

Living the dream SPRING ACRES FARM is *haven* for horses, and Perrellis

By Sadie Fowler

Stacey Kipper Perrelli is a driven individual who is not afraid to get her hands dirty. A long-time amateur who is known for having enough skill to train her own horses, Stacey has competed in the American Saddlebred world at a very high level for many years. Married to trainer Scott Perrelli, the couple is living out their dream at their beautiful Spring Acres Farm in the countryside of Colorado, and it's indeed a family affair.

"I do everything around the farm from cleaning stalls to digging trenches to working horses," Stacey said. "Our farm is a family venture. My mom, my dad and my husband all participate in the upkeep of the facility and the horses."

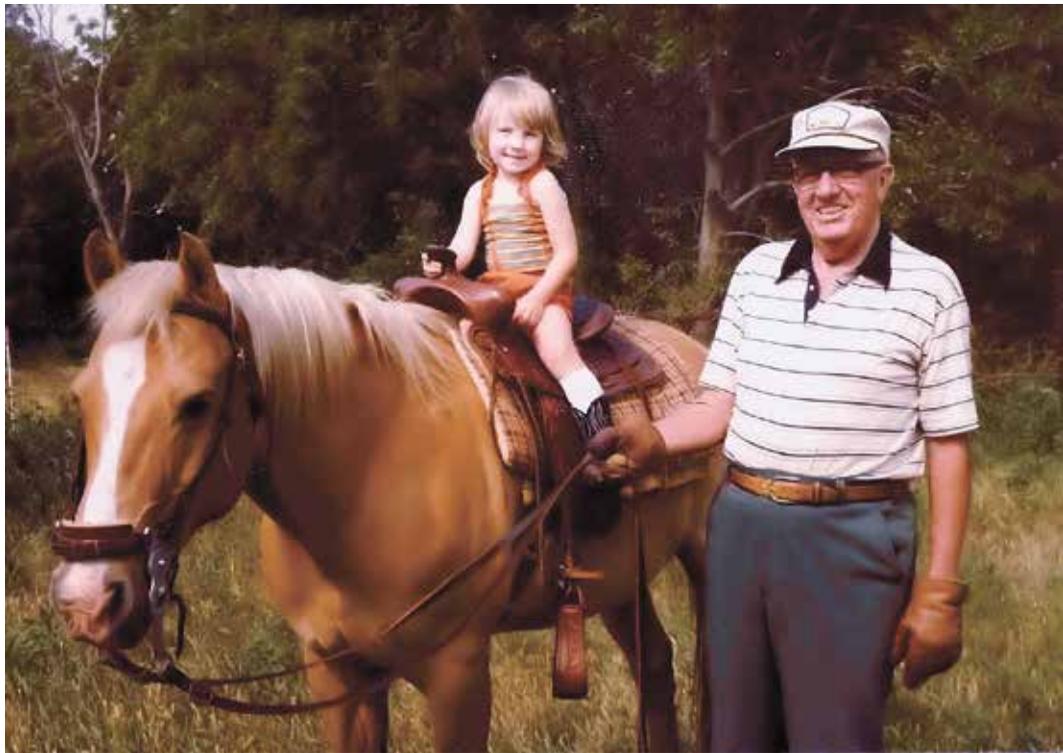
In addition to training her own talented crop of horses, the family has also recently started breeding some of their old show mares so they can raise some colts on the farm. If that's not enough to keep Stacey busy, she's also very active in leadership positions that benefit the horse industry she so dearly loves.

"Right now my hobby pretty much consumes my life," laughed Stacey, a native of Denver, Colorado, explaining she's living out the life for which she always hoped. "My hobby is training Saddlebreds and running our family farm ... Our barn is named for a fictitious farm that I pretended to own when I played 'horse show' with my barn buddies as a child."

THE EARLY DAYS

Going back to the very beginning, Stacey says she was first introduced to horses by her grandfather, Andy McClure, while visiting him for the summer in Coffeyville, Kansas.

"I stayed there during summers from the time I was born," she said. "My grandad had a horse and when I was very young he would put me in the saddle in front of him and also lead me around on the horse ... When I was six he sold the horse and I was devastated, so much so that they got me riding lessons over the following summers while I was there."



