

Craig Cole
2013 KQHA Hall of Fame Inductee



Inducted to the hall of fame for 2013 was Craig Cole of rural Downs. He was raised in southern Smith County on the family farm where he continues to farm and run his horse business. Craig's parents Eugene and Wilma Cole farmed and ran a real estate business in Downs and Eugene was an auctioneer at numerous livestock markets. This environment gave Craig and his younger sister Beth the opportunity to not only be involved in the running of the farm and businesses, but to be involved with the 4-H program where they both began showing horses and other livestock.

At a very young age Craig and his dad entered the horse business by buying colts at auctions, breaking them to ride, and then reselling them as broke horses. The first registered Quarter Horses were soon to follow as they began to take horses to the Kansas State Fair, which featured an AQHA show, futurity, and sale sponsored by the Kansas Quarter Horse Association (KQHA). They soon became more involved with and showed at many one-day quarter horse shows across the state. They began to breed mares of their own and this led to them purchasing a young grey stallion named Roosters Dawn. "Rooster" proved to be the impetus of a long career that followed as Craig hauled and showed his good stallion to the 1967 AQHA High Point Honor Roll Youth Stallion Title. This was the most coveted award at the time.

Craig's early competitive career included jockeying racehorses on local tracks, showing at local saddle club shows, and traveling to many single day American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) shows all around Kansas and Nebraska. At these early shows Craig was exposed to many great horsemen who came to the area shows pursuing honor roll titles. This sparked a fire in him to understand all things that went into making good horses, fitting, training, and breeding. He only needed the opportunity to practice these skills.

Beyond the horses owned and raised by the family, he found this opportunity in AQHA leading breeder and fellow KQHA Hall of Fame member Warden Dudley of Osborne. Craig began to work for Warden while he was still in high school and continued to do so after he graduated in 1967 from Downs High School. He was drafted into the United States Army and served in Germany.

When he returned home, he went back to work for Dudley and Acre, fitting, training, and showing many fine horses including the great mares Vallerina Miss, Watch Jo Jackie, and the great sire Watch Joe Jack.

After several years working for Dudley and Acre, Craig made the decision to start his own training business. Along with his wife Rosanne, they went out on their own and formed Cole Training Stables located at the family farm. Initially, Craig started with a simple four-stall horse barn working his horses after he went to Osborne and worked the show horses of Dudley and Acre. Soon however, Craig's show ring accomplishments and reputation for honesty had his services in demand and expansion was needed. Craig and his father Eugene began work on what would become an 18-stall barn with an indoor riding arena, doing all the work themselves including welding the trusses and erecting the building.

As soon as it was finished Craig began filling the barn with clients and his own horses. During these days Craig campaigned numerous horses to AQHA championships. As the business grew and changed so did the industry and he began to concentrate heavily on futurities, showing both halter and pleasure futurity horses.

Craig's show ring accomplishments include AQHA superiors, register of merits, high point honor roll titles, and countless point earners, and many futurity champions. When AQHA added a world show with a qualifying point system, Craig has qualified numerous horses in halter and performance event with many top ten finishes. He has also showed in several various breed associations, American Paint Horse Association, Palomino Horse Breeders Association (PHBA), Pinto Horse Association of America, and American Buckskin Registry Association (ABRA) reserve and world champions. He has also exhibited horses in the National Snaffle Bit Association and National Cutting Horse Association competitions.

Another facet of Craig's business is coaching youth and amateur riders. As a coach, Craig has helped many people achieve their horsemanship goals both in and out of the show arena. He has coached many American Quarter Horse Youth Association world show qualifiers, as well as ABRA reserve world champions and PHBA reserve world champions, regional champions, KQHA high point year end winners and 4-H Kansas State Fair champions.

His years of experience have also made him a mentor to numerous professionals within the horse industry, including his son Ryan who works alongside him, in the family business.

As a Quarter Horse breeder, Craig has had the opportunity to stand several outstanding stallions and breed many mares of his own and manage the breeding program for Dudley and Acre several years, standing several stallions and breeding over 40 mares a year. Watching a colt you have raised, trained, and shown is one of the best rewards of a successful program.

Even with all the varied aspects of the horse business, Craig has always found time to serve the Quarter Horse industry as a leader. He has served the KQHA as president and an active director on the board of directors. Craig currently serves on the committee that founded the Prairie Classic Quarter Horse Circuit, which had become one of the top 10 shows in the United States. He is a 10-year member of the AQHA Region 8 steering committee and a AQHA Professional Horseman.

A selfless worker, it is not uncommon to see Craig step right off a horse to set jumps, turn out cattle, deliver shavings or set a trail course at any KQHA event.

Craig continues to be a leader, family man, farmer, horse breeder, coach, trainer, and exhibitor and loves his job and enjoys watching his family (Ryan and LaRhea) and his many clients compete and succeed in the show pen. Present for the presentation were Craig, his wife Rosanne, son Ryan and daughter-in-law LaRhea, sister Beth and husband Adolph Charbonneau, nephew Jeff Nelson, and a host of past and present clients, many who are extended family, fellow trainers, and exhibitors.