

# Reminiscing with Martin COCKRIEL



The original 50 stall barn in Parker, Colorado that Martin built.

by Farra Baker and Kelsey Baker

“Winners make things happen; losers let things happen.” These are words that Martin Cockriel has lived by for over 75 years in the horse business. Today, at age 91, Martin is still going strong and “making things happen.” He and his wife, Barbara, still live in the home they built in Parker, Colorado in 1964.

The original 50 stall barn has been converted into an antique store and it does a huge business being conveniently located on Highway 83 just south of the town of Parker. In 1994, Martin built a new, smaller barn at the top of the hill closer to his house.

*“Winners make things happen;  
losers let things happen.”*

For over 20 years he showed American Saddlebreds, Morgans, road horses and ponies out of this barn. In 2016 Martin sold this barn to a dressage group and although there are no longer Saddlebreds or Morgans in the barn there are still lots of horses for Martin to watch over. The town of Parker has even named the street just north of his property Cockriel Drive.

Martin was born in 1926 on a farm near King City, Missouri just 100 miles north of Kansas City. The farm was 120 acres and produced all kinds of vegetables and fruit. Each fall, four or five pigs were butchered and cured in the smoke house. The family raised their own chickens as well. Twice a year they took the wagon to town to buy flour and sugar in 100 pound sacks. Martin’s father never owned a car or a tractor.

The family was connected to the outside world with a two-battery wall phone that rang when the

operator had a call for them. It was a “party line” and everyone could listen in to the conversations.

Martin’s father was a widower and his mother was a widow when they married. Each had older children and then they had a second family that consisted of Martin’s sister, Maude and his twin brother, Marshall. Marshall suffered from Epilepsy, a condition that plagued him for most of his life, even into adulthood.

When Martin was 12 years old his father died of a heart attack. At that point, Martin’s education ended because he was now the bread winner of the family. There was no time for school when you had to keep a farm up and running.

The beginning of Martin’s horse training days came when he was in his early teens. He rode his Saddlebred mare 28 miles to breed her to a five-gaited stallion named Beau Rose then rode her back home.



Martin with his first Saddlebred; a mare he bred to Beau Rose.

Her foal was the first horse Martin showed. He won the class and has never looked back. In all the years that Martin has been showing and training he has never had a riding lesson. He was completely self taught. He bought a book called *Riding and Training* written by Earl R. Farshler in 1945. Martin says that book really helped him in his youth and he continued to refer back to it in later years. He talked about training, gaiting, shoeing, feeding and stable management as well as breeding principles and horses’ different vices. Martin says, “I’m not bragging about it but I learned the hard way, by myself – watching and listening, mostly.”

Very few people realize that Martin was a welterweight boxer when he was 18. He entered a Golden Gloves tournament in St. Joseph, Missouri. The local newspaper stated that it was “one of the most entertaining fights on the 22-bout program”. He continued fighting for two more years and then decided he needed to do more with his life.

Martin volunteered for military service in the late forties but was dismissed from duty for medical reasons. At this point, he decided a decision had to be made about the family farm and its future. In the spring of 1949 the farm was sold and Martin’s mother moved into King City to live with his sister Maude.

It was also at this time that Martin began his career in the horse business, leaving behind the farm and the life he had grown up with. His first job as a horse trainer was in April of 1949. He became the head trainer at the Star Lane Farm in Lenexa, Kansas. The farm was owned by E.C. Rhoden who raised Saddlebreds and Palominos. A Star Lane Farm dispersal sale was held in the fall of 1949 and Martin then moved on to a job in Perrytown, Texas. He was the trainer and riding instructor at Haskall Hollard Stables, gaining experience not only

with the Saddlebreds but also Shetland ponies.

In April of 1950, Martin moved to North Platte, Nebraska where he was hired as trainer and manager of a private facility owned by L.A. Kelly. He worked mostly with Saddlebreds but on occasion, another breed of horse would come into the barn and he would work with that horse too. In his five years working for Mr. Kelly, Martin was able to get some tutoring from Billy Mountjoy, who trained horses in Omaha. "Billy taught me how to sit up straight and put a good mouth on a horse", Martin says.

While Martin was working for L.A. Kelly, he met the woman he would soon marry and spend the rest of his life with. Barbara was born and raised in North Platte and came to the barn one day to watch her friend ride.