Stacey, pictured with grandfather Andy McClure and "Pal" in 1979.



After a long friendship, Scott and Stacey got married and have been making their life in Colorado.

The riding lessons during her summer trips to Kansas focused on jumper horses and barrel racing, which is what Stacey did until she was 11, when her parents David and Sandi Kipper finally agreed to let her take riding lessons back at home as well. A facility near their home in Denver taught dressage, so that is what Stacey rode.

“Like any horse trainer, my trainer in Denver pushed for us to lease a horse from her to show,” she said. “We agreed to this and were going to start after my summer with my grandparents. Turns out, the horse we were going to lease died while I was gone of food poisoning.”

That trainer did not have another horse available to suit Stacey’s needs, so upon returning from Kansas that summer her parents found a horse camp for Stacey to attend one week. The camp introduced participants to western, hunt seat and saddle seat.

“I fell in love with a Saddlebred at the barn,” Stacey said. “We stayed at the barn and I continued to take lessons after the camp. We eventually leased the horse I fell in love with and bought him a few months later.”

The Kipper family was hooked, and as they say, the rest is history.

KENTUCKY MEETS COLORADO

Meanwhile, back east in Minnesota, Scott Perrelli also grew up loving horses; he started training them when he was 14 and worked at several local barns until moving to Kentucky when he was 21 where he would continue to work for some of the Saddlebred industry’s best trainers in addition to starting his own stable at one point as well.

Scott and Stacey crossed paths at a horse show many years ago and had actually known each other for 15 years before they started dating.

“During those 15 years we talked at horse shows mostly, then the last five years we talked on the phone almost every day,” Stacey said.

One summer, Stacey decided to go to Kentucky for the season to gain experience alongside her most influential mentor Carter Cox and that is when the pair officially started dating.

They had a long-distance relationship and would travel to see each other for over a year, but Stacey admits she went to Kentucky more often than Scott came to Denver, and justifiably so, since some of her horses were in training in Kentucky.

As their relationship progressed, Scott eventually proposed to Stacey on the property they eventually built their farm on.

“It was just vacant ground at the time,” Stacey explained. “When we got married Scott gave up his life in Kentucky to move to Denver. He loved it here, becoming familiar with it during the times he had visited me. He also knew how close I was with my parents and didn’t want to break that up.”

Scott and Stacey had aspirations to build a barn in Denver, which they did shortly after getting married.

“We are best friends and had been even before we were married,” she said. “We knew everything



Pictured with her parents David and Sandi Kipper, Stacey described Arrowhead's Up All Night as being extraordinary.



Scott and Stacey at a Broncos game in 2016.



Ribbons And Reins and Stacey Perrelli at the American Royal in 2012.



As indicated by the lounge inside the barn, Stacey is a self-described neat freak who likes everything a certain way.



After proposing on the property, Stacey and Scott began building their dream barn, Spring Acres Farm.

about each other before we even started dating from our long talks on the phone.”

These days, Stacey is full-time at the farm and Scott has a day job, but helps out when he can during the evenings and on weekends.

“He helps me get horses ready for shows and I have him watch one if I’m having trouble with something,” she said. “He also comes to most of the shows to help me get horses ready and in the ring ... When we have foals at the farm he and I will be foaling the mares out and breaking the colts together.”

TIGHTER THAN VELCRO

Stacey is blessed for Scott’s generosity, not just at horse shows but related to life in general. His willingness to make the move to Denver as a result of Stacey being so close to her parents perfectly demonstrates their respect for each other, and also how smart Scott is, because Stacey is, no bones about it, a Denver girl at heart who loves her family dearly.

“I have always been very close to my family,” she said. “My parents and grandparents traveled all around the country to follow me to all my horse shows,” she said. “Since my grandparents have passed, my parents have continued to do the same. We do all the work at shows ourselves, from setting up to tearing down to getting all the horses worked and in the ring ... We do almost everything together, even outside of horses and I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

In fact, Stacey, who graduated from the University of Denver with a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration, even spent much of her early professional career working at a bank her father founded.

“My dad started the bank from scratch in 1982 and I started working there part-time when I was 14, transferring the bank’s operation manuals from type-written pages to the computer.”

