

DARREL KOLKMAN

Leaving a Lasting Imprint on the Hackney

by Bob Funkhouser

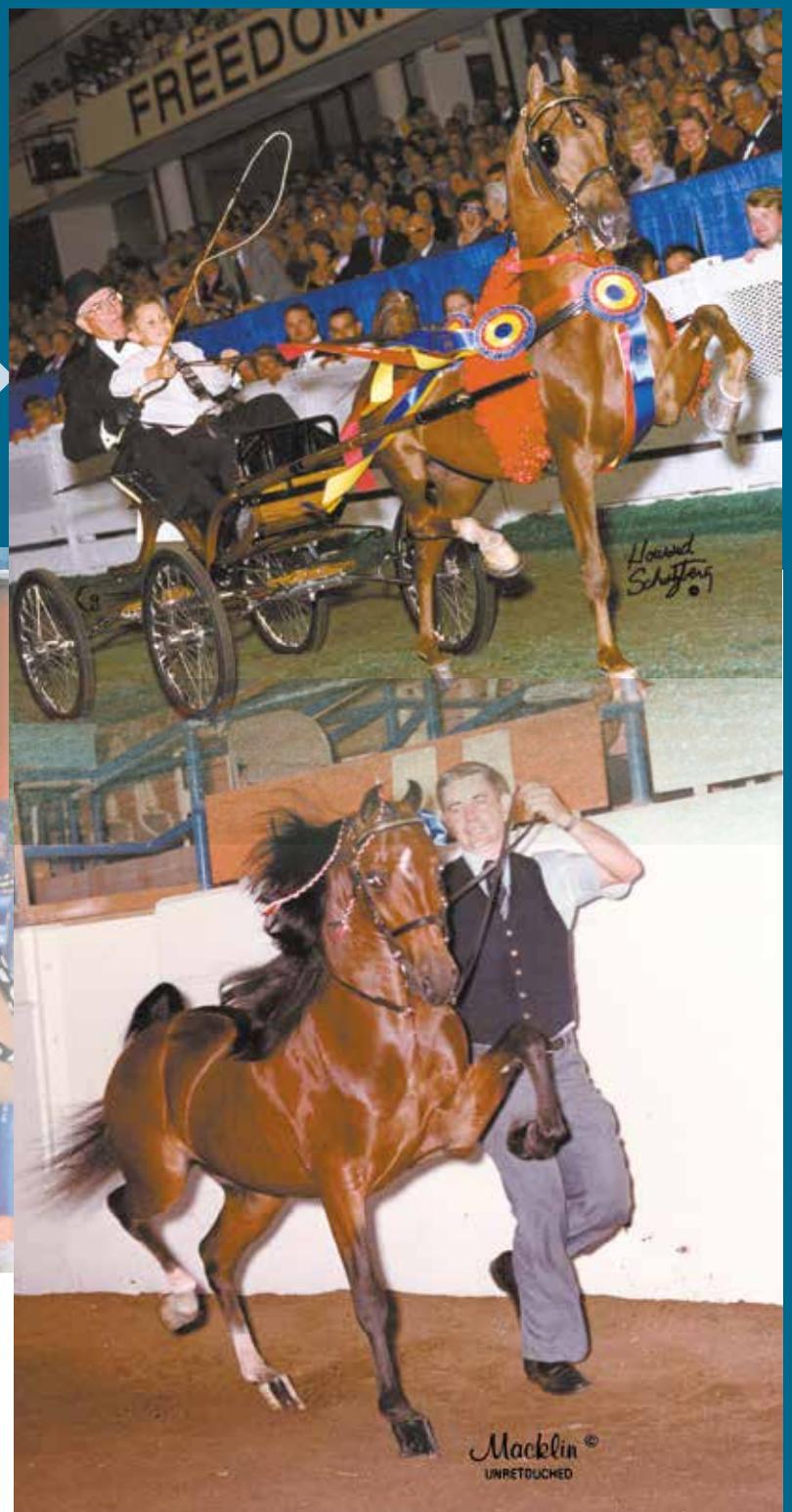


"Heartland Hackney was like an amusement park for Hackney Pony enthusiasts," said Chris Gantley who spent six years with the Kolkman family as its trainer. "Darrel was dedicated to his faith, his family, and his breeding operation."

"If you heard the horn on the Kubota beeping you knew he'd be coming up the lane in a few with a broodmare and a newborn foal and a big ole smile on his face. He never lost his excitement for a nice foal born on the farm. It was like he'd had the baby himself. When you raise that many colts each year not everything goes the way you want it too, but Darrel never cried over spilled milk. He would tell me all the time that he looked forward and not behind. That's what kept everything going in the right direction around there."

