

The Oleen brothers'  
American Quarter Horses  
have to be just as good as  
their registered Hereford  
and Angus cattle.

Story and photos  
by Becky Newell



# Hidden in the Hills

**I**NTERMITTENT RAIN SHOWERS DON'T SEEM TO BOTHER JAN and Arden Oleen, who are horseback moving a herd of cows from one pasture to another. Despite the showers and heavy, dark clouds, the burnt-orange cattle are a pleasant contrast against the lush, green pasture.

These brothers raise commercial and registered Angus and horned Hereford cattle and American Quarter Horses on the northern edge of the rolling Kansas Flint Hills. Jan, 60, and

Arden, 57, don't complain about the rain because while it may make moving cattle a little miserable, the rain also nurses their pastures and wheat.

The Oleens have lived on the family's ranch near Dwight, Kansas, all of their lives. In the 1960s, when they were in high school, Jan and Arden farmed and maintained a herd of registered Herefords, but sold the cattle when they headed to college. Then in the early 1970s, after stints



The Oleen brothers move a group of their Angus and horned Hereford cows through a pasture. Their American Quarter Horses are necessary tools on their Kansas ranch.

in the military, the brothers jumped back into the cattle business with their other brother and silent partner, Kent, who is an attorney.

At that time, Jan was working in a bank in Dwight, and Arden was working for a printing company in Kansas City, Kansas. Arden spent most of his spare time helping on the ranch. In 1978, he abandoned the city work for full-time ranch work.

“I drew a line down the center of a piece of paper,” Arden recalls. “And the only thing on the plus side for staying with the job in Kansas City was dollar signs. The plus side for coming home to the ranch included hunting, fishing, riding, cattle, and living and working on the ranch.”

Those things held a strong allure for Jan, too, but he was able to continue working at their small-town bank, while he pursued his passion for ranching. Even though Jan’s



Jan and Arden Oleen have been in the ranching business together since they were in high school. They began building their horse herd in the '70s.

president of that bank today, it's nothing for him to go from an office chair to a saddle at a moment's notice.

"Before we had hired hands, Arden would saddle up our horses, come to the bank and we'd go rope and treat a cow, then I'd go back to the bank and he'd go unsaddle the horses," Jan says.

"It took longer to get the two horses caught and the trailer hooked up than it did to go treat the cattle, but it was a way that we could do it, and it worked out," Arden adds.

The brothers began building their horse herd in the late '70s. They'd had Quarter Horses on the ranch when they were kids, so there was never any question about the breed they'd be raising.

"Quarter Horses have always been an important working part of our ranch," Jan says. "We have many small pastures without corrals. If cattle need to be caught or doctored, a horse is involved. A lot of times, it's easier to go rope a bull out of a pasture than it is to go set up pens to run a bull into."

"There are places in some of our pastures where you can't get with a four-wheeler," Arden adds.

The brothers' horse herd began with a mare named Lacy Taylor, a bay great-granddaughter of Leo who traced to King on her dam's side. Arden bought her in 1981, shortly after he and Jan had purchased their first stallion, Speed N Crome, a grandson of Leo. They began breeding the stallion to Lacy Taylor and several other mares who traced to Old Taylor, who was by King and out of a daughter of Poco Bueno; Peter McCue; and Leo. They also stood the stud to outside mares.

Speed N Crome died in 1998, and today the Oleens are using his son, JAK Black Leo. The JAK in many of their horses' names stands for Jan, Arden and Kent. The ranch's other stallions are JAK Blue McCue 118, a great-grandson of roping-horse sire Blue Valentine; JA Night Train Dude, a grandson of Blondy's Dude; and Mighty Joker Joe, who traces to Sugar Bars and Joe Hancock.

The Oleens keep two to three fillies each year as broodmare candidates and about the same number of colts that will eventually be used as riding stock.

With two herds of registered cattle, 60 head of horses and a farming operation to manage, the Oleens don't have time to break any of their horses to saddle.

"We send our coming 2-year-olds to Frank Buchman at

Alta Vista (Kansas)," Jan explains. "He starts them, then sends them back to us to ride."

Disposition, conformation and performance are the three things that the Oleens' American Quarter Horses have in common with their cattle.

"I like cutting horses," Arden says. "I appreciate their ability, but some of the very best ones aren't stout enough. They're a little finer-boned. They can work cattle better than our horses, but when we've got an 1,800-pound bull on the end of the rope, today's cutting horses are not going to make ranch horses for us. Here, horses have to literally pull for us. I don't care how good a horse works in the corral, if he can't pull a bull into a trailer, then we're in trouble."

The Oleens would like it if their horses, like their cattle, could make them a little money. That's why they added horses to their annual spring production sale in the late '90s. They sell 15 to 20 yearlings and 2-year-olds that have been started under saddle.

"We were raising more horses than we could use," Jan says. "Our cattle philosophy carries over into the horses. If somebody gets a horse from us and it doesn't work, we take it back. Now we've got bull buyers that will come to our sale because we've got horses, too."

Ranch rodeos, which the brothers have been competing in for 20 years, also help the Oleens spread the word about their homebred horses.

"I'm probably one of the older contestants out there," Jan says. "We've had a lot of fun, and we've always been competitive. We've always ridden our own horses. There have been a couple times that our whole team has been on Oleen-bred horses. It's been good for advertising our horses."

Good advertising, good fun and a good life – even in the rain.

"Horses make our work fun," Jan says. 🐾

*The Oleen brothers' annual production sale is March 28 in Dwight, Kansas. See [www.oleenbrothers.com](http://www.oleenbrothers.com) for more details.*



The Oleen brothers' mares trace to Old Taylor, a son of King; Peter McCue; and Leo.