Eventually, Stacey worked there full-time, starting as a teller and working her way up to the vice president and head of operations in the loan department of Colonial Bank, as well as serving as a construction lender.

Stacey’s dad sold the bank in 2006 and she stayed there for about six months after the sale before leaving to join her dad in some other business ventures, mainly in real estate, which they continue to do together today.

“Working from home with my dad allows me to follow my passion, which are the horses,” she said. “I am a driven individual who is not afraid to get my hands dirty ... I learned these traits from my parents at a very young age and they have carried me through life. I never do anything halfway. I do it right or I don’t do it at all. I’ve got my own unique idea about things and I’ve been successful at almost everything I do.”

THE EPITOME OF ‘DIY’

Stacey wears a lot of hats, but there’s nothing she loves doing more than training her horses, which she has been doing since 1991. The concept of doing it herself really started when Stacey was a young equestrian. Even then she had some opportunities to train horses for others at some local barns in Denver.

“I would go after school and work horses just about every night,” she said. “From the time I was 14 I stayed summers at the barns where I had my horses in training. At Dick Wallen Stables, where I had horses from 1990 through 1992 Dick and his assistant Jayne Moore had me riding from morning until night.”

In fact, it was at Wallen’s where Stacey learned to gait her first horse, among many other things. Stacey fondly recalls Dick sending her out on a horse to just “figure it out.” Jayne would lots of times ride next to Stacey and show her what to do.

At almost every barn Stacey had horses in training, she catch-rode pretty much any horse she could.

“I was a barn rat, there as many hours as I could be,” she said. “I helped get horses ready, set up for shows, loaded and unloaded the trailer, brushed horses, washed tails, blacked feet, held horses for the farrier and the vet. You name it and I did it.

“I also gave some lessons to beginning riders periodically. I just wanted to be around the horses. There was one show in Denver I showed in 26 classes at the show on 10 or 12 different horses. I always rode my own, and almost always rode someone else’s horse as well.”

Stacey believes that all the time she spent at any given barn, in addition to riding horses at home and catch riding all she could are all factors that led to her becoming a mature and skilled rider today.

“I’ve been put on many horses at all different levels of ability and all different levels of training, from finished show horses to the first time wearing a saddle,” she said. “Those experiences have made me the rider I am today.”

MEANINGFUL MENTORS

Though Stacey has certainly crossed paths with many great riders and trainers over the years, from mentors Wallen and Moore to Rob and Sarah Byers, there is one person who stands out as being Stacey’s greatest influence as a trainer, and that’s Carter Cox.

“He taught me just about everything I know as a horse person today,” Stacey said. “When I started riding with him I knew how to ride and knew horses pretty well, or so I thought. He taught me how to get a horse to wear a bridle properly, the timing of a horse, how to get one to rack instead of pace, how to break one to jog, line, and ride, and the list goes on and on.

“Carter always worked horses the same way, regardless of if they were talented or not. He always said

Stacey's champions through the years

Stacey Kipper Perrelli's parents bought their daughter her first Saddlebred in 1988 and his name was Adam Smith. Since then, she's had many great horses and has certainly put for the blood, sweat and tears in making them hold their own among the best of the best.

Here's a closer look at some of her other meaningful equine partners over the years.

Talent of the Town (Scout) was Stacey's first real show horse and he served as her equitation horse from age 13 until she graduated from the division.

"He was three when we bought him and he developed with me," she said. "He was very tough to ride and taught me a lot. It was never easy to get him to do anything

CH Starmaker's Bouquet (Bougie) was the first horse Stacey owned that she trained herself. This is also the mare that began Stacey's relationship with her biggest mentor, Carter Cox.

"We bought her from Carter as an early three-year-old," Stacey said. "She was green broke to ride and drive. I put her in a show bridle and put her in the show ring for the first time. I was the only person to ever show her."

She earned her CH as a four-year-old and was a reserve national champion twice. Bougie also was the USEF Three-Gaited Open Horse of the Year twice.

"She was competitive all across the country and won a lot of classes," Stacey said. "I showed her until she was 16 years old and she's still alive today. She is 26 and lives at the farm and is a spunky as ever."