That was indeed the way he lived life, always looking forward, always looking to improve himself and the breed that he loved. The passing of Darrel Kolkman at the end of 2019 leaves a void in the Hackney world that will never be replaced.

He was raised by mid-western farming parents who raised grain, cattle and hogs. Part of the family tradition was to load up and go to the Iowa State Fair each year for their vacation. It was there that Darrel saw his first Hackney and was immediately attracted to its beauty and extreme athletic ability. In the years before Darrel got his first Hackney his dad gave up some precious pasture space, for a Shetland for his son. It didn't take long before there was a herd of 20 grade ponies.



top: Heartland Hackney Farm has been a family affair from day one. Darrel Kolkman gave his grandson Shae Seils a ride on his victory pass with Heartland Equality in the 2003 Hackney Pony World's Grand Championship. The stallion son of Dun-Haven Bandolier and a Sky King daughter, Heartland Princess, won his first blanket of roses as a three-year-old.

left: Kolkman closed out his amazing show ring career with the 2019 Hackney Pony Reserve World's Grand Championship with Heartland Secret Weapon. That same night he celebrated with Rich and Maureen Campbell as Maureen drove the Grace Arnold-owned Heartland Bejeweled to the Harness Pony World's Grand Championship. Bejeweled joins a long line of world's grand champion greats with the Heartland prefix.

below right: Long a supporter of Hackney Futurities, Kolkman is pictured here with Main Performance who went on to a long career as a performance pony for Ben Lester, Richard Ridge and Janet Crawford Hicks.



left: A product of Dun-Haven Bandolier and the Sky King daughter, Heartland Elegance, Heartland Heiress was the 1999 World's Grand Champion Harness Pony with Beth (Harris) Campbell at the whip for Heartland Hackney Farm. Heiress went on to win numerous titles with Helen Rosburg.

below: Rex and Shirley Parkinson (left) presented Sandy and Darrel Kolkman with the Rhythm's Spirit Trophy for winning the 1998 UPHA Harness Pony Classic Grand Championship with Heartland Heiress. Heartland Hackney won all four Classic Grand Championships that year with Wendy Winstead driving two-year-old Heartland Equality to the cob-tail title, Kathy Capsuto driving Heartland Morning Star to the pleasure driving honors and Darrel driving Heartland Sundust to the UPHA Road Pony Classic Grand Championship.

On the adjoining farm there was a young lady named Sandy Jarvis who loved horses and ponies as well. They became grade school friends and later high school sweethearts. In

a standout on the court and in other sports. He received a scholarship to Southeastern Community College in West Burlington, Iowa and later earned a Bachelor's degree from



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In addition to sharing their love of family and farming, they were also normal teens, Sandy being a cheerleader for the Yarmouth Consolidated High School basketball team where Darrel was

at Northern Iowa University and a Master's from Northeast Missouri State. It was during graduate school that he purchased his first Hackney, a pony named Two Bit Cracker from Roy Sutton.



Another of a long line of greats bred and sold by Heartland Hackney, Heartland Expectation started out as the 2002 UPHA Harness Pony Classic Grand Champion. The Dun-Haven Awesome Creation son went on to win (3) World's Grand Champion Harness Pony and a World's Champion of Champions Amateur Harness Pony title for Karen Frickey, a World's Champion of Champions Amateur Harness Pony title for Mary Gise (pictured) and the 2010 world's grand championship – his fourth – for her trainer, Lynda Freseth.

An in hand champion as a weanling, Heartland Code Of Honor's leg was later shattered in a farm accident. Kolkman convinced the veterinarians to fit him with a prosthesis and the pony went on to be a sire of many great champions, including Heartland Demonstrator, Heartland Accolade and Heartland Secret Weapon, among others.





Chris Gantley (r) spent six good years with Kolkman and Heartland Hackney Farm. The two developed and sold several champions.

Turning down an opportunity to coach at the collegiate level, Darrel returned home and went to work for Burlington Community High School as the head track coach and assistant football coach for some 37 years. That opportunity left him time to pursue his biggest love, Hackney ponies.

"We didn't have anything when we got married," said Sandy in an earlier Saddle Horse Report interview with Ann Bullard. "After being married a few years, having three children and a few ponies, we wanted to get out of a big town to be in the country where the children could learn responsibility. And, we needed a place to pasture the ponies. There was nothing close to Burlington so we moved 20 miles away and bought some acreage in New London."

