



Imagineate



Mighty Tim



Imaginary Gold



Prince Shannon



King David

Imagineate: Sheldak's senior sire has produced halter and performance champions such as Imagine That Jack and String Of Storms. **Mighty Tim:** Bred by Lane Hudson, the prominent early Sheldak Ranch sire spent his final 19 years with the Utkes. **Prince Shannon:** Sheldak Ranch's first National Show competitor took home a reserve championship and later, a Hall of Fame title. **Imaginary Gold:** Has passed on the halter and performance legacy of his sire, Imagineate. Photo by Faye Unrau. **King David:** Bred at Sheldak, he sired halter and performance winners such as bronze medallion earner Christi Kings Red. Photo by Don Shugart.



Temperament, talent and type

Clear and consistent breeding goals have produced a 45-year legacy of foals stamped with the unmistakable Sheldak Ranch signature.



Dave and Kim Utke. Photo by Duane Steedsman.

Most any horse enthusiast can tell an Appaloosa from a Paint, a Tennessee Walker from a Saddlebred, and an Arabian from a Quarter Horse. It's uncommon, however, to look at a pasture full of foals and be able to pinpoint the very breeders and the ranch from which they hail. Unless, of course, those foals are from Sheldak Ranch five miles east of Sheldon, North Dakota.

Sheldak Appaloosas possess a characteristic conformation that sets them apart in both type and talent. And they inherit tractable temperaments

that, combined with their physical traits and abilities, make them sought-after mounts for most any discipline.

Dozens—and likely hundreds—of horses with Sheldak breeding in their pedigrees have ended up in the ranks of performance champions. Yet due to their consistently correct conformation, a large number began their careers in the halter pen, snapped up by eager buyers as weanlings.

Foundation lineage

Sheldak foals' uniformity comes from owners Dave and Kim Utke's strict adherence to old-time foundation bloodlines from the Peavy, Coke

Roberds and Wiescamp lines. These very horses formed the foundation for the major stock breeds and all trace back to Old Fred.

"Bright Eyes Brother was the solid foundation of our breeding program," Kim says, naming progeny such as Mighty Tim, Spittin Image, Mr. Exclusive and Barretta Bright, all of whom were part of Sheldak's breeding stock lineup.

"We aim for a very athletic, correct conformation; good hindquarter muscling; big eye; fine neck; keen throatlatch; exceptional head; and small ears," Kim says. "To be athletic, a horse has to have the best conformation.

"We're the ones who have to look at them daily," Kim adds, "so we raise what's kind on our eyes and a joy to work with."

Sheldak studs

The Utkes' senior stallion, 19-year-old Imagine (by String Of Stars son Image Of Stars and out of Slippertone Dixie, AQHA), has strengthened the athletic halter horse type they've always bred for. "His offspring are highly intelligent and very responsive," Kim says. "Customers tell us they only need to show these horses something once—maybe twice—and they remember."

North Dakota trainer and halter showman Laurence Hiatt has won several Canadian National

{ By Diane Rice }



Skipa Crystal



Crystal Slippers



Exclusive Crystal and Crystal Cowboy

Sheldak offspring

Skipa Crystal: A Mighty Tim granddaughter by Crystal Prince and out of Cherry Benita. **Crystal Slippers:** A Mighty Tim granddaughter by Crystal Prince and out of Cherry Slippers. **Exclusive Crystal and Crystal Cowboy:** Crystal Prince colts out of Cameo Bimbo by Mr. Barretta, and Always And Forever by Master Star. Photos by Kim Utke.

championships and National grand champion awards with the Imagineate and Master Star (String Of Stars x Ms Impressive Jack, AQHA) offspring he's shown for himself and his customers. And he enjoyed an undefeated summer at state and regional shows with those same Sheldak get.

Awestruck (Awe Striker x Love To Connect), Sheldak's 1996 sire, has bloodlines that trace back to The Old Blue Mare, considered by many to be the most influential mare in the Appaloosa breed. The colorful stallion's foals have won points in both halter and performance, and his sire and dam have produced several bronze medallion earners.

The Utkes' junior stallion, Master In Command, is a 2004 String Of Stars grandson out of Lads Moody Blues, who's out of Lads Mighty Bar, by Bright Lad by silver medallion winner Skip Bright—who goes back to Bright Eyes Brother.

Master In Command's top side traces back to many of the great "Sheldak family" horses that appear in numerous ApHC Hall of Fame pedigrees: Gold Heels, Ding Bob, Flossie, Sheik, Blue Mare, Old Fred, Coke T, Peter McCue and others.

The bottom side

If mares are happy, stay in good condition year-round and raise a foal each year, they stay in the broodmare band well into their 20s. If not, Dave and Kim find them a good home in a better climate so they can raise a few more foals for someone else.