Another special mare from Stacey's file of memories is

CH Callaway's Ariel (Ariel). She was not the easiest horse to work either, but she gave Stacey her best every single time.

"She was a grand five-gaited mare, but was even better as a five-gaited pleasure horse," Stacey said. "She could out rack them all."

Ariel was a national champion and reserve national champion in five-Gaited pleasure. She is pregnant now and the Perrellis are looking forward to her first foal.

Ribbons and Reins (Ribbons) is the horse that taught Stacey patience. A very game mare, she's not easy to ride and Stacey admits it took her about two years to be able to get her around the ring the second way.

"Once we got it down, we never lost it," she said. "She is about as correct a three-gaited horse as I've ever been around."

Most recently, Arrowhead's Up All Night (Zorro) is the horse that Stacey describes as being a one in a lifetime horse. Talented and willing, this horse is easy to work and loves doing his job.

"He is a blast to show and to be around every day," she said. "He's just a special horse all around."

that if you treat a horse like it is the only horse you have to work, it is amazing what you can get out of them."

Stacey admired Carter's constant attempt to get the most out of each horse he had in training, whether they were Louisville quality or not.

"So many people today don't put in the time on a horse they don't think is good enough to compete at Louisville," Stacey said. "Carter always gave each horse he had a fair shake, and I admire him for that."

GO BIG OR GO HOME

Whether it's banking, training, skiing, or serving on committees that benefit the industry at large, Stacey's got it going on and doesn't mind having a full plate.

Currently, Stacey serves as the president of the Colorado American Saddle Horse Association, a role she's done well with since 2005. She is also the co-manager of the Denver Queen City Horse Show, head of the Colorado futurity and regional contact for her region on the ASHA's Charter Club Council. She served on the ASHA board from 2013 to 2016 and was a member of the executive board the entire time, serving as the organization's secretary in 2015 and 2016.

While on the Charter Club Council and the board Stacey was the head of the committee to redo the Saddlebred Regional map with ASHA and USEF. She helped produce a manual for ASHA in 2014, in addition to playing many other parts that have helped the industry she loves.

"I single handedly put together the specifications for the Marple Grant for ASHA, which is a grant to help start up trainers as well as trainers in underserved areas," she said.

What drives Stacey to take on so much and excel at everything she does? For Stacey, it's quite simple. She is an all or nothing type of person and doesn't mind hard work.

"Everything I've ever been involved with I take charge of, regardless of the task," she said. "I guess my drive is that I want to make things better. I'd like to be a small part of making our industry better. With our numbers declining as a breed, I want to do everything I can to keep it alive."

Stacey, unfortunately, knows first-hand what it's like to see a once-thriving industry challenged when it comes to growth and expansion. Once a hotbed for the Saddlebred, attracting big-time trainers including Tom Moore, Donna Moore, Shug Utz and Jimmy Simmons just to name a few, the Denver area now struggles with numbers.

"I'm not sure what happened but over time it has dwindled quite a bit here," she said. "We are struggling like many other areas in the country. The Saddlebreds that are here are very nice, there just aren't that many of them."

Stacey says part of the challenge is to get trainers to travel the distance to Colorado to show, but if they did make the trek they certainly wouldn't be disappointed.

"We have great facilities, some of the nicest in the country," she said.



Ribbons And Reins was the horse that taught Stacey patience.



The Perrellis celebrate New Year's Eve in 2015.

AN EASY CHOICE

Ever since participating in the week-long riding camp as a young girl, the Saddlebred has been the easy choice of breed for Stacey. She loves the excitement of riding them and their willingness to perform.

"I love their personalities and dispositions and their animation and movement are like no other," she said. "Their upright head and neck are also a big thrill for me. Now if I go trail riding or ride a horse that is not a Saddlebred I can't stand to have the horse's head down."

Life at the barn is indeed busy for Stacey and Scott Perelli, but not having outside clients has been something that has allowed them to dictate their own schedules and enjoy other hobbies in addition to horses. They love traveling, attending concerts and, of course, they are fans of the Denver Broncos and love attending their games.

"I don't work horses on the weekends," Stacey said. "That is time for us to get away from the barn life and do things as a couple. It is a lot easier for me to do that than most horse people as the weekends are their busiest time with customers ... I think it is important to try to keep balance and not let one thing take over too much."

