

# His 'retirement rocking chair' is a horse

## Book-a-mal-doh

**BY DICK ANGLESTEIN REINHOLDS** — Some men, when they finish out one career and begin to point their vocational efforts more in the direction of retirement, may think of a rocking chair.

But not Lester Weber, of R1 Reinholds, Lancaster County.

His "retirement rocking chair" comes in the guise of the smooth, rolling gait of the Tennessee Walking Horse he has been breeding and raising for the past half-decade.

His operation, one of the largest in the Northeast for Walkers, numbers as high as 25 head in the spring when the brood mares are in foal.

His breeding of the Tennessee Walkers, which Weber describes as the ultimate in pleasure horses, was a back-to-the-land goal he has been striving to reach for quite a few years.

"I grew up on a farm in the vicinity of the Bergstrasse School near Ephrata," he explained.

"I always loved horses and enjoyed working them on the farm. You might say I stumbled into the raising and breeding when we later got our first Walker as a pleasure horse. I read up on them and started studding."

Weber launched the operation while still working as a sales rep for a publishing company, covering a six-state area.

"I had a sense of frustration and tension," he said.

"I was gone from Monday morning to Friday night. That's not my ideal way of living."

So, the family's pleasure horse hobby evolved into a Tennessee Walking Horse breeding farm and Weber began spending fulltime at it during the past summer.

"Now, I can spend more time with the horses," he said, "as well as potential customers."

He presently maintains one stallion and a half-dozen brood mares. Overall inventory can range from 15 to

25 horses, depending on the season of the year.

His stud stallion is a big, husky black, nearly 16 hands high, named Senator's Thunder, who is out of the World Grand Champion, Ebony's Senator.

One of his mares is directly out of Sun's Delight, current World Grand Champion standing at stud at Shadow Valley Farm near Shelbyville, Tn. Another mare is directly out of Mack K's Handshake, a World Grand Champion standing at stud at Stallion Stables, also near Shelbyville.

He has had good mating results with his stallion and other mares, which trace bloodlines back to Midnight Sun and Merry Go Boy, two top breeding stallions.

Other animals he acquires directly from Tennessee or Kentucky, the bastions of Tennessee Walking Horse country.

"When my inventory gets down," he said, "I concentrate on bringing in only quality animals and have been able to get some outstanding ones. I try for the complete package — well broken, nice looking, size and good disposition."

Weber describes the Walker as the ultimate pleasure horse because it combines all of the needed characteristics — a spirited mount with a gentle disposition that has tremendous strength and stamina, plus the smooth, easy gait desired by riders spending many hours in the saddle.

The Walker has gradually evolved from multiple cross-breeding, which has included the Southern Plantation Walking Horse, the Thoroughbred, Standardbred, Morgan and American Saddlebred.

Since its beginning in the Tennessee hill country, it has been a very versatile horse.

Currently, they're used in barrel races, in single or double hitches ranging from carriages and sleighs to manure spreaders, by



cowboys working the high country of Montana, Wyoming or Idaho, police in New York City, rangers in state parks, and countless pleasure horse owners, particularly those running bird dogs in field trials.

Weber has sold horses as far away as Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey. Three mounts have gone to Bob Abric, of Bernville, Berks County, who participates in the Field Trials circuit in the Northeast.

Prices of the Walkers range from \$900 - \$1000 for unpapered, quality horses to \$1500 - \$1800 for registered top-of-the-line animals.

The Weber farms covers 85 acres northwest of Reinholds, including five acres of woodland, 30 tillable and 50 acres of pastureland, which provides a sizeable exercise area for the Walkers.

Presently Weber is branching out in another agricultural direction with a 60,000-layer poultry house.

But the Walking Horses remain his primary agricultural pursuit.

"I'm trying to continually upgrade the breeding operation to improve the quality of the animals and maintain a source of good, quality pleasures horses for the Northeast."

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