

Family Finds Miniature Horses Are Ideal Pets

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LEOLA (Lancaster Co.) —

When passersby see Cliff and Sue Martin taking their pet for a walk, they slow down for a second look.

It's not a dog on the leash although it's about the same size, and it's too small for a pony or a colt.

"What is it?" people ask.

It's a miniature horse. In fact, the Martins have eight miniature horses, which have all the characteristics of standard-size horses but not the height.

The dainty animals are gaining in popularity in the area, although the breed has been around since the 16th century. Through selective breeding and inbreeding, European royalty bred the miniatures as pets for young princes and princesses.

Wars and the decline of Europe during the 18th century caused the breed to almost disappear and the miniature horses were mostly delegated to circuses until the 1930s, when miniature horses were introduced to the U.S. The horses were not used as pets but to pull coal cars from the depths of coal mines where the tunnels were too small for mules and horses.

Miniature horses were regarded as novelties until the 1970s when several breeders imported the finest thoroughbred and Arab-type miniatures from Europe.

Several miniature horse associations register the horses, but the horses must be five years old before registration. This is to guarantee that growth is completed. To be officially registered in the American Miniature Horse Association, the miniature horses must not exceed 34 inches when measured from the ground to the last hairs on the mane.

The horses come in all colors. The Martins prefer Pintos, which they breed to sell the offspring. According to Sue, black and white Pintos and Appaloosas are the most desired type, but color preferences go in cycles.

"There's a smell about horses that is wonderful," Sue said.

She grew up on a dairy farm and always had a riding horse. After she had a scary riding accident, her husband said, "That's enough of that."

Sue sold her horse and Cliff sold his 1934 Chevy Street Rod and used the money to invest in miniatures.

"It was a good move," Sue said. "Miniatures are very gentle and are

something the whole family can enjoy."

The Martins have three daughters, Amy, 9; Kim, 7; and Audrey, 5; who often play with the horses in the yard or use them for cart rides. Walking the horses prepare them for showing and keep them in shape.

"The horses are so playful and become very attached to the people they are around," Sue said. "They actually act very much like puppies by following you around." She told of one horse jumping in their laps when they were seated on the lawn watching its antics.

At birth, the horses average 18- to 22-inches. Within three years, the horse almost reaches its maximum height, but may grow 10 percent more. For this reason, the horse cannot be registered to make sure that all growth has occurred.

The Martins show their stock at the Mid-Atlantic Horse Show, where most of the classes found at full-size horse competitions are available. Riding classes are not available, but halter and driving classes are held.

According to Sue, miniature horses seem to be more common in Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia than in Pennsylvania. But popularity is growing as many people find that miniatures are much easier to keep than standard size horses.

"A horse can be kept in a backyard. I even know one woman who keeps hers in a doghouse," Sue said.

The breed doesn't require much feed. According to Sue, a miniature horse eats one cup of grain and one-half flake hay a day. One bale of hay lasts a whole month.

The horses are fed in the morning and let out to pasture at noon. At 4 p.m., the horses are brought in and fed again.

"You must be careful not to let them eat too much," Sue said.

The breed needs the same shots and care as other horses. Feed must be clean and kept in airtight containers.

During birthing, a person must be there to keep the foal from suffocating. Because of breeding, the horses have become smaller ones but the birth sac has remained as tough as for larger animals. The animal cannot break the sac.

The Martins installed a camera over each stall. Each horse wears a special halter with a mercury switch so that birth contractions may be monitored while the Mar-



Cliff and Sue Martin with Amy, 9; Kim, 7; and Audrey, 5; find that raising miniature horses is a hobby the whole family enjoys.



Dakota takes Amy, Kim, and Audrey for a cart ride. tins are in the house.

"I wear a warm-up suit to bed during the birthing season," Sue said. "By the time I get to the barn after the monitor goes off, the sac is coming out.

"The horse should come out like a little diver, but often its legs are twisted and need to be untangled."

Other than the problem with the sac, birthing is generally uneventful and the foals are hardy. It is a stressful time for foals during weaning, and yearlings must be watched for respiratory infections.

Because the Martins have this

sophisticated birthing set up, they offer boarding and foaling services. They use all their own breeding stock and contract services to others. The average foal costs \$2,500, and a mare, \$3,000 to \$7,000.

Gestation period is 11 months. The foals are born in April and weaned at three months.

If more information is desired, contact the Martins at Pinto Park Miniature Horses, 184 Newport Rd., Leola, PA 17540 (717) 656-7635.

Homestead Notes



Audrey admires Andy's tall as Kim scratches his ears. An old wife's tale claims that the horse stops growing when its tail reaches the ground. The Martins believe the tale holds some truth.