Martin decided right away that Barbara was the girl for him and a few days later he showed up at the jewelry store where she worked "to get his watch fixed". Within a year they were married and are still married today after 66 years.

Barbara has been an enormous part of Martin's success in the horse business. Who could imagine that she was afraid of the horses. In spite of her fear Barbara still washed blankets and towels, packed for the horse shows and did all the bookkeeping for many years.

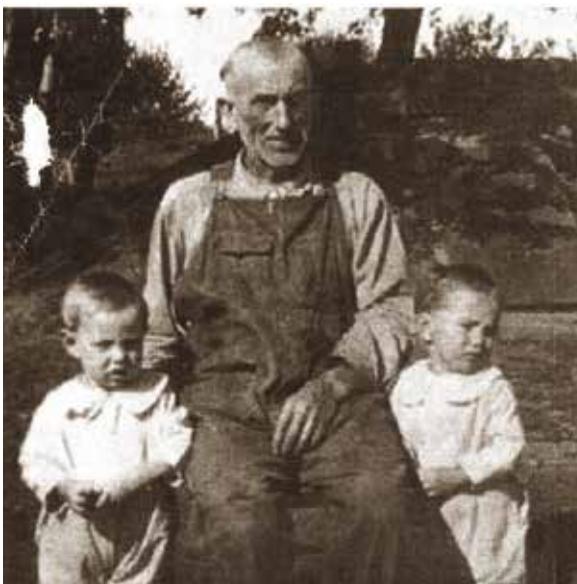
"She did all the bookkeeping. I would be broke today if she was not my bookkeeper and secretary for all those years," Martin says. He adds, "She has always been the biggest believer in my talent. She is the woman behind the man."

In addition to all the work she put into Martin's career, she also presented him with six children; three girls and three boys. The children are, of course, all grown now and following their own career paths. Two of the six have chosen to continue in Martin's footsteps. Mary Cockriel has an extremely successful Morgan training facility in Elizabeth, Colorado, that she runs with her partner Bob Kellert. They have a long list of world champion Morgans that they have put in the show ring over the years.

Eddie Cockriel has been training Saddlebreds in many different locations and has produced some of his own top notch Saddlebreds. At this time, he is working with Patty and Kayla Wooters at Longview Stables in Aurora, Colorado.



Martin trained his first show horse from the weanling he bred by Beau Rose out of his first Saddlebred mare. Their success in the ring encouraged him to continue his training career.



Martin as a child with his father Jim and brother Marshall.



Martin was a Golden Gloves welterweight boxer when he was 18.



Martin and Barbara Cockriel's children; (L-R), Charlie, Eileen, Eddie, Mary, Jim and Cathy.

*Martin Cockriel has been a huge success in the horse business after starting with nothing. He is a perfect example of what you can do with your life if you live it the right way and "make things happen".*

*Martin has lots of interesting stories about his life in the horse business. In future articles, we'll talk about some of his training experiences and judging and hauling stories. He'll also share some of his memories of horses he's has trained, customers he has had and family tales.*

# Reminiscing with Martin COCKRIEL

## PART TWO



by Farra Baker

It's a cold, snowy day in Parker, Colorado. Tomorrow the sun will come out and it will again be beautiful. But today, what fun it is to be sitting with Martin Cockriel and listening to his stories and hearing about his experiences over the last 75 years with horses.

Martin opened his training barn in Parker, Colorado in 1965 and had Saddlebreds, Morgans, Arabians and Tennessee Walking Horses as well as many other breeds.

In the early 1980s, he decided he wanted to go back to being a farmer having been raised on a farm in Missouri. He leased 2,000 acres of land along Parker Road, which is also State Highway 83.

He bought 100 head of cows and all the equipment you need to grow and bale hay. For many years, along with the horse training, Martin farmed that property. However, when a drought came along and lasted for two years, there was no hay either for the cows or for the training horses. Martin had to sell it all and just stick to what he did best; showing and training horses.

Never one to let the grass grow under his feet, Martin also became a USEF certified judge and judged at shows across the United States and



Spellcaster and Martin Cockriel won the Five-Gaited Grand Championship at the 1979 National Western Stock Show.

in Canada as well. He tells a funny story about judging a show.

