberlain bought was a son of King P-234 named Teeoh.

Margaret's brother Walter later purchased the yearling racing bred stallions Sugar Band and Tiger Leo from Bud Warren and campaigned them to AAA and AQHA Championships. When he was 10 years old in 1968, Tiger Leo was syndicated by trainers Stan and Mary Kay Steyskal. He went on to become a famous sire and the Tiger Leo blood continues as a strong influence in Margaret's breeding program, now crossing with such popular stallions as Judge Cash. Walter always said that horses were just like a set of mechanical levers and, when balanced, they would have 4-wheel drive.

MARRIAGE AND ANOTHER START

Margaret Chamberlain first saw her future husband, Virgil Hawkins, at the Haythorn Ranch branding. The Haythorn Ranch bordered Virgil's ranch near Arthur, Nebraska. Virgil had been a lot of places and had done a lot of things, and Margaret found him to be a very interesting man (Margaret has a very inquisitive mind and, to this day, reads and studies constantly). They were married in 1960. From that time until this day, Margaret lives on the ranch Virgil owned. Their union produced two children – Virgilene and Virgil James Hawkins, and each of them have two children.

When Margaret moved to Arthur, Nebraska, she brought her horses with her and continued the breeding that she and her father had started. She continued to breed winning horses. Some of them were sold, and others were kept as ranch and rodeo horses. Ranching always came first to Margaret and her family, so their horses only saw competition as time allowed.



"I trot circles on these side hills where it's washed out and sandy. There are undulations in the ground, and it builds up your horse. He has to make a lot of transitions within himself. Then, when you get to running barrels, it's easier for him to do it."

THE LEGACY CONTINUES

The singer/songwriter Jewel wrote a song about rodeo called "Til We Run Out of Road" and in the song she writes, "I guess we will just go til we're too old or we run out of road." However, the road that is the legacy of someone like Margaret Hawkins seems to never end. She inherited her legacy from her family, and that legacy will be passed on to the next generation. She was forced to grow up fast when her father passed away and she was needed to help her mother and siblings run the ranch. History repeated itself when her husband passed away and she had two children to raise and a ranch to run.

"When Virgil died, I went ahead and ran the ranch and raised my kids. And son-in-law Mark said most women wouldn't have tried that. I just figured I could do it. Age is such a state of mind. You should never stop doing the things that make you happy."

Her story will not run out of road. It will instead take a bend in the road where her legacy continues through her children and their children. Virgilene has some mighty good horses coming up that carry the legacy of many years of selective breeding. Inherited Champion legacies are being passed on - both horse and human - and are a solid indication that the legacy of Margaret Chamberlain Hawkins will continue on for years to come.

"People that love their work get to play all their life. I get on my horse and ride through these hills, and I'm in touch with my God and I'm having a great time!" 🐾



© Hawkins Family

- Margaret was one of the first women in Nebraska to earn a pilot's license and was later joined by her daughter Virgilene. There was an ulterior motive - it was faster to check the water and livestock from the air than riding out. The family has owned seven or eight different airplanes.
- Margaret loves dressage and she took lessons from renowned trainer and teacher Lowell Boomer in Lincoln, Nebraska.

"Dressage is fascinating to me. There's a lot in dressage today on how using your body determines how your horse works. Someone said you cannot learn all of dressage in one lifetime. I bet you can't learn all of calf roping either, or cutting horse training, or anything else. But if you 'knew it all' it might be rather boring."

- Margaret's quest for knowledge, combined with an open mind to learn, is unquenchable. She believes you should learn something new each and every day.

"I read every day. I read a lot of different things, and people say 'this is right,' or 'this is wrong.' There's people that do totally opposite of what you think is good sense. And you know the interesting thing that they all have in common? They all think they're right. So maybe I don't know what's right either."

- There are no doctors or hospital in Arthur county, so when Margaret broke her finger, she set it herself. She learned to do whatever was necessary.

"If you ride, every now and then you're gonna get in a wreck. But if you say, 'I'm too old to do this,' you lose something and you can't get it back. I think you shut the door to accomplishing what you could. Maybe you shouldn't use age as a limit, but so many people do."

