GIL GALYEAN

He is a multiple World and Congress Champion and the first NSBA Million Dollar rider. Champion after champion horses and riders emerge from his program. So how does he do it - year after year?

Text Katie Navarra Photos Mallory Beinborn

THE GALYEAN Way

Inside a six-foot-tall stockade fence, a style often associated with cutting pens, Western Pleasure prospects are learning to find their natural rhythm. Their rider's cues are almost imperceptible as he lopes a chestnut colt 20 feet off the fence. His hands are nearly still. His long legs quietly hang well below the horse's belly as the horse floats down the rail in a cadenced three-beat lope.

The goal is getting the horse to "complete its stride" for a fluid three-beat gait rather than "going" slower.

At six-foot-four, Gil Galyean makes the process look effortless because he has the enviable "feel" that other trainers and riders spend a lifetime trying to achieve. Longtime friend and fellow trainer Jon Barry said it's a trait Galyean must have been born with.

"I've known him since he was 15 and he's always had that natural feel, more than most guys," Barry said.

Natural talent is a key ingredient in a formula for success. That's why Galyean looks for prospects that have the innate ability to trot and lope, a sense of natural rhythm and carriage – even before they've been under saddle.

"You can't assume it will change a lot with training. If a horse can't trot or lope, you can't think you are going to train that," Galyean said. "I also look for a horse that's attractive and that will make an impression."

Training is, of course, necessary to refine the raw talent. That's where Galyean's legendary program excels at bringing along the industry's top achiever. He's developed, and sticks to, a program that emphasizes softness, collection and longevity.

"It takes steady repetition and consistency, but we don't rush the process," he said. "We let the horse tell us when its ready to show. For some that may be when they're 2, for others it may not be until they are 3. Sometimes a horse just doesn't have what it takes and won't make the show string but can go on in other disciplines."

Gil steps off and hands the horse off to assistant trainer Pasley Puthoff. She'll untack and tie the horse inside the airy, multi-purpose covered arena to dry. Sweating is a constant battle in Oklahoma. Allowing the horses to completely dry before hosing is the latest strategy Galyean is using to combat the problem. ▶

Although the aisle is large enough to easily drive a living-quarters rig through, Puthoff only has to take a few steps between the horse, the saddle rack and other storage areas. Galyean explained that this facility, the second he and his wife Becky have built, was designed to save steps and increase efficiency. When nearly 30 horses have to get worked every day, every step counts. The couple was intimately involved in the design phase and throughout construction to ensure no detail was overlooked.

IT TAKES STEADY REPETITION AND CONSISTENCY, BUT WE DON'T RUSH THE PROCESS.

"That facility is probably the most workable I've ever seen," Barry said. "They put so much thought into where to put the doors and the gates and how to make everything accessible to efficiently get the horses worked."

The 21-stall barn includes a 120-by-225-foot covered pen that often doubles as a turn-out area for the horses because Gil believes that turn-out is a critical component of his training program.

"You can't train a super fresh horse that hasn't been out of its stall," he said.

Giving horses time to burn off steam is a philosophy he learned early on, growing up in the industry. His father, Kenneth was a renowned trainer in Northwest Arkansas. At that time trainers accepted a variety of disciplines, rather than specializing in one. His father excelled in Halter, Western Pleasure, Cutting and Reining. Since it was a family business, that meant Gil and brother Jody, were out in the barn daily, cleaning stalls and riding horses and, most importantly, learning from an accomplished horseman.

Kenneth was among the handful of judges invited to officiate at the American Quarter Horse Association's inaugural World Championship in 1974. He was equally influential in the National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) and was later inducted into its Member Hall of Fame.

As a teenager, Gil loved playing football as much as rid-

ing horses. After high school he attended Arkansas Tech University, but horses were always on his mind. He returned to the industry in the early 1980's when there was an increasing popularity in the Western Pleasure industry. He first trained in his home state and then moved to Missouri, where he met and later married Becky White. In 1998, he moved his business to Paws Up Ranch in Purcell, Oklahoma, and the couple thought the area was ideal for a training business. Eventually, they built their own facility nearby and then engineered the design and construction of their current location, the second they've built. ▶