The Utkes keep the number of mares in their broodmare band at approximately 35, occasionally replacing older mares with carefully selected younger stock.

Although Dave and Kim produce many of their replacement mares, they occasionally purchase outside mares with their desired bloodlines to infuse fresh genetics.

Kim believes mares provide 80 percent of the foal equation's

value. "Any new mare considered must have a rock-solid pedigree of champions top and bottom to match the rest of our mares," Kim says, "and the best possible conformation. And, they'll have to trace back to our foundation family of horses."

Desired world wide

In addition to the Sheldak halter horses that have graduated to the performance pen here in the United States, many have gone to other countries where they've excelled in performance events for which points and honors aren't tracked by the ApHC.

Sheldak Appaloosas span the globe, having been exported to Europe, Canada, Central America, Australia and Mexico.

Eyes Of David (King David x Mighty Flashy) sold to Sweden in foal to Crystal Prince. She won the champion best mare title at her first show, the Scandinavian Appaloosa Show, then foaled her leopard colt. He went on to become a champion and passed the test to be approved as a stud in Sweden.

Of three colts sold to Panama, RR Spanish Skipper (Imagineate x Arrayed In Gold) won many grand championships, including the Panama Quarter Horse Association Show where he was named best imported horse over all ApHC, AQHA and APHA horses. The 7-year-old excels in roping and contributed to owner Roberto Rodriguez's Best Appaloosa Exhibitor award.

Many top Sheldak foals have excelled in arena events in Mexico, where they're prized for their agility, speed, training ease and dispositions. "Many proud owners

“Any new mare considered must have a rock-solid pedigree of champions top and bottom to match the rest of our mares.”

—Kim Utke

there keep in touch,” Kim says. “They send us photos as the foals grow up. We enjoy not only seeing what great shape the new owners keep the foals in, but also what beautiful ranches, buildings and landscaping they have. Whether they perform them or not, they dearly love the horses and it shows in the care they give them.”

The championship tally

“I haven’t tabulated the National and World champions our horses have produced,” Kim says. Suffice it to say that she occasionally traces the pedigrees of National and World champions and winners at bigger shows, only to discover that many were raised at Sheldak.

After the 2006 World Show, she researched pedigrees on the Internet’s all-breed pedigree site. She found that every halter winner—mares, stallions and geldings of all ages in both non-pro and open, with the exception of one—was Bright Eyes Brother-bred. And in the exception, aged geldings, a Bright Eyes Brother horse placed reserve champion in both open and non-pro. “The results carried down to second, third and often to fourth place if I kept checking,” Kim adds. “It was a pretty thrilling discovery!”



Mares at Sheldak Ranch live and foal on pasture. Photo by Kim Utke.

The Sheldak operation

That thrilling discovery was more than 40 years in the making. When they married in 1964, Dave—originally from Fargo, North Dakota—and Kim—who hailed from Detroit Lakes, Minnesota—decided to ignore well-meaning advice and follow their hearts to make their living raising horses.

They bought a run-down farm and put their dreams and dedication to work. Since those early days, Appaloosas have funded the land, house, barn and improvements, and turned their vision into their real-life dream. They raised their son and daughter, Shannon and Lori Jo, on the ranch, and each returns occasionally to help Dave and Kim, now in their mid-60s, with some of their favorite chores.

The Utkes believe that nature knows best, so they still pasture-breed and -foal their horses. From early May through mid-July, they turn one stallion out with each of three bands of mares in separate pastures and let nature take its course.

Sheldak Ranch produces 30–35 foals each year. Some get fitted for halter competition; some go on to the performance pen. And some become valuable using horses with reputations for quality and substance.

True to breed averages, about two-thirds of Sheldak’s foals are born with Appaloosa coat patterns. “We’ve always bred for the most superior conformation and just prayed for color,” Kim says.

Yet there’s no less interest in their solid foals than in those with colored coats. They’re highly sought after by ranchers in South Dakota, Kansas and Nebraska.

“We’ve gotten amazing feedback from these people telling us what they can re-sell our horses for after they’ve been trained,” Kim says. “There are horses in their 20s still doing a full day’s ranch work. Their owners claim they’re some of the best ranch horses in the area.

“We breed a horse that can be a halter champion and then go out and do anything in the field of real work or the show ring,” Kim says. They’re Appaloosas that not only *can* do it all, but *do* it all—and have for years.

Editor’s note: For more about Sheldak Ranch, visit www.sheldakranch.com. If you have a Sheldak Ranch horse, tell us! Send a 300-word or less letter to editor@appaloosajournal.com, fax to (208) 882-8150, or mail to Editor, Appaloosa Journal, 2720 W. Pullman Road, Moscow ID 83843. 🐾