During those early years, Darrel worked several side jobs in order to have more money to buy better ponies. He spent time at a full service gas station, as a painter, a carpenter, selling appliances for Sears and as a basketball referee from the junior high to college levels. Their farm was a typical midwestern operation with the entire family involved. Sandy did most of the farm chores, in addition to being wife, mother and secretary. Their children, Julie, Jay and Doug, helped with the chores and training ponies.

It was a humble beginning with the Kolkman's putting a rack on their pickup truck for hauling a pony and tack to a horse show. They finally got a home-made trailer that would hold two ponies. "It had a canvas top.

We called it our covered wagon," said Sandy. "For many years we'd sleep in our vehicle or stay in the stalls at shows."

What drove Darrel and Sandy to sacrifice and work so hard for decades to breed and develop the ultimate show ponies?

"When I was getting started 40 or 50 years ago, I visited a Hackney farm," said Darrel in that 2012 Saddle Horse Report interview. "As a coach, I wanted an athletic breed. When I'd walk the fields to look at foals and yearlings the owner would say, 'It looks like a miniature Saddlebred.' I'd visit a Saddlebred farm and they'd say, 'This foal trots like a Hackney. I decided what I needed to do was develop a pony that looks like a Saddlebred and trots like a Hackney. That's what we've pursued all along."

In the 1970s, the Kolkman Hackney herd featured a dozen ponies. Over the next decade it reached 90, eventually reaching some 350 ponies and horses. His early role as a scholar worked well in the pony business. He studied bloodlines and family traits until he had the tools to build a better product, a product which began with the right foundation sire.

In the early '80s he purchased Dun-Haven Valerie, the dam of world's grand champion Brass Lass. Valerie was sired by Mastercraft Magic, a great-grandson of King Of The Plain. Her dam was a linebred Southworth Swell mare named Cassilis Valerie. When bred to Lee Dunn's Dun-Haven Shamrock King, Dun-



A tightknit family, Julie, Darrel, Sandy, Doug and Jay Kolkman were all integral parts of making Heartland Hackney the iconic operation that it is.

DARREL KOLKMAN

Haven Valerie produced Sky King who would become Kolkman's foundation sire.

He produced many show ring greats like Mrs. Alan R. Robson's multi-titled world's grand champion Heartland Triumphant King. Among others, he also produced Heartland Princess who became the dam of three-time World's Grand Champion Hackney Pony, Heartland Equality.

The next step in building the Heartland program was when Darrel's son Jay helped him acquire Dun-Haven Bandolier, a son of Dun-Haven Crescendo and Dun-Haven Desdemona (by Mr. Chips). The Sky King/Bandolier cross proved to be extremely successful for the Kolkmans.

"Bandolier had a great neck that would bend every way," said Darrel in that 2012 interview. "The first few years we bred him, we got the carriage that we were after, but I desired a more athletic individual so I looked to the three families that seemed to produce a lot of motion with an open delivery. They were Wheatland's Humdinger; the Dun-Haven Shamrock King family, through his sons Sky King and Impression; and the Cadet Commander line through Cadetson's Choice and his son, Dun-Haven Awesome Creation. I linebred that into my dams."

They showed very few fillies early on, keeping them for breeding purposes. Even if they looked like they would be great prospects he wouldn't allow them in the training barn. "We were trying to develop a gene pool on the dam's side that would give me the athletic ability of the Hackney and more of the Saddlebred stretchier carriage animal."

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One of those early products was Heartland Ooh! La La, the 1997 Three-Year-Old Hackney Pony World's Champion and Hackney Pony World's Grand Champion with the Kolkman family's first non-family member trainer, Mike Dumas. She was the first in a long line

of Heartland bred world's grand champions. Another filly born in the early '90s was Heartland Rain Song, another thrilling world's grand champion who was later repurchased by the Kolkmans to be a part of their broodmare band. She produced Heartland Summer Rain, who is currently siring world's champions for Heartland Hackney.

Heartland Heiress, CH Heartland High Tech and CH Heartland Expectation were also among the world's grand champions. High Tech continues his reign at the highest level. Then, there was the pony of all ponies, Heartland Equality.

Sired by Dun-Haven Bandolier out of the Sky King daughter, Heartland Princess, Equality was the Hackney that Darrel had dreamt of for so many years. His beautiful swan neck, off the charts athletic ability on both ends and sparkling chestnut color have made him a fan favorite in both the Hackney and American Saddlebred worlds.

