

Just Horsing Around with Bryant's Miniatures

By Randy Olson

We have all heard the phrase: "A dog is a man's best friend." This statement may not be true for Hal Bryant of Bryant's Miniatures. Hal and his wife, Debbie, have raised registered miniature horses for about 20 years on their farm just north of Norris City. Their love of miniature horses, which started as a hobby, has blossomed into a serious business that has literally taken them all across the United States to participate in registered miniature horse shows and countless parades.

The Bryants have been honored as National Champions in single horse draft, tandem, unicorn, and two, four, and six horse hitch competitions. They have showcased their hitch in major parades such as the Great Circus Parade in Milwaukee, Indy 500 Parade, Kentucky Derby Parade, and the Mane Event at Equitana USA in Louisville.

Hal grew up around regular full-size horses, as his dad used them on the family farm. "I liked horses when I was a kid, but I was always just a little bit afraid of them," said Hal. After purchasing his first registered miniature about 20 years ago, Hal fell in love with their gentle temperament and ease of handling. He soon began breeding them and selling them nationally, as well as training them for national shows through the (AMHR) American Miniature Horse Registry, and the (AMHA) American Miniature Horse Association.

A miniature horse is a small version of a standard size horse. It is not a midget, dwarf, pygmy, or pony, but a horse that can measure no more than 34 inches at the mane. They are divided into three body types: Arabian, Quarter, and Draft. They come in a variety of colors: Appaloosa, Buckskin, Palomino, Pinto, and other traditional colors.

Foals may be from 14 to 22 inches high and weigh 15 to 30 pounds at birth. They usually attain 80 percent of their growth at one year old, and mature at three years when they will weigh about 250 pounds and have the ability to pull 1,000 pounds. They can be kept on a

Hal stands in his pasture with just a few of his miniature horses. He and Debbie specialize in the rare black and white pinto coloring.



Hal and Debbie Bryant's home is full of trophies, plaques, and awards that they have accumulated with their miniature horses over the past 20 years.

space as small as 1/8th acre and are excellent pets and playmates for children.

Where did the miniature originate? Although relatively unknown in this area until about 20 or 30 years ago, miniature horses date back to the 16th Century when they were raised in England, Holland, and Argentina as novelties highly valued by royal families and their children.

In the early 1900s some of the miniatures were brought to the United States to be utilized in the mines. They were especially popular in the shallow mines of West Virginia and Kentucky. Their usefulness deteriorated in the 1950s as mines became more mechanized, almost forcing the miniature horses into extinction within the U.S. In 1971, the AMHR was originated and has continued to thrive. The AMHA soon followed and the popularity of the miniature horse has continued to grow.

Prices for miniature horses range from a few hundred dollars to \$10,000 or more, depending on size, age, conformation, and bloodlines. This past year, the Bryants were fortunate to show and bring home eight National Grand

Champions at the Tulsa, Oklahoma national competition, which featured more than 1,700 head of horses.

The Bryants sell about eight to 10 miniature horses a year to people throughout the nation. "We have met some wonderful people and made some great friends through this business," said Hal. He retired from teaching Building Trades at Fairfield Community High School last May, while Debbie works at the Presbyterian Church office in Carmi. The couple collect and restore many wagons, stagecoaches, and specialty hitches for their miniature horses, including a beautiful white vis-à-vis coach that can be rented out for weddings.

They are happy to give tours of their unique farm to youth groups and families from throughout the region. The miniature horses answer to names such as Joseph, Sweet, Cisco, Gunner, Sidekick, and Hi-Ho. In addition to the horses, they also have a Camel named Charlie, a Llama named Kramer, classic Shetland ponies, cats, and dogs. For more information about miniature horses, or to rent their services for a special event, call Bryant's Miniatures at (618) 378-3558.



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