

Cover Feature Title

By Dan Kemp

The magnificent stallion featured on our cover this month is a Dales Pony. His name is COLLIERY ALICK. He is a member of a very select group of purebred ponies. The breed was nearly extinct only a few decades ago but today, after diligent work by a group of concerned and committed pony breeders, is barely back from the brink of extinction. Today, there are about 800 purebred individuals in the world.

The Dales Pony is a native of the upper dales of the eastern slopes of the Pennine range in the English county of Yorkshire, near the Scottish border. A dale is a broad valley. These ponies were bred to be pack animals serving the lead mining industry. The Dales Pony was noted for its ability to get over rough country under heavy pack weight at a good speed over great distances.

From Roman times a lead mining industry has flourished in the region and from the 17th century until the rise of rail transportation, Dales Ponies were used to pack 2 pigs of lead, each weighing 120 pounds, 100 miles from the lead mines down to the coast for transportation out by sailing ship. They were driven in gangs of 9 - 20, loose headed, in the charge of one mounted man. During that time, demand for lead was soaring because of the new custom of having glazed windows in dwellings from the most humble, to the most stately houses and castles. Slim lead bars were used to hold the panes of glass in a frame. Today leaded windows still exist.

After the advent of rail transportation, the Dales Pony found work on small northern English farms. Because of their strength and surefootedness, they carried the shepherd and burdens of hay great distances on the fells. A fell is a hill or stretch of high moorland. Dales Ponies were used as draught animals. Stylish and fast in harness, they were used at trotting races and were also reputed to give an owner a good day's hunt. Later, particularly during World War 1, they were used extensively as pack and Mountain Artillery ponies. As one would expect, most died in their harnesses on the battle front. WW1 led to the near extinction of the breed. They were being destroyed faster than they could be replaced.

Dales Ponies are very hardy animals. They stand ideally between 14 hands and 14.2. Most are black, but bay, brown, grey and sometimes roan are found. Not much white is permitted: A star, small snip, and white below the fetlock on the hind legs is allowed in Section A ponies (individuals with more white than this are downgraded to Section B). They are renowned for the quality of their feet and legs. They are good movers, using their knees and hocks well for a powerful drive. Their action is straight, high and true. The Dales Pony is well known for stamina, endurance, an iron constitution, high courage and great intelligence. That is combined with a calm temperament.

Our cover stallion, COLLIERY ALICK, known lovingly as Alick, is owned by Kelly Davidson Chou and her husband Al Chou. There is a 3rd significant person in Alick's life, his trainer, Roger Cleverly. Kelly and Al own and operate Davidson Dales Pony Farm in Clayton, California.

When asked how in the world she chose the Dales Pony, she smiled and said, "It's such a funny thing... A friend wanted to take an Equine Breeding and Reproduction class at Modesto Junior College and she didn't want to go by herself. So I said OK, I would go with her." The first night of the class, the instructor Julie Haynes, who has Friesians, did a presentation on horse breeds. At the end, she told the class she was going to show her favorite pony breed and she put up an image of a Dales Pony. Julie told the class the top 3-Day Eventing Pony in the U.K. was a Dales. Both Kelly and her friend came away jazzed on the Dales Pony. That was in the fall of 2004 and in February of 2005, Kelly purchased Alick, 2 purebred mares and a foal in-utero.

When she started thinking seriously about acquiring a Dales Pony, and she located Alick, they went to Alberta, Canada to visit him and his previous owners. "We were there for 2 days, looking at a stallion who had only live covered mares in an open pasture. I wanted to go there to see where his head was at. We went in and played with him, groomed him, and moved him around. We could tell he was used to getting his own way, but that he was still willing to listen. After being there for 2 hours, I said I think we are going to be OK, I think he will be willing to do this stuff." What she meant by that, was that he could be started under saddle, trained to the harness and be able to perform all the disciplines the Dales Pony is noted for. "Sure enough, that's the way it turned out. After 100 days under saddle, he won a 5th place at the Ram Tap, against 18 horses. We were very impressed." He did his first 3-Day Combined Driving Event (CDE) earlier this year, in April, also at Ram Tap and he earned a 3rd place, with Roger. The event was recognized by the American Driving Society which was important to Kelly, Al and Roger. "He's probably one of very few ponies who has successfully competed in both types of 3-Day Events (ride and drive) and placed on his first try."