In 1998, as a two-year-old he won the UPHA Hackney Pony Classic Grand Championship at the American Royal with Wendy Winstead. He would go on to win that Classic Grand Championship for the next two years with Darrel driving, making him the only pony to win it three years. As a three-year-old



Scarlett Mattson (with ribbon) presented Darrel and Sandy Kolkman with induction into the World's Championship Horse Show Hall of Fame. Joining the presentation (l-r) were Jay Kolkman, Doug Kolkman, and Christy and Chris Gantley.

he also won the first of three World's Grand Champion Hackney Pony titles.

"Equality had so much God-given talent," said Rich Campbell who directed his world's grand championships. "He knew at the horse shows it was time to fire.

"I don't know of any other breed that has been affected by one person the way the Hackney breed has been by Darrel. He totally changed the look of ponies. He said to me a couple of times that if you put a Hackney, Saddlebred, Arab and Morgan trainer in a room for a weekend and asked them to come up with the perfect horse, it would be what he was breeding for in his ponies: long necked, extremely athletic with great ears and expression. He was amazed that when he and his son Jay went to England that the statues of horses over there were just what they were breeding for as far as looks, ability and head set and these statues were hundreds of years old.

"Darrel was a great horseman. He picked the brains of all of those top pony guys and did his homework, studying the lines that produced athleticism, carriage and charisma. He was really good to me when I worked there. He left me alone training while he concentrated on the breeding. I had to beg him to come to the barn to drive one. If I would get in trouble with one I would get him to come watch me. He was a great second set of eyes and we would figure it out."

Today, stud ponies like Heartland Summer Rain and Heartland Heartbreaker are taking Heartland Hackney Farm into the next decade. This past August, Heartbreaker offspring won the Three-Year-Old Harness Pony, Three-Year-Old Hackney Pony and Three-Year-Old Road Pony World's Championships, all from Majestic Oaks. Heartland Summer Rain's offspring were reserve world's champions in the three-year-old long-tail and road pony divisions, also with Majestic Oaks.

For years now, the Heartland prefix has dominated the pony division at shows large and small, east and west and it doesn't appear to be slowing up anytime soon as Darrel's vision will be producing champions for years to come and his ponies keep showing for years.

Few people can single-handedly shape something the way Darrel shaped the Hackney breed. Through generations of tinkering and perfecting individual traits of families, the Heartland Hackney ponies have proven hard to beat as the proof is in the results.

Looking at the 2019 World's Championship Horse results is a great testament to his and Sandy's vision. The first four ponies in the Junior Exhibitor Road Pony 14-17 Championship were Heartland bred; the Junior Road Pony World's Champion of



Returning to the ring after a five-year absence, CH Heartland High Tech was the 2009 Hackney Pony World's Grand Champion with Maureen Campbell driving for the Kolkman's. Heartland ponies are known for their longevity. In 2017, he would win the World's Grand Champion Hackney Pony and World's Champion of Champions Hackney Pony honors, both with Ali DeGray. The Majestic Oaks trained team won another world's champion of champions title in 2019.

Champions was Heartland bred; and the top five in the Three-Year-Old Road Pony World's Championship all sported "Heartland" as their prefix.

Heartland Bejeweled was the Harness Pony World's Grand Champion and Steely Dan (by Heartland Head Of The Class) was World's Champion of Champions Amateur Harness Pony. Heartland was also the first

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name of the World's Champion of Champions Junior Harness Pony and World's Champion Three-Year-Old Harness Pony, in addition to the second and third place finisher in the Kentucky County Fair Harness Pony Championship.

Moving to the cob-tail division on the green shavings, Darrel exhibited the Hackney Pony Reserve World's Grand Champion, Heartland Secret Weapon. Grace Arnold's Heartland Jamin' was third. Heartland-bred ponies were first, second and fourth in the Amateur Hackney Pony Championship; first,

second and fourth in the amateur ladies class; first through fourth in the amateur gentlemen's class; the winner of the three-year-old world's championship; and winner of the Kentucky County Fair Hackney Pony Grand Championship.

And this was not an unusual year. This is the imprint Heartland Hackney has on the breed. This is what Darrel Kolkman worked side jobs for and slept in stalls for early on at the shows: the ability to buy better ponies in order to breed better ponies. His vision and love of the breed have given us some amazing animals. His love of his family and church has given us something to admire.

The Kolkman family will continue on, carrying Darryl's passion with them. He was a great teacher in the classroom and in the barn. Son Jay and grandson Shae Seils soaked up everything they could and along with Sandy's guidance, it is their mission to not let decades of blood, sweat and tears fade away. Heartland Hackney will make its founder proud because trainers and exhibitors of Hackney Ponies will be happy that they get to continue sitting behind some of the most leg-waving athletes this sport has ever seen.