- Margaret liked to shoe her own horses.
- Margaret's brand is the figure 2 brand, and she actually branded herself with the brand. She saw that people were getting tattoos, but she figured she could do something more western. She made her brand with a small copper wire, heated it up, and experienced what it is like to be branded. The brand is on her left leg above the knee.
- Margaret lives life in a full gallop, but still found time to help organize the Nebraska Cowgirl Rodeo Association with her sister Beverly, who was the first president. Margaret served as president more than once.
- Margaret won the state championship in barrel racing several times. Barrel racing began in the early '40s in Texas and Oklahoma, and Margaret was instrumental in bringing it to her area. She promoted barrel racing and rodeo and started women's events when they were scarce.
- Margaret sewed all of her clothes and up to ten years ago never owned a store bought shirt. She also made most of her own tack. She has many types of leather sewing machines in the basement of her house.
- Margaret had an indoor arena barn built so she could train year around.

"One riding instructor said, 'Learn from the mistakes of others because you don't have time to make all the mistakes yourself.' That can apply to about anything in life."

- Margaret and daughter Virgilene spent part of the year following the professional rodeo circuit - a tradition Margaret started years ago. Her last competition run was in 2005 when she ran Steppin Darling, who was purchased by Margaret at Heritage Place in 1999. Margaret used Steppin Darling in her breeding program and ran barrels on him. She also rode him many miles as a cow/ranch horse. This descendant of Moon Lark and Easily Smashed was smooth, tough and had "cow running out his ears."

"If your horse don't have a good attitude, he isn't any good to you."

- When asked what her secret to long life is, her reply was she is a firm believer in vitamins E and B and she packs her own food on the road. At 88, she still does daily exercises and got on the floor and demonstrated her "planks."
- Margaret has been inducted into Nebraska Sandhills Cowboy Hall of Fame, received the Nebraskaland Days Best of the West Award for her contribution to rodeo, and has been featured in Women of the West by *Western Horseman*. Margaret was recently awarded the American Quarter Horse Association Legacy Award for 50 years of registering at least one foal.

Margaret receives her AQHA Legacy Award for 50 years of registering at least one foal, with Ward, James, Annie and Julie Hawkins. © Hawkins Family



© Hawkins Family

Margaret & Virgil Hawkins, Christmas, 1960.

"I am appalled at how fast some people can totally ruin a good horse. They can ruin the best attitude in the world. So, I've gotten to the place that I'm pretty particular who I sell my horses to."

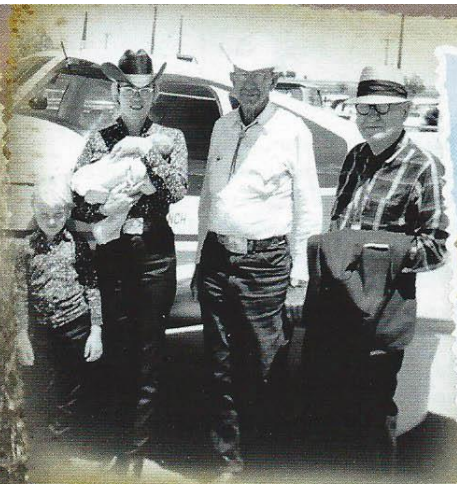
Margaret has her own criteria, and she knows exactly what kind of horse she is breeding for. One of her mentors is Dr. Beeman, the popular and famed Littleton, Colorado veterinarian. He advised her and became a great friend, and still is to this day. Margaret wanted to raise horses with heavy bone, good feet, strong shoulders and prominent withers. She wanted a very athletic horse that was mentally very trainable with a people-friendly disposition. She had read that eventing and barrel racing were the hardest two events on horses, and she wanted to raise horses that would stay sound and be long lasting.

Margaret was pregnant with her first child the summer she won the 1961 Nebraska State Barrel Racing Championship. Her fellow competitors kidded her saying that she had "help," and she answered that her horse had a "disadvantage carrying two!"

Margaret is adamant about the importance of the broodmare line, and she is also very selective in choosing stallions. She likes to see them standing on cement, as well as turned out into a paddock to watch them move. She is particular about conformation. If she is buying at a sale, she wants to see how they act in their stalls and what their disposition is throughout the commotion of the sale.

BREEDING FOR SPEED

Margaret has always bred to speed horses, and she did so before barrel racing even began. Her horses have all grown up working cattle and covering country to earn a living. She discovered that some Thoroughbred blood produces horses that are tougher and that ride smoother. She preferred a short,



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Virgilene, Margaret holding son Virgil James, and Virgil Hawkins with Bill Howard in front of their 1968 Mooney airplane.

thick Thoroughbred when she could find them since they were easier to get on while wearing thick layers of winter clothing.