Kelly thinks it is great that both Alick and Roger come from Yorkshire in England. They both came to North America in 1998 but didn't meet until Kelly and Al brought Alick to Roger for training. Roger's specialties are training horses and ponies for driving, training drivers, and reschooling ex-racetrack Thoroughbreds. Alick began his driving training with Roger in the summer of 2005.

Alick is 11 years old. They acquired him when he was 8-1/2 years old. He was originally imported from the U.K. to Canada at 3 years old. Until that time, he had only been turned out with mares and live covered them. He had no other responsibility. In the year and one half Kelly and Al have owned him, with significant help from Roger, they have him under saddle and going very well on the flat, jumping, and driving to the point where he is competing in combined driving, which consists of 3 legs - obstacle course around cones, endurance, and dressage in harness. "I think that is a real testament to the breed, that they are really intelligent, they're very trainable, they like people, they want to make their handlers very happy, and they

want to perform for you. That's very much a characteristic of the breed."

Roger respects and praises the dispositions of Dales Ponies. "They are very tough. When you get into a problem with a Dales Pony... A lot of horses would have a panic. These guys will just stop and say, 'OK, let's just work this out.' They don't explode. They're very like the Yorkshire people. They're very stolid, very tough minded, a little single minded at times, but, totally straight."

Kelly also added, "At the same time Alick was competing at 3-Day Eventing, Roger was breaking him to the cart. We started to realize that although he is a fantastic saddle horse and loves to jump, he really prefers to drive. The more we were doing both, the more we realized he had a preference for harness work. Because the breed is built for driving, we realized he could probably go farther in combined driving events than he could in 3-Day Eventing or Hunter/Jumping so we're focusing on that (carriage driving). We are going to do a schooling Hunter/Jumping show at the end of September."

At a show in Albany, Oregon, Alick and Roger competed in 9 classes and won 7. Roger told us that at that show, the second day he was warming Alick up for an in-hand class and Alick was misbehaving. He was not paying attention, wouldn't trot, "messing about... But he is the typical Yorkshire professional, we entered the ring and he just switched on and performed! More and more, I'm finding that with him. That, when you put the harness on, and go onto the dressage court, it's business."

They are enjoying very much showing Alick. He is taking to it well and his willingness to please is translating into winning performances. Roger was pleased at a recent show because Alick has finally mastered the ability to stand absolutely still at the halt, which is a requirement for driving horses that takes time for most to achieve.

Roger told us one of the classes he and Alick competed in that he and Kelly were the most proud of winning this year was at the Pleasure Days Carriage Driving Show at San Miguel. The judge was Muffy Seaton, whom Roger describes as one of the premier driving judges in the U.S. It was the Turn Out Class and they were placed first. "To get a blue ribbon from Muffy Seaton is one you hang on the wall!"

Roger believes Alick has stamina and endurance they have not even tapped into yet. A year ago, they drove a course at the Wente Vineyards in Livermore in 37+ minutes. Roger was using an easy entry cart and the combined weight was around 300 pounds. A couple of weeks previous to this interview, Roger, Kelly and Alick drove the same course using their marathon carriage with a combined weight of over 730 pounds, and Roger said they did the same course in 32 minutes and 7 seconds. Roger grinned, "That was 5 minutes faster and he was not even doing an extended trot." Alick competed in his first preliminary level Horse Driving Trials recently. They were very pleased with his performance and his blue ribbon.

For this year, Alick has 2 more Mountain and Moorland breed shows including the West Coast Connemara Show that will be offering Mountain and Moorland Pony classes. Mountain and Moorland or "M&M" refers to the 11 breeds of British Native ponies of which the Dales Pony is one. "We are very excited about the Connemara show, because Linda Impey is coming from the U.K. to judge the Mountain and Moorland classes. She is the Chairman of the National Pony Society in Great Britain and is very qualified to judge all the participating breeds." Alick will also finish the H.D.T. Series at Clay Station,

which are Horse Driving Trials or one-day versions of 3-Day Combined Driving Events."

