

For the love of Clydesdales

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

Jack and Michelle Parnell raise beautiful Clydesdales near Sandpoint, Idaho.

Jack grew up in California, where his family farmed with horses. He started raking hay with horses when he was hardly big enough to reach the pedal on the dump rake.

Later he had his own ranch and raised registered Angus.

"When my sons Randy and Lon were old enough to learn how ranching used to be done, we bought our first team of horses — in the 1970s," said Parnell.

For many years Parnell Ranch contracted with fairs in California to do demonstrations with their hitches. They also had an annual pumpkin harvest at the ranch and invited 5,000 kids from local schools.

"We'd hitch teams to big hay wagons, and give the kids rides through the ranch and let them pick their own pumpkins," Parnell said. "After we moved to Idaho we did hundreds of sleigh rides. We had a big campfire, told stories about the horses, let people talk to the horses and feed them carrots."

The Parnells now raise Clydesdales for customers nationwide. Budweiser uses two Parnell stallions in their breeding program in Missouri.

He and Michelle have also shown horses for many years. At every opportunity Parnell tries to promote draft horses and educate more people about them. These horses are used for many things, and you don't need an 8-up hitch or a 6-up or buy expensive harnesses.

"These horses are wonderful just to have in the pasture to look at. They are wonder-



Courtesy of Parnell Ranch

Jack Parnell giving sleigh rides with their horses.

ful to ride, or drive as a single horse," he said.

"We try to breed excellent horses that can show or do anything," he said. "The ideal horse could go into a big hitch, pull a plow or harrow, or do whatever the owner wants it to do."

Breeding excellent horses is a passion. Jack and Michelle often take a consignment of horses to the National Clydesdale Sale in St. Louis, Mo. They also have private treaty sales at the ranch.

Today Jack, age 82, and Michelle manage the ranch with the help of Ben Shupe, who moved to Idaho from Pennsylvania a few years ago to work for them.

"He handles every horse on the ranch. Every horse we own is broke to drive," Parnell said.

"We keep two stallions. We bought our older stallion in 2000. We went to Scotland and bought him, and had him flown over here. We call him Ramsey and he's been outstanding. He's in a pasture right outside my office window, where he looks in at me," he said. "We throw him an apple or two every day

and he's very spoiled!"

Most of the mares on the ranch today are Ramsey daughters.

"We bought a young stallion, from Ontario, Canada, to breed those mares. Breeding horses is a genetic art. It takes a bit of artistry to put the genetic material together to create the horse you want," he said, adding that it's part science and partly art and intuition.

"My wife, Michelle, does all the breeding. We do our



Courtesy of Parnell Ranch

Michelle and Jack Parnell with one of their Clydesdale foals.

own ultrasound work in getting the mares bred, and she's the expert in that field," Parnell said.

Michelle handles the mares, gets them ready to breed, does the ultrasound and gets them bred. She also does most of the veterinary work on the ranch. The Par-

nells also sell cooled semen from their stallions. Michelle recently learned how to freeze

semen from their stallions. They are expecting 23 foals from their own mares in 2018.

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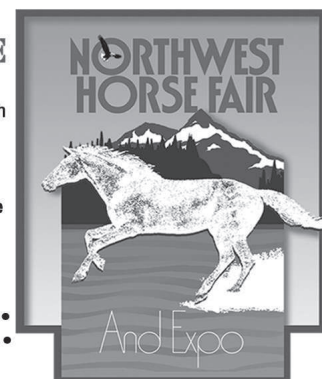
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