Looking ahead, it's not surprising that Stacey has goals. She wants to continue what she's doing at the barn and really start focusing on their breeding program as well. But the number one goal at the top of Stacey's list includes a win on the green shavings.

"The closest I've ever been is third," she said. "It's the only horse show in the country that I've been to and not won at. It would be a big deal for me to have the opportunity to win there. I really don't have any other goals beyond horses. I just want to be a good person and make a difference in the world, whether it be horse-related or not. I just want to be the best person I can be."

A trip down memory lane

Stacey Kipper Perrelli has countless memories that stand out over the years, from her first work off at Lexington to her 2017 reserve at the American Royal. She cherishes each one of them.

As she reminisced, Stacey pointed out several of her favorite memories, starting with the workout at Lexington with CH Starmaker's Bouquet, riding against The Groomsman and Deerhaven's Fancy Filly.

"It was a very large Three-Gaited Amateur 15.2 & under class and I didn't think I had a very good ride," she said. "It was the first time I had ever shown my horse outside. I was surprised when I made the work out and then wound up second ... It was a thrill to be a part of that."

Another favorite memory is the year Stacey won her first blue ribbon at the American Royal, with CH Callaway's Ariel in their five-gaited pleasure class followed by a win in the championship as well.

"I had shown at the Royal every year for 22 years and had never won," she said. "I had been second countless times. It was so exciting when we finally got to make a victory pass there."

Stacey points to her final year of equitation as another marking memory. This was the year she had finally made the cuts in all three medal finals. Prior to this year she had never made one cut.

"In those days, you rode in the morning, did your rail work and pattern, and then went to breakfast to kill time until back numbers were posted of those who made the cut," she said. "The judges would confer after the class splits and then they'd post back numbers on the column outside the show office in the governor's hall around noon or 1 p.m. I can't tell you how many times my number was not on the column. My last year of equitation, it finally was."

Another memory also involves equitation; the equitation championship at Lexington in 1993, when riders were asked to do a pocket pattern.

The pattern had to consist of certain elements, but otherwise could be one of the rider's choosing. One of the elements was to trot without stirrups.

"I rode the entire pattern without stirrups," Stacey said. "It was one of my strengths in equitation. I wound up falling out of the canter in one part of my pattern, which knocked me out of contention to win, but I got a standing ovation from the crowd after I completed my workout."

Stacey won the senior equitation championship at Midwest Charity in 1992. She was riding with Dick Wallen at the time and was competing against the girls from the Kentucky circuit at the show that year.

"It was my first time competing against the 'big boys,'" she laughed. "I was second all week long but somehow won the championship at the end of the week. It was the thrill of a lifetime."

At St. Louis in 1996, Stacey showed CH Starmaker's Bouquet in the Open Park Championship after winning the qualifier earlier in the week. The show was at the old Queeny Park and it had rained very heavily the night before Stacey showed.

"The warm up ring had washed away in the parking lot and each class was allowed two minutes before the actual class started to warm up in the show ring," Stacey explained. "Every horse in the ring was trotting around with trainers whooping and hollering at them. I trotted in and went straight to the middle and stood."

When they called the class to order Stacey went to the rail and started to work and won the class, beating all the trainers.

"I believe I was the only amateur in the ring," she laughed. "My horse never needed a lot of warm up. She was always ready to go. It was fun winning, and beating, the trainers — without even warming up!"

In 1997, Stacey was in the Three-Gaited Ladies Championship at Midwest Charity and was in a workout with three other horses, some of the finest from Kentucky.

"My mare, CH Starmaker's Bouquet was incredible the first way of the work out, and then the second way she came down the rail and the horses that were still in the middle had scooted towards the rail on one side," Stacey said. "She came around the corner and thought she couldn't get through on the rail. We wound up circling at the end of the ring the entire second way. I was disappointed, but thrilled to be a part of the work out in the first place."

Lastly, In 2017 Stacey was reserve national champion with Arrowhead's Up All Night in the Five-Gaited Ladies Amateur Championship at the Royal, which was another amazing memory.

"He had come so far that year and it was just a special moment to be reserve with such nice horses in the ring," Stacey said.