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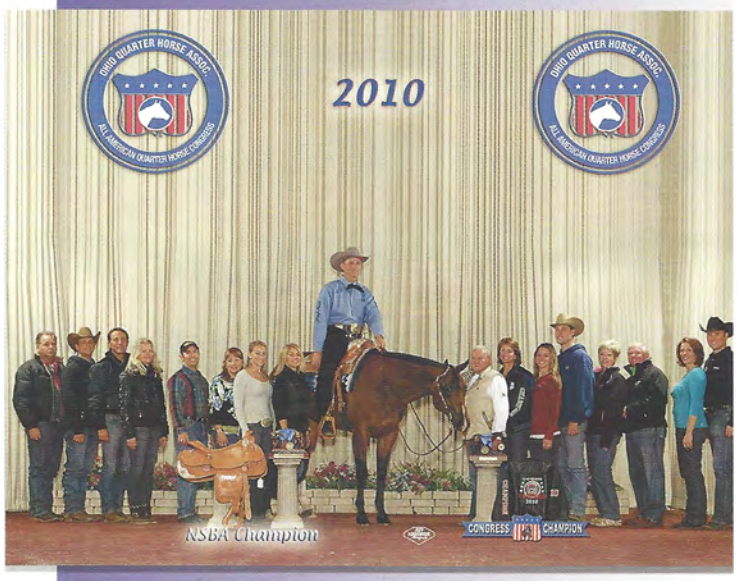
Gil Galyean with his family, sons, Brody (at left) and Garrett; and wife, Becky. On this page Gil is pictured with just some of his many AQHA World and Congress champions (top to bottom): How Bout At Midnight, 2014 AQHA 2-Year-Old Western Pleasure World Champion; Suddenly A Cool Lady, 2011 Congress Masters Western Pleasure Champion; and Cool Krymsun Lady, 2010 Congress Junior Western Pleasure Champion. (Win photos/Jeff Kirkbride & KC Montgomery)

THE HONORS



"HE TAUGHT ME THE MOST ABOUT HOW HORSES THINK AND REACT," SAID DAVID DELLIN. HE INGRAINED IN ME THAT HORSES LEARN OFF THE RELEASE OF PRESSURE MORE THAN FROM THE PRESSURE ITSELF.

"We take a lot of pride in this facility," Gil said. "We walked around and picked out where to put things."

Becky hops into the driver's seat of their ATV and offers a tour of the 140-acre ranch. Small paddocks for the show horses give way to larger pastures for a handful of broodmares. The largest pastures bump up against a private glistening lake. A small herd of angus cattle wallow in the pond and graze along a shaded tree line.

The cows are a nod to the couple's passion for Cutting. In addition to the Galyean's wild success in Western Pleasure, both have competed in Cutting events. Gil's won the Congress Open Cutting and has accumulated $216,372 in NCHA earnings and Becky has $150,442 lifetime earnings.

Becky grew up on a small 30-acre farm in Kansas. Her family owned horses as a hobby rather than a business, but it was always her passion. She began showing Quarter Horses at age 13, and her mom drove her all over the country to compete. That first year, she won the AQHA Youth Rookie of the Year Award. She qualified for the Youth World Show multiple times, earning numerous top five and top 10 honors and a Reserve Championship at the All-American Quarter Horse Congress.

Today, she prepares her own horses for the Non-Pro classes. The Aftermath and First One In Last One Out, are two of the Non-Pro horses she's showing this year. When she's buying horses for herself, she looks for young ones that are affordable and that she can mold into a successful show partner.

"I always like a pretty horse. It has to be strong over the loin and in the heart girth and have straight pasterns," she said. "It's pretty important how they're bred, especially on the mare side."

For both Becky and Gil, they said they've had real good success with horses out of the Invitation Only and Good Machine family tree. Even though he's now three to four generations away, Zippo Pine Bar breeding has also been influential in producing winning pleasure horses.

Since she can't help Gil with the riding side of the business, Becky works in the office running the day-to-day operations at the ranch, such as ordering shavings, making sure the show entries are submitted and all of the critical tasks it takes to keep a show stable running smoothly.

"Becky has had a big influence on where we're at," Gil said. "Her father wasn't a horse trainer, but her family made sure she learned the proper way to ride and attend shows and that has given us an advantage to having a career in horses."

From an airport in Uruguay, Dave Dellin, the director of shows, judges and education for the American Paint Horse Association (APHA), reflected on what he considers the "masters and Ph.D." he earned while working for the Galyeans.

