

Sandy Ridge Stallion Station

BY HEATHER COOK



Doug Schaffer says there is nothing better than gazing at his fields and seeing mares and foals standing contentedly in the sun. These are just some of the 200 mares that are bred by stallions at the Sandy Ridge Stallion Station in Bassano, Alberta. Owned and operated by Doug and Carol Schaffer, high school sweethearts still going strong, Sandy Ridge Stallion Station has carved out a secure niche in the Canadian horse industry.

THE BEGINNING

The Sandy Ridge story began back when Schaffer was 16 and he purchased a stallion – a son of Leo – from a friend. Soon after, Doug met his wife-to-be, Carol, at the local high school. “It just began to evolve from there,” says Schaffer.

At this early point in their journey, owning a stallion station wasn’t on the radar. “We didn’t really decide to take in outside stallions,” says Doug. “Other people decided for us. Dave Robson called and asked if we’d take his stallion, that was one of the first we took in. Then other people kept calling us. We had a few stallions of our own by that time and we picked up a few more.”

Currently Doug and Carol keep mares boarded year-round, breeding them to stallions they stand as well as to shipped semen from other stallions in North America. With five of their own at the Bassano facility and one outside stallion, the farm is inundated with mares and foals for much of the year. As well, they are responsible for 160 acres of hay, which Doug tends to after a full day’s work is done.

Carol is involved in custom foaling client mares, a growing business that picks up in early spring. “Clients choose to have their mares foaled out here for two reasons,” she says. “First would be to have their

mare/foal monitored closely at foaling time. The second reason is that the Alberta government recently added additional incentive money for the Alberta-bred race horses, defined as horses foaled in Alberta.”

THE FAMILY AND THE HISTORY

“When we were first married we each had one grade horse and a \$400 truck between us,” Carol recalls. Doug was a ‘town boy’ raised in Bassano, but somehow he managed to keep at least one horse and a 4H calf, Carol tells. “He quit school in grade nine and spent a winter ranching on the LK Ranches where he had to ride 20 miles a day to break water holes for the cattle. He also says he was ‘the first one back at school that fall!’ Carol says. And Doug worked every summer of his teenage years on the AI cow camps for the local ranches.

Carol, on the other hand, grew up on a cattle ranch just east of Bassano as the oldest of nine children. “My father was not a horse person but did have a horse to work his cows with,” she explains. “He gradually acquired a few more horses and we learned to ride them with bits of advice here and there. My father heard that it was possible that we (the children) could get hung up in a saddle so he insisted we learn to ride bareback. This was probably true, but I think he was busy farming and we were

always asking him to put the saddle on for us.”

They all became good riders and with plenty of land to ride on, it was a source of entertainment for the children. “Once, when I was eight, I had gone out for the milk cows, riding an inexperienced four-year-old of my uncle’s, and was bucked off into a barbed wire fence (riding bareback of course) a half mile from home.” Carol needed 16 stitches in her leg that day and two in her arm.

“As I lay on the couch that evening, an ex-bronc rider by the name of Clark Lund came to our home for a visit. When he saw me on the couch he said to my parents, ‘Well if you haven’t ridden much, you haven’t fallen off much!’”

Interestingly, Doug is involved in raising world champion pigeons, breeding Rolling, Homing and Indianfantails. Despite Carol’s busy schedule, she too finds time for hobbies including “fooling” with her camera, sewing, knitting and crochet. She also teaches church youth groups and spends time with the couple’s grandchildren. “We love to entertain the grandchildren when they come here from the city. They love the freedom. We have eight grandchildren now and one on the way.”

The business has not been the only success for the Schaffers. “We were used to breeding about 45 mares a year and would do our breeding in the evening. Doug was in charge and I assisted. But when we purchased Givemalickin, he drew in an extra 65 mares; we were swamped and had some very, late evenings,” recalls Carol. “That year, my sister Terri and our children got us through. Our oldest boy would fill several 45 gallon drums with water every day and our daughter helped take care of our other two children, the youngest being four-months-old. Our children grew up around the horses and have become our best friends.”

It was hard work, Carol remembers, but it contributed to her children’s engagement with a solid work ethic. All four – Vicki, Thane, Logan and Jordan – have excelled in their work fields, she notes.

Root Beers Boots is one of the stallions that stands at Sandy Ridge.



FARM PHILOSOPHY

The Schaffers have a simple philosophy: "We treat other people like we'd have them treat us."

The standard has worked for them.

"Clients have turned into good friends," says Doug. "That is one great thing about this business – we get to meet nice people in the industry. We know we are never going to be rich, but I've always thought that I'd want someone to treat me fair, so that's how we treat our customers."

The business philosophy has always been to make horses pay for themselves. "Doug would buy one stallion, then sell and acquire a better one. As time went on, our business just evolved," says Carol.

RACE HORSES GAINING GROUND

Sandy Ridge – named for the ridge of sand on which the facility is built – has weathered the ups and downs of the horse industry well.