After putting in a full day of work one cold February day, he flew north to judge a show in North Dakota. He arrived very late at night and was exhausted. Show management discovered that they had neglected to get him a room at the local hotel and there were no rooms available that late.

The show manager said he could get him a bed at the city jail, but then another man, a doctor, spoke up and said he could stay at the hospital. Martin said anything would be better than jail, so off he went to spend the night at the hospital. Everything went well until early the next morning when a nurse came in to prepare him for surgery. He left that hospital in a real hurry!

Martin had some wonderful horses in those early days. Spellcaster, an Indiana Peavine son, was shown by Martin across America and in Canada. Martin was fourth with him in the Stallion Stake at Louisville one year.

"He was a pretty horse with a great attitude," Martin said. He added, "It was too bad they didn't breed him a lot."



Sultan's Golden Age, Cockriel's three-gaited stallion, earned many wins with Cockriel in the 80s and had the heart of a champion.



Martin showed his black roadster mare, So Lovely, to numerous victories in the '70s.

## Reminiscing

Another good gaited horse from around that time was Modern Sensation, one of the first spotted Saddlebred horses to be shown. Trinity J and Murray's King were two other memorable five-gaited horses shown by Martin.

Martin trained and showed many great three-gaited horse as well. Irish Lassie, Saucy Sadie, Canadian Sunset, Betty's Gloriann, Private Eyes and Martin's stallion, Sultan's Golden Age were some the ones he remembers best from those days.

Sultan's Golden Age was quite a story. Martin bought him from Ruxer Farms in Indiana as a yearling in the early 1980s. He had a low back so Martin just turned him out in the pasture. Amazingly enough, by the next spring that back had come up and he turned into an outstanding fine harness horse and then went on to win many, many three-gaited championships across the country.

One hot summer day when Golden Age was around 13, Martin took him to a small show south of the farm in Parker, [Colorado]. He won his class and later when he was being loaded in the trailer, he had what turned out to be a stroke and fell over. Martin stayed with him all night at the showgrounds and the next day the horse was up but was blind. They managed to get him home and nursed him for many weeks. Amazingly, his sight returned and Martin's daughter, Eileen, showed him the whole next summer. One year to the day of Golden Age's first stroke, he had another and fell over dead. What a great heart that horse had.

Not only was Martin a top Saddlebred trainer in the 70s and 80s but he also trained and showed a number of great road horses. One of his favorites was a roadster mare named So Lovely. For years, she won driving classes across the country.

In 1977 and 1978, Martin drove So Lovely to win the Roadster To Bike Championship at the

American Royal. Martin sold her in 1978 and she went on to win numerous Open and Amateur World's Grand Championships for owner Eva Clifton and trainer Dale Milligan.

In the Morgan division, Martin trained and showed a wonderful roadster mare named Greentree Mary Jane. He showed her against Standardbreds and usually beat them all. She was later sold to Larry Sparks and went on to win many Morgan Grand National titles. Other road horses that Martin worked with in those days were Mr. Zip, Captain Easy, Early Start and Speed Queen.

Monte Vermont was a wonderful Morgan that Martin showed for many years. He was a winner both in harness and under saddle. He also won many versatility classes where first the horses show in harness then while in the ring, the harness is removed and saddles are put on. In those early days, the Morgan Versatility horses were required to jump as well.

Some other Morgans from that time who were shown and trained by Martin were Serendipity Storm B, Pinehaven Fire Glow and Yellow Iris Jaybe.

Of course, Martin was not to be outdone in the Arabian division either. He trained and showed many Arabians around the country. One of his favorites he says was Abu Bahabas. Not only was he a top English Pleasure horse but Martin also showed him in Arabian costume classes and loved the authenticity that was required. He even rode the horse barefooted and with a fake beard. Did the Bedouins really ride barefoot?

J.G. Fox, who was sired by Starheart Victory, was a horse that Martin bought in 1981 for Becky Larson who was 12 years old at that time and just beginning her show career. He found the horse in Missouri and Fox and Becky hit it off right away.