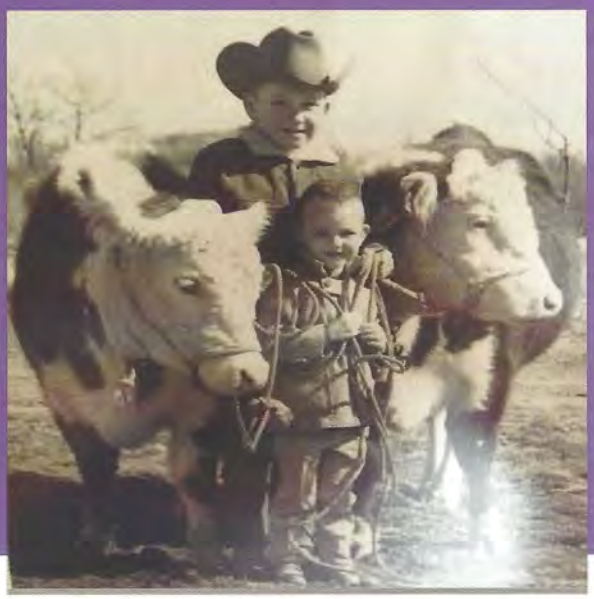
"He taught me the most about how horses think and react," he said. "He ingrained in me that horses learn off the release of pressure more than from the pressure itself."

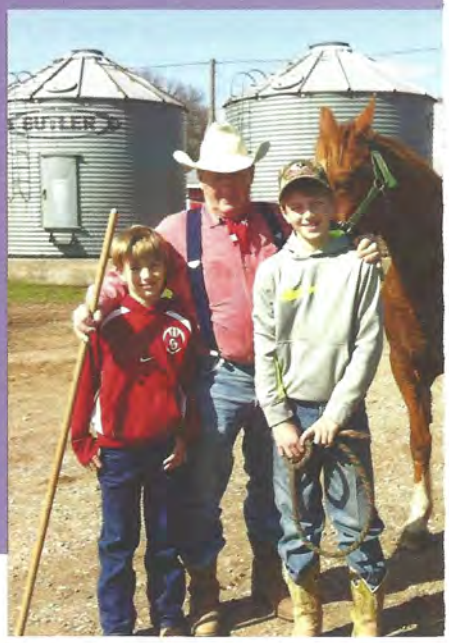
Dellin graduated from Oklahoma State and then worked for the Galyeans for seven years before running his own training business and then accepting a position with APHA.

"Gil is one of the few people I'd call a real horseman," Dellin said. "He has an appreciation for all kinds of horses."

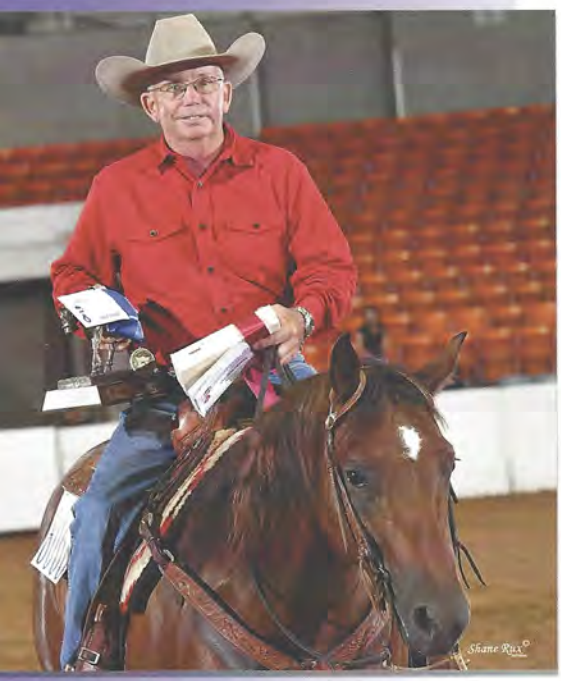
Good help is essential to running a successful training ▶

THE FAMILY





THE FRIENDS



business, but the Galyeans see it as much more than that. Hiring young, eager staff allows them to give back to the industry by sharing their expertise. There's no substitute for spending time in the arena with Gil who has mastered the art of teaching enough to help aspiring trainers figure out a few things on their own.

