

A History of H

"Have I told you how much I love this horse?" These words are music to the ears of Anita Hughes Dunham, owner of Hughes Stables, in Kidder, Mo., some 60 miles north of Kansas City. Anita knows her breeding program and what she's aiming for, but you will be hard pressed to hear her toot her own horn, brag or pat her back.

Anita and husband Van Durham have four children; two are into horses and two, not so much. The family's two-story farmhouse sits on 65 acres for the horses with an adjacent 115 acres devoted to its Angus herd and fields of high-quality Brome hay. Its Facebook page reads, "[It is] a small, family-run operation that focuses on the best aspects of nature and nurture when it comes to sound, naturally gaited horses."

The working stable has five brood-

mares: three Missouri Fox Trotters and two Tennessee Walking Horses, but no breeding stallions of its own right now. There were three foals

born in 2019, five in 2020, and Anita looks to breed again in 2021.

The gaited horse has a natural way of going. Anita explains, "The babies are born with it, gifted with natural timing, rhythm, and head nod. It is natural and easy for them to flat walk. The 'way of going' is how they move or travel.

"The walk is the same for all breeds of horses. The optional gait, or intermediate gait, is

what sets gaited horses apart--ours either foxtrot or have a four-beat running walk."

BREEDING PROGRAM AND PEDIGREES

Anita is crystal clear about the Hughes Stables breeding goal. "We



Hughes Stables

By Janet de Acevedo Macdonald

want to breed forever horses for people."

Friend and fellow FOSH board member Alece Ellis, who holds judging cards for multiple gaited breeds plus an Independent Judges Association license, is an avid fan of Hughes Stables-bred horses.

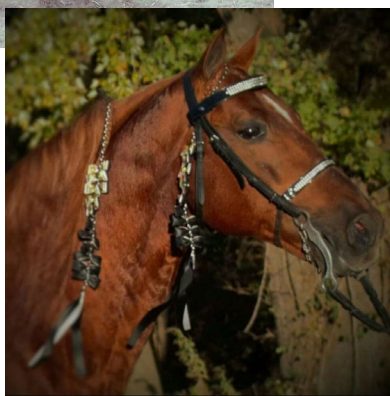
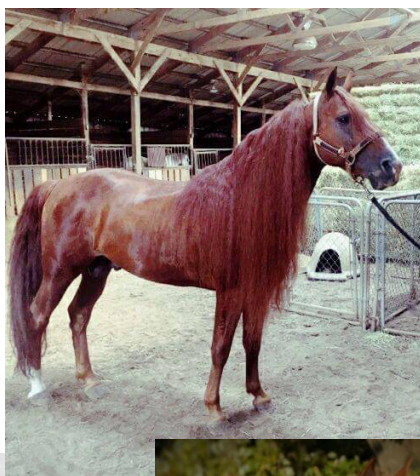
"Her [Anita's] horses have good minds. They are cooperative 'yes' horses, which is why they sell and contributes to why they win!"

To further her point, Ellis notes that Hughes Stables doesn't advertise. Other than its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/hughesstables>), it has no online or social media presence. Its reputation for sound, well-dispositioned horses precedes it by word-of-mouth from horse lovers well beyond the gaited world.

When Anita considers her breeding program, there are lines she looks for in pedigrees. An oldie-but-goodie is the black stallion Midnight Sun, one of the leading sires of the Tennessee Walking Horse breed, and a two-time World Grand Champion in 1945 and 1946.

Knowing this fact, 22-year-old Tennessee Walking Horse Generator's Mac Attack, owned by David and Melanie Lehman of Marissa, Ill., has sired many Hughes Stables' foals. It should come as no surprise he has five crosses to Midnight Sun in his pedigree.

The late Sensations Pride B, who was owned by Tom and Donna Struempf of California, Mo., had both Missouri Fox Trotter and Tennessee Walking Horse bloodlines. Pride's get can be found throughout Anita's program, including Bama, her daughter Cheyenne's stallion.



Stallions important in the Hughes breeding program include (clockwise from top): Big Whiskey, Jester's Charming Legend, and Midnight Sun.

The 2001 Fox Trotter stallion Jester's Charming Legend, owned by Brian Oglesby of Perry, Mo., is another of the chosen breeding sires.

Hughes Stables has two 3-year-old mares sired by Big Whiskey, a Missouri Fox Trotter owned by Monica Daugherty, and they are getting ready to start them under saddle. Anita likes their dispositions and conformation. Of course, the Midnight Sun spotted on the tail female line can't hurt.

"Mac and Pride are definitely the two stallions that we have bred to the most and are the core stallions for our breeding program," says Anita.

The core principals of the Hughes Stables breeding program are straightforward. The horses are bred to be well-rounded, sound-minded trail horses. Gait, conformation, 'way of going' and disposition are all must-have components.

"We've taken mares out of our breeding program because of their [bad] dispositions," says Anita. "We breed horses that are not spooky and not stupid."

FIRST GENERATION

Luther and Vonnie Hughes established Hughes Stables in the 1970s and began breeding, training, and showing Missouri Fox Trotters. In the 1980s Hughes Stables extended its interests to include Pleasure Walking Horses and Tennessee Walking Horses. Its program doesn't include

pads, chains, bands, or other action devices--just flat shod, barefoot, and easy-going horses.

By all accounts, Luther was a gifted trainer and rider, with Vonnie as the essential ground person telling the rider which small tweaks will get the most out of the horse—ask for a little more or less headset or change in speed. At shows, the ground person not only coaches, but also keeps track of which classes the riders are in and helping with tack changes and clothes. Luther and Vonnie's teamwork were hand-in-glove.

Not surprisingly, as kids, Anita and her sister accompanied mom and dad and also showed horses.

SECOND AND THIRD GENERATIONS

Anita has been the Hughes Stables trainer for the past decade. Unexpectedly, 11 years ago, management of Hughes Stables changed in an instant when Luther Hughes had a horse accident that left him invalid and still in a care facility today.

At the end of April 2020, Anita retired after 35 years with the USDA as a Resource Conservationist. Like most retirees, she too finds it interesting how her days remain as busy, or busier, than when she was employed.

Daughter Cheyenne, 28, and son Garrison, 22, are the Hughes Stables third generation. Cheyenne has a 7-year-old Fox Trotter stallion—Pride



and Prejudice—sired by the late Sensation Pride B, that she calls Bama. This dynamic duo graduated to cattle sorting and ranch horse riding when rail classes got a bit too boring. Garrison is the ground person, lifter-of-all-things-heavy, and all-around fixer.

Primarily, the Dunhams show on a local Pony Express horse show circuit. They nominate for the Missouri Horse Show Association and just started showing at the big Fox Trotter shows in Ava, Mo. the last two years. Of course, the local circuit was canceled for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alece Ellis also applauds the mentoring that Hughes Stables does in

the show ring and on the trail. Ellis recalls the 2019 Missouri State Fair when many of the youth riders were showing Hughes Stables horses together in several classes. All were cheering for and encouraging one another. Why? Because that is what's modeled by the Dunhams, and above all else, it is what's valued. Hughes Stables regardless of its success never has and does not now put on airs.

When Anita was pressed to talk about winning accolades, the Hughes Stables humble struck again with a gentle quip, "No one likes you much when you're winning." The inability to toot one's own horn is so refreshing.