Just before we went to press, Kelly emailed us with the results of Alick's latest achievements: He won Supreme Grand Champion Mountain and Moorland Pony at the West Coast Connemara Show against 15 M&M ponies for the honor. It was quite an achievement as there was some stiff competition! BICKERDIKE BY DESIGN, also owned by Kelly and Al, took Third place in her 3 and over M&M pony class behind Alick and a "beautiful Highland pony" mare. Alick went on to be named Reserve Best In Show. He also won Second place in both the Ridden M&M and the Driving Cones Obstacles classes.

Alick has 3 sons who are breeding stallions. Kelly owns a mare who produced one of them - BICKERDIKE CANADIAN STORM, who is in Edmonton, Alberta.

They have one Alick colt, out of their Welsh, mare who is one year old. His name is DAVIDSONS MERCURY RISING, aka Freddie. They expect him to be dark bay. Roger is excited to see how the colt turns out and is hopeful he will be as talented or even more so than his sire. His dam is also showing much talent for carriage driving. He believes Freddie has high prospects. "He's very athletic and is already showing great potential." Roger will start him under saddle when he's 3 years old.

We looked at a 3 month old Alick filly, DAVIDSONS YORKSHIRE ROSE, now owned by Cena Soldati. Kelly said, "She already has her daddy's neck. She's going to be a big and talented girl." We were in the paddock with the filly and her dam was permitting all contact with the foal, who was very friendly and outgoing. The dam was right there but made no effort to interfere. The filly was sold at the age of 3 weeks.

At that point in our visit, Kelly brought Alick out. He is a very friendly, personable stallion. He stands 14.1. "He is very calm, very easy to deal with," according to Kelly.

They put him in the cross ties, groomed him, then tacked him up for the marathon carriage. He was very cooperative while Kelly and Roger installed all the complex items of the harness. We were then treated to a drive in their marathon vehicle with Alick in harness and Roger driving. Away we went out the gate and down the road. Alick performed perfectly, even when cars passed and with a gusty wind blowing. The day was almost too warm and we went up and down the street several times in the shadow of Mt. Diablo but Alick didn't fatigue even though the street is part of a fairly steep hillside. It appeared to us Roger has Alick expertly trained to the harness and that Alick was enjoying his part in all this. At the beginning of the drive, the anticipation of going out for a drive was obvious on Alick. Roger was using the reins only for steering. All other communications to Alick were voice commands.

Roger also added that when he started Alick, being a young, powerful stallion, he was not very responsive to the rein. Now, however, Roger said he is very soft which we observed on our drive.

Kelly's breeding goals are to produce correct, athletic, purebred Dales Ponies. "So that is what I am concentrating on, putting nice ponies on the ground. There are two crosses we are considering, and those are the Dales/Welsh cross, and Dales/Gypsy/Cob cross. We're picky about out crossing because that isn't our focus. We want to see more purebred Dales ponies in the world." Last year Alick bred 4 outside Dales mares, most on the East Coast. They prefer to ship Alick's semen frozen. "For one thing, it freezes exceptionally well. His progressive motility rate after it is thawed is between 55% and 45%. That's consid-

ered excellent for frozen semen. His cooled semen is fine, it is 65%. Since he freezes so well, we are focusing on that.”

“I guess what I see myself the most as, is a Dales Pony promoter. Alick’s breeder in England did such a phenomenal job with him, and I want to continue in that direction with my breeding efforts. People are hearing about Dales more and more in the U.S. I think Alick is a big reason for that because he is out there doing his thing so well.”

Alick’s breeding fee is \$850 for frozen semen and Private Treaty for cooled. A good place to go next is- **www.DavidsonDales.com** - This is an excellent website where you will find a wealth of additional information on Alick, his activities, the Dales Pony breed, and breeding and sales information. After that, you will be ready to call Kelly and Al for an appointment to see Alick, their mares, and his foals. Their phone number is **(925) 673-5203** and email address is-

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