

Surviving & thriving

Orphan foal beats the odds to grow up and become a reiner like his dad.

By REBECCA OVERTON



Top right: Colonels Lone Gun as a colt when he appeared on the cover of the May 1999 Journal.

Above: Today, "Lone Gun" is a handsome Paint stallion in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma.

It was one of the most dramatic stories the *Paint Horse Journal* has featured, involving a critically ill mare in foal with a reining superstar's get.

In February 1999, Pam and Paul Rohus had to make the agonizing decision of whether to let veterinarians operate on the mare, which would endanger the baby, or put the mare down and try to save the foal, who would be born prematurely.

Because the mare, Jays Ace (AQHA), was 23 years old and had only a 50-50 chance of survival, the Rohuses gambled on saving the baby, even though its chance of surviving was only 5 to 10 percent.

After more than \$10,000 and weeks of care at the Texas Veterinary Medical Center at Texas A&M University, the orphan survived and finally went home to Quinlan, Texas, where the Rohuses lived on their Double PR Ranch.



Today, the fragile little colt who was featured on the *Journal's* May 1999 cover is a handsome, 14.2-hand stallion named Colonels Lone Gun. With his bald face and blue eyes, he looks like his sire, Colonels Smokingun ("Gunner"), the show-stopping Paint reiner who was inducted into the National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) Hall of Fame last February.

The story began when Pam wanted to learn reining, and she and Paul bought Gunner as a 2-year-old. Under trainer Clint Haverty, the stallion's reining career took off. After he won the 1996 NRHA Futurity Reserve Championship, the Rohuses sold the sorrel overo crowd-pleaser to Debra Sloan of Newfoundland, New Jersey.

Colonel Lone Gun's resemblance to his sire doesn't end with his appearance.

"He's a big stopper, lopes very pretty and has a lot of turnaround, like his sire," said Fred Thomsson, Lone Gun's trainer at Nedpoint Quarter Horses Inc. in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma.

"The first show I took him to was the Southwest Reining Horse Futurity. He was pretty green for a futurity horse, so when we made the finals we were really happy."

Thomsson planned to debut the stallion in junior reining at the 2003 World Championship Paint Horse Show. When "Lone Gun" is not in the show pen, he stands at Nedpoint.

The stallion has come quite a long way from the colt Fred predicted would only be a pet when Fred worked for the Rohuses in Quinlan.

"That's how it goes with orphans," said Fred. "Sometimes they get to be more like a human than a horse. He turned out way better than I ever dreamed."

Lone Gun wasn't out of the woods when he came home to Quinlan from the veterinary medical center. For at least two months, the Rohuses, Fred, his wife, Dori, and ranch manager Kevin Forttetter had to care for the colt around the clock.

That meant working early-morning and late-night shifts to feed him and administer a battery of antibiotics and ulcer medication.

"Some nights we were so tired, we could hardly get up," Paul recalled. "We're not vets, but we had to learn how to give shots and crush pills real quick."

In addition, there was the colt's lack of socialization with other horses to handle. In fact, Lone Gun got his name because of his reluctance to mingle with other equines, and their initial refusal to accept him.

"When I first turned him out in the pasture, I had to separate him from the other horses because they were kind of mean to him," Paul remembered.

"I tried to get him to buddy up with another little stud colt, but he wouldn't make friends with him.

"To this day, he's a loner. He never socialized with anything but humans. He was relaxed around people, but he was shy and timid around horses."

The Rohuses sent the colt to Joe Fish, who was training 2-year-olds at a ranch in Valley View, Texas. Lone Gun was in training with Joe for about three months.

When Paul first saw the stallion afterward, he was astounded.

"This colt had put on 250 pounds and it was all muscle," he explained.

"I couldn't believe it was Lone Gun. He was slicked down, shiny and pretty. I thought, 'Man! What a nice horse!'"

The Rohuses took him to Luke Gagnon at McQuay Stables in Tioga, Texas, to continue his training.

"Luke thought he'd be a futurity prospect," Paul said.

Eventually, the horse was hauled to Fred, who had trained Colonels Lil Gun and Colonels Loud Gun, two other Rohus horses and Gunner babies who became champions. Fred was ecstatic when he called Paul after 30 days of training the young colt.

"He kept saying, 'I can't believe this is the same horse,'" Paul recalled.

Two weeks later, Irmgard Geul, owner of Nedpoint Quarter Horses Inc., bought Lone Gun.

After Lone Gun made the Southwest Reining Horse Association Futurity Finals, Fred

Lone Gun today with (from left) Dori Thomsson, Irmgard Geul, Fred Thomsson, and Pam and Paul Rohus.