Many of their stallions are racing and barrel racing bred, and the Schaffers keep a close eye on those industries. Some of the Schaffers' mares have over \$100,000 in race earnings, though the family doesn't travel to the races as often. "We don't really classify ourselves as race horse people anymore," explains Doug. "We are busy here at home for most of the season."

"In racing, the competition is getting tougher and tougher," says Doug. "We hope it doesn't knock out the little guys. It used to be that you could run a \$2,500 horse, but now there are partnerships and syndicates that are buying \$40,000 horses from California and running them up here. That's happening quite a bit now. On the positive side, it helps owners split the cost and there is a higher caliber of horses being bred. We have shipped in semen from some of the

The goal at Sandy Ridge is to offer to the public a variety of top quality, good looking, world-class stallions with speed and cow genetics at affordable prices. These stallions must have strong, proven pedigrees, good conformation, and excellent dispositions, and if possible a proven performance record. By offering reasonable rates and treating customers fairly, Sandy Ridge has become one of the leading stallion stations in western Canada.

biggest names in the Quarter Horse racing industry, such as Wave Carver and Ocean Runaway. These are \$10-12,000 stud fees."

When considering the Canadian industry juxtaposed with the American, Doug feels that the Canadian industry is quickly gaining ground. "Our horses are getting so well-bred with shipped semen that soon our horses will be comparable, specifically in the race horse world. Those well-bred horses that we're shipping semen on are all being bred here and are considered Alberta-bred."

BARREL RACING SYMBIOSIS

"The barrel racers have treated us really well," says Doug. "Our breeding program is pretty simple – we just like good looking, well-bred, usable horses that have speed."



One of the Schaffer's own stallions, **Crimson Jess**.

As payback to the barrel racing industry, the Schaffers offer the Sandy Ridge Stallion Station Incentive Program (offering prizes and cash for Sandy Ridge bred winners), in conjunction with Canadian Barrel Futurities and Derbies.

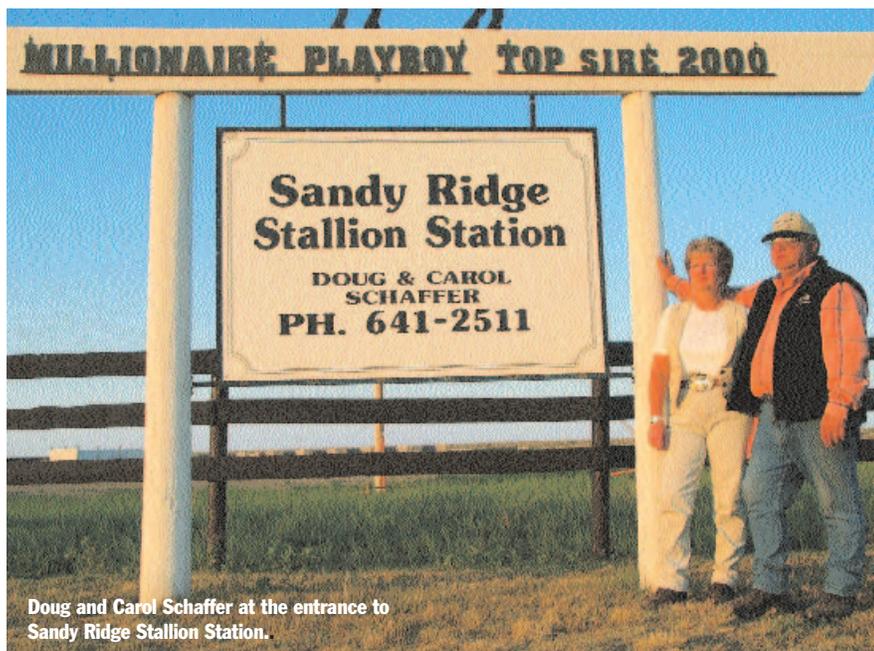
ADVICE

Doug has been approached in the past for advice on standing a stallion and while he loves his job, even on days when it's cold and wet, he pulls no punches with reality. "Be willing to give up your whole spring and summer," he advises. "No offense to the trainers who have to make a living – but they have to do their job and go to shows. We've dedicated our lives to be a breeding station here. That's our only job. Once the season begins, the only time we leave the farm is to go to the airport to pick up semen."

THE FUTURE

With no immediate plans to increase their herd size, the Schaffers will continue to focus on increasing quality. Their website has become a key marketing tool. It lists not only all the stallions of Sandy Ridge Stallion Station, but all the mares as well. "We have gotten calls from as far away as France and they basically buy the foal before it even hits the ground," says Doug.

According to Carol, Doug has a plan. "He has always had a blueprint of our place including his 'future plans', done in pencil of course. We talk about him retiring, but that isn't going to happen, as he has too many things to do yet! He may never accomplish all of his plans, but he is having fun trying and that's half the battle isn't it?"



Doug and Carol Schaffer at the entrance to Sandy Ridge Stallion Station.