"He taught me how to really use the wrist to make the bit move in the horse's mouth to keep them soft," said Denton DeBuhr who rode with the Galyeans from 2011-2016.

"If you worked hard you were given plenty of opportunities to show," DeBuhr added. "They have such a great reputation. Now that I'm on my own I've had people send me horses even though they don't know me, but they know I worked for the Galyeans."

It takes three to four employees, one with a focus on facility and grounds maintenance, to keep the barn running. The other two to three are assistants to help with the riding and care of the horses and to learn all they can from Gil. When hiring, the Galyeans look for people who work hard, have a good attitude and are willing to get up every morning and give their best.

Perhaps even more important than teaching aspiring trainers how to improve their craft, the Galyeans impress upon them the importance of how to treat clients. While the horses and their care are of upmost importance, they view the relationships with their clients as being even more so. Current assistant trainer Adam Mathis said that he quickly learned that riding the horse is only 50 percent of what is done on a daily basis. The other half is interacting with clients.

"It's very important to us to teach our assistants how to be around people and to develop lasting customer relationships," Becky said. "It's the people that keep us going, so they have to enjoy the experience too."

It's undeniable that, not only have the Galyeans produced the industry's winningest horses, they have done the same for trainers. In the past two decades Mike Tivoli, Brian Baker, Matt Klingspoon, Shannon Curl, Aaron Moses, DeBuhr and Dellin all spent several years with the Galyeans. Today, Puthoff, Mathis and Denny Jones are absorbing all they can from the world-class program.

For seven years Moses studied under Gil and Becky. He couldn't point to one specific training method he learned while there, because there were so many career-altering lessons, but said that the interaction with others always stands out in his mind.

"They treat people with respect," said Moses. "They taught me everything I know about the business."

The couple's commitment to this principle is not lost on their customers.

"They are honest and great to work with," said Bill Cox who owns Sleep Machine, a horse that just recently won the L2 Senior Western Pleasure Circuit Championship at the Cornhusker Classic. "They walk you through the training aspect and we've really enjoyed the great mix of people that make up his clientele."

Moses said there's no place else he could have gone and gotten the same experience. They gave him the opportunity to learn as much as he could.

"They are like family to me and they are still the people I call when I need advice," Moses said.

Balancing a barn full of clients with differing goals and abilities can be a challenge. Gil's insistence on open communication has attracted a group of clients that is more like family than competitors. Each is aware of the other's goals, they keep an eye out for one another and are their biggest cheerleaders.

"Gil never burns a bridge with a client," Barry said. "I've never seen him get out of sorts with a person, even if they leave their program he still speaks with them."

Brody Galyean saunters into the office to check in with mom and dad before heading up to the house. It's before noon and he's already been to football practice and ridden his horse, Cool Poco Dot. Brody, 14, is the

Galyean's youngest son and he has recently been back in the saddle. He's having as much success as his mom and dad. At this year's AQHA Youth World Show he was Reserve Champion in the 13 & Under Western Pleasure and won the Level 2 Western Pleasure. He also won the 13 & Under Youth Western Pleasure at the NSBA World Show in August.

"One of the favorite parts of my job is helping Brody," said Mathis. "It's almost like when they drop him off at football practice. The simple fact that they really try to let me teach him shows their integrity. Gil could voice over me, but he doesn't."

Brody and his older brother, Garrett, 17, showed in Leadline and Walk-Trot classes as kids, but sports quickly became their passion. Garrett hasn't shown horses since he was 8, and that's OK with the Galyeans. Of course, they would love for him to share their passion, but realize that his focus is sports.

"I love watching them take care of their children," added Joanie Zelino.

The Jackson, Wyoming rider has had horses in training with the Galyeans for the past five years. Her horse, The Dark Impulse, recently won the $10K Limited Horse Non-Pro Maturity and the NSBA Maturity Western Pleasure at the NSBA World Show.

"They have never pushed their children to ride and let them come to their own conclusions about wanting to show," she said.

The days are jam-packed with caring for the horses, but running their own business allows the Galyeans to plan their schedules so they can make it to all the boys' games. October is the toughest month to work it all out. Between the All-American Quarter Horse Congress and football season, there's rarely a free night.

"Gil is an excellent family man," Barry said. "He tries to never miss a football game, even if it means flying back and forth between a show and home."