Becky showed him in English and Western Pleasure, Saddle Seat Equitation, Pleasure Driving and Showmanship. He won hundreds of ribbons for Becky over the years including the reserve championship in the Good Hands Finals at the American Royal, third in the Pleasure Medallion Finals at St. Louis, and later in his career, many Shatner Western Pleasure buckles. Becky says that without Martin, she would never have had the confidence to believe that she and Fox could succeed at whatever they tried. Here is another example of Martin's words to live by. "Winners make things happen; losers let things happen." Becky and Fox were certainly winners.

Martin, along with his wife Barbara, have been mainstays of the Colorado horse show fraternity for over 70 years. One of Martin's favorite shows back in the late 50s and 60s was the Denver National Western Stock Show held in January in conjunction with the rodeo.



Monte Vermont competed with Cockriel in the Morgan Versatility division which used to include taking a jump.



Complete with bare feet and a fake beard, Cockriel enjoyed showing Abu Barabas in the Arabian Costume classes.



J.G. Fox and Becky Larson won numerous championships together under Cockriel's direction. photo by Jack Schatzberg

Horses came in by train from other states and saddle horse classes were held in between rodeo events. The audiences loved it. Even back then Martin won most of the classes he entered. His winning has continued on into the next century.

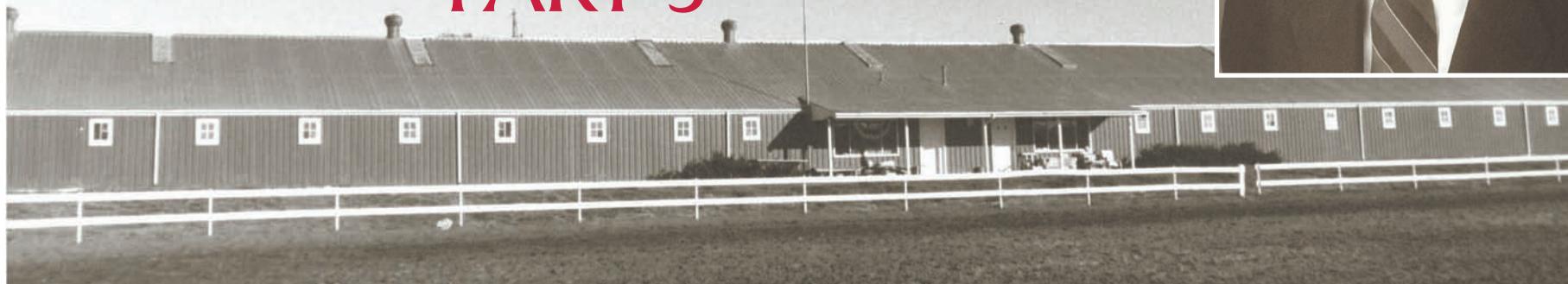
*We'll have more stories about Martin and his horses and his friends and clients in another issue.*



Martin Cockriel, with wife Barbara, proudly showed off the ribbons earned by Cockriel Stables at the 1967 National Western Stock show. photo by George Axt

# Reminiscing with Martin COCKRIEL

## PART 3



The original 50 stall barn in Parker, Colorado that Martin built.

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The view from Martin Cockriel's front porch and from the barn as well is absolutely spectacular. You can see the snowcapped Rocky Mountains all the way from Longs Peak in Estes Park to Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs. A person could sit there for hours and just enjoy looking at those mountains. But not if you are Martin Cockriel. He's much too busy.

Even though he's almost 93 years old, he still remains on the go. Either he is visiting other horse barns in the area or attending one of the many shows held in and around Denver. He even climbs on airplanes and flies around the country to attend horse shows; at least he tries to do that.

This year however, in March, he was planning to attend the Carousel Charity Horse Show in Scottsdale, Arizona. His son Eddie took him to Denver International Airport and dropped him off. He got through security, got to the gate, got on the airplane and then... got off the airplane. Denver was experiencing a "bomb cyclone" (otherwise known as a Spring snow storm).

The planes were all grounded but worse than that, the one road to the airport also closed down because of the snow drifts and the multitude of wrecks all over the road. Martin spent the entire day waiting for a flight which never left and then had to sleep on the floor of the airport. He couldn't even get home.



The Cockriel Family (l-r): Barbara, Eileen, Mary, Martin, Cathy, Eddie, Jim and Charlie.

Finally, by late afternoon the next day, the road had reopened and Martin was able to get back home. He wasn't so mad about sleeping on the floor of the airport but he was really mad to have missed the horse show!