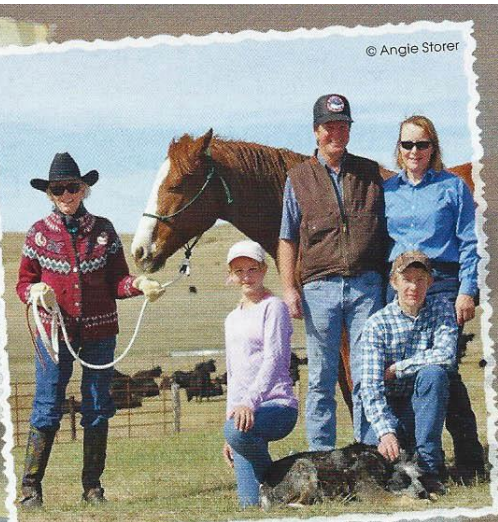
She not only wanted good conformation in her horses, but they also had to be able to eat and drink anywhere they were. And, they had to have the will to 'die trying' to get a cow. She believes that some modern "cow horses" do not have good enough feet and legs and are as hot as many race horses. So, to breed for the type of horse you want to ride requires a lot of research. It doesn't take a great deal of searching to find racehorses that were built to turn around and also wanted to work a cow - and later a barrel.

"I saw barrel racing for the first time at the Burwell Rodeo in about 1948 or '49. It looked like a simple event that didn't require a helper. I still laugh today at how I thought it was so simple."

"Modern day horse people seem to have totally forgotten that many of the famous horses in cutting, reining and show pedigrees were bred to be running horses," she says. "The Quarter Horse and some Thoroughbreds - Leo, Three Bars, Sugar Bars, Azure Te, Doc Bar - were all bred to run. A classic example is Sugar Band, a AAA Grade 1 stakes winner who became a top maternal sire of cutting horses."

Margaret's breeding ideas have paid off, not only for herself and her daughter Virgilene Hawkins McCasland, but for many others. To name just a few, Allene Gaylor rode Bali in the National Finals Rodeo; Tamerlane Eagle won pro money for Joyce White; and Babs Neal amassed a record on Rube.

Margaret won the National Old Timers Rodeo Finals riding Shalim. Tiger Brasilius helped Margaret qualify for the Houston Rodeo in 1991. She was the oldest competitor at the time. She was featured on the front page of the Houston Post as "Rodeo's Senior Cowgirl." She also placed on Tiger Brasilius at Cheyenne Frontier Days and qualified for the National



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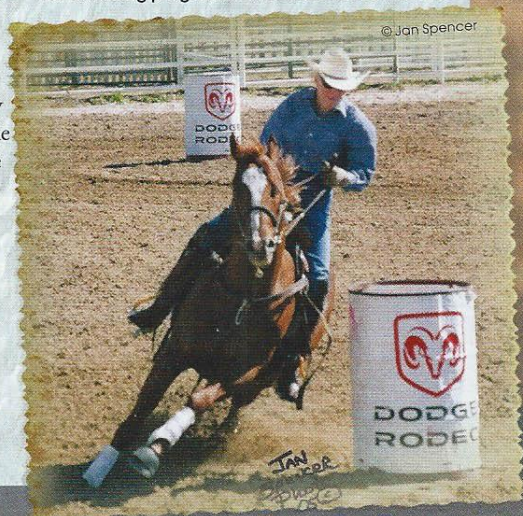
Margaret with her granddaughter Della, son-in-law Mark, daughter Virgilene & grandson Colter.

Circuit Finals in Pocatello, Idaho. She was Reserve Champion in the Mountain States Circuit WPR. Tiger Brasilius's dam, Tahita Bell (Off Base-Fancy Hancock by Revenue H), carries her father's Thoroughbred remount stallions Dry Moon and Reviewer TB in her pedigree, and he also carried Tiger Leo on the top side.

"When I came out fourth in the average at Cheyenne, it was a special time. I rode Tiger Brasilius. He was incredibly smart and incredibly smooth. That's also the best cow horse I ever rode."

Still other horses have gone on to qualify their riders for National Finals Rodeo, National high school finals, and college rodeo finals, and have earned numerous barrel racing titles. And, it doesn't end with barrel racing titles. Horses she and Virgilene have raised and sold have won World Championship titles in breakaway roping, carrying Lari Dee Guy and Kim Dickins.

Margaret's last competition run was in 2005 aboard Steppin Darling, a descendant of Moon Lark and Easily Smashed who was also used in her breeding program and as a cow/ranch horse.



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