Because the sports are as important to the kids as horses are to their parents, Gil and Becky do more than support them, by attending practices and games. Over Labor Day weekend, Gil headed to the football stadium with his power washer to clean up the stands and help get the facility ready for Garrett's senior high school season.

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Pictured on this page, Gil Galyean is honored by the National Snaffle Bit Association at the 2015 Quarter Horse Congress for being the first in the association to record $1 million in lifetime earnings. On the opposite page (top to bottom) a collection of Gil's friends and clients: Joanie Zelnio; Fritz Leeman, Jon Barry and Bill Cox.

"IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO US TO TEACH OUR ASSISTANTS HOW TO BE AROUND PEOPLE AND TO DEVELOP LASTING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS," SAID BECKY GALYEAN. "IT'S THE PEOPLE THAT KEEP US GOING, SO THEY HAVE TO ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE TOO."

"We enjoy watching them play sports, it's our hobby," Becky said.

Both Gil and Becky were athletes themselves. Gil played football and basketball and Becky played basketball and tennis.

Gil says the boys get their athletic talent from Becky – she won the state tennis championship her senior year and attended Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas on a scholarship.

Inside the air-conditioned, ranch décor office, Gil shoos a cat that's snuck in uninvited off his shelves filled with the iconic AQHA World Championship globes, bronze statues and other championship memorabilia. In 2000, he was inducted into the NSBA's Quarter Million Dollar Club and in 2015 he became NSBA's first Million Dollar Rider, by recording more than $1 million in lifetime earnings from competition at NSBA sanctioned association events.

"Gil is a horseman, the kind of individual who understands that while not all horses can win at the majors, with proper training, they all have a place in the industry," said Stephanie Lynn, NSBA's director of operations. "By taking the long view he has helped create, not only great horses, but great horsemen. Whether dealing with clients, horses or staff, Gil is a teacher who leads by example and sets the standards high for everyone."

Gil is honored by the recognition.

"Being named an NSBA $1 million rider was a monumental achievement. It was nice of NSBA to acknowledge it," he said.

He quickly changes the subject and starts talking about the future rather than the past. Gil savors each achievement but doesn't get complacent.

"I'm always looking forward, trying to get better. I never stop trying or competing," he said. "Every client's horse helps us sustain our business. Some of them have just come at the right time in my career."

But it's his past that has brought him to the present and will carry him into the future. When pressed, he admits there are a few that stand out for significant wins such as Mac Dudley, the horse he credits with putting him on the map. The buckskin gelding with four white feet was owned by the Murphy family.

"That horse was light on his feet and was so different than what anybody was showing at the time," he said.

Tillie Shiek will also always be a stand- out because he carried Gil to his first AQHA World Championship in 1982. There's also Pine Barn, a horse that won the 3-year-old Western Pleasure Derby at the Congress in 1984.

"Pine Barn had a real pretty top line that profiled well and he had a lot of eye appeal," Gil reminisced. "He taught me the feel of a correct three-beat lope. He had a lot of hang-time and was slow legged."

In more recent history, the bay mare Cool Krymsun Lady has carried Gil to the winner's circle multiple times, first as a 2-year-old. She went on to win an AQHA World title and the Congress as a Junior Horse. The multiple Congress and AQHA World Champion mare even made an astonishing return to the show arena as a senior horse after ligament surgery.

Cool Blazing Lady, a mare that traced to Zippo Pine Bar on both sides, was a family favorite. She was the first of the Cool Lookin Lady foals they had in the program. She was eye-catching and Becky celebrated multiple Non-Pro wins aboard the horse.

But there were so many others over the years, like Old Gold Machine, Suddenly A Cool Lady, How Bout At Midnight,
Onlygoodtilmidnight, Rewind And Repeat, Mr Rusty Zipper, Investment Creditor, Hot N Spicy Me, Hot N Blazing, Golden Moonlite, So Good Im Classic, Eazy Dayzie, Irish
Invitation, Dont Skip Zips Lady, Sure Am Hot, Go Figer, Authentic Invitation, Chips Chocolate Star and VS Lady In Red.

"Gil is the hardest working horse trainer as there is in the industry," Barry said.

Moses echoed the same sentiment.

"They don't just walk out of the barn at night and think they're done until the next morning," he said. "They're always thinking about the business. That's a big reason their program has been so successful for so long. It's one of the biggest things that has helped me in my career."