Over the past 80 years that Martin has been training horses, he has rarely taken a vacation, much less even one day off a week. He was convinced however, in the spring of 2006, to take some time off and go deep sea fishing off the coast of Mexico. He was as successful at fishing as he has been at training horses and he caught a 110 pound sailfish. He had the fish stuffed and it hung in a place of honor in the barn for many years.

Probably the most satisfying thing that can happen to a professional horse trainer is to find a young horse that has had little or no training and bring it home and work it for six months or a year and then sell it to an amateur rider who then goes on to win and have the thrill of performing with a horse they love.

Some examples of the horses that Martin has brought along over the last 30 years are certainly worth talking about. The Perfect Blind Date was bought as a three-year-old and she went on to win the Junior Three-Gaited World's Champion of Champions title in 2003.

New York Style was bought by Martin in 2000 as a three-year-old and four years later won the World's Champion Park Stallion/Gelding class at Louisville as well as many other world's championships.

Kabu was raised locally in Colorado. Martin found her in 2003 as a three-year-old. She won the World's Championship Country Pleasure 13 and Under qualifier and the 13 and under championship in 2006 and would go on to win other world's championships.

Keep Me Posted (formerly named Roseridge's Posted Note) was another that Martin bought and sold that went on to win a world's championship in 2006.

Catalytic was an older fine harness horse that Martin showed himself to a third place tie in the Fine Harness Stallion/Gelding Stake at Louisville in 2010. Martin relayed an interesting story about this horse. Catalytic would show in a class just fine but then in the lineup he would rear and not stand. Martin took him to a hill at the barn at home and stopped him facing down that hill and made him stand. The horse couldn't rear going downhill and after a few attempts gave up trying and never reared again!

Front Row Frankie, Glendale's Bonnie Lass, Greentree Mary Jane, So Lovely, Spellcaster, Monte Vermont, and one of my horses, Doubletree's D'Cisions, D'Cisions won classes all across the country in many different divisions.

## Reminiscing

Perhaps the favorite horse that Martin owned over the years was High On Champagne. This five-gaited horse was bought by Martin when he was 77 years old. He showed Champagne all across the country for ten years and won most every class he showed in. This is one horse Martin didn't start, improve and sell. As a matter of fact, the horse is still owned by Martin and

*Martin must certainly be classified as a "winner"...*

living a happy life in the pasture at daughter Mary Cockriel's training barn The River's Edge.

Martin has won numerous awards over the years. He was inducted into the UPHA



Martin showed Kabu to win the Junior Park class at the 2004 Colorado Classic Horse Show.

Hall of Fame in 1998. He won the AMHA Golden Reins award in 1999. He and Barbara together won the National Horseman's Castleman Award in 2012 for devoting their efforts to the advancement and promotion of the Saddlebred breed.

He was involved in establishing the United Professional Horsemen's Association and remembers their first organizing meeting held at the Aladdin Hotel in Kansas City in 1968. Martin was Chairman of the UPHA Chapter 19 for many years and was elected the Chapter 19 Horseman of the Year numerous times.

Another organization that Martin was involved in organizing was the Colorado American Saddlebred Horse Association which began operating in 1969 and is still



Martin isn't a big believer in taking time off but one rare occasion allowed him to catch a 110 pound sailfish on a 2006 deep sea fishing trip to Mexico.



Eddie Cockriel showed The Perfect Blind Date and she would go on to win the Junior Three-Gaited World's Champion of Champions title in 2003.



Catalytic and Martin showed to a top three finish at the 2010 World's Championship Horse Show in the Fine Harness Stallion/Gelding class.

going strong today. He has also been recognized locally by the Rocky Mountain Horse Shows Association. He continues to serve on the board of the National Western Stock Show Association and is currently helping them plan a new state of the art horse show facility that will replace the current National Western Events Center.

What a career Martin has made for himself, buying, training, selling, showing and loving the show horse industry. He has been a mainstay in the Colorado Saddlebred Horse business for decades. As he has said for all those years, "Winners make it happen, losers let it happen."

Martin must certainly be classified as a "winner" because he has definitely made it happen in Colorado and across the country for over 75 years.



High On Champagne was one of Martin's all-time favorites and they showed together for 10 years in the open five-gaited division. He is still owned by Martin today.