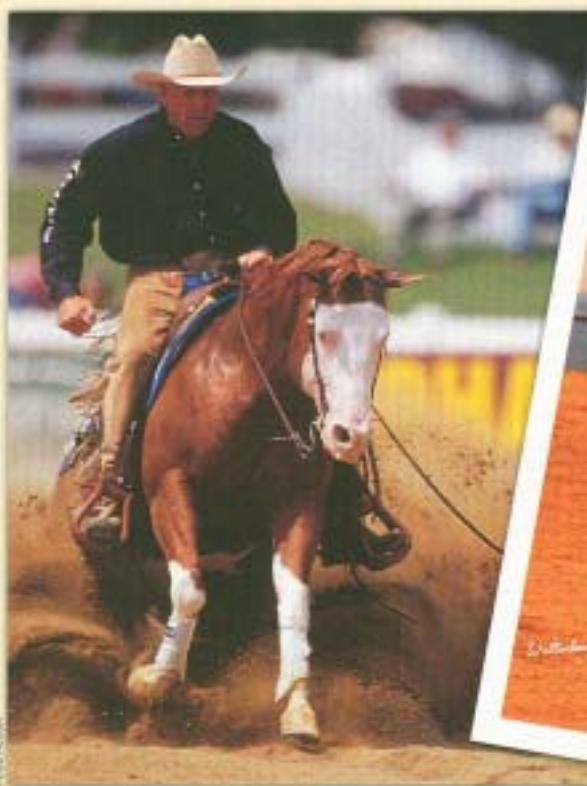


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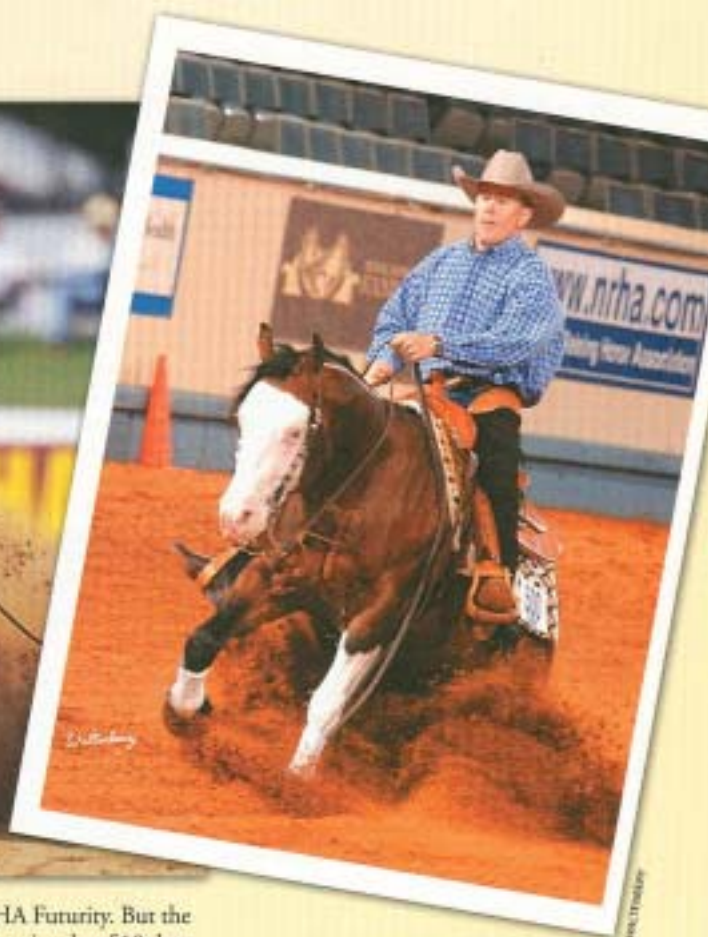


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It's easy to see the resemblance between Colonels Lone Gun and his famous reining sire, Colonels Smokinggun ("Gunner"). At left, Bryant Pace rides Gunner to win the 2001 Cosequin/ USET Reining Championship. Right, Lone Gun competed at the 2002 National Reining Horse Association Futurity with trainer Fred Thomsson on board.

entered him in the NRHA Futurity. But the horse developed an abscess in a hoof 10 days before the show began.

He competed in the first go-round, but missed the second.

"We wanted to give him a chance to heal completely and have him ready for this year," Fred explained.

Still, people who saw Lone Gun at the futurities asked Fred if he planned to breed him.

"The thought really hadn't crossed our minds," he said. "We wanted a show horse first."

"But people kept asking us about it this spring, so finally we decided to collect him because we got requests from people who have some really nice mares."

"I was skeptical to start breeding him this year because I didn't want him to have studly behavior while I was showing him, but he has been great. They can collect him and 15 minutes later I can ride with a group of mares and he won't even look at them. He's the quietest horse I've ever ridden."

In 2000, the Rohuses moved their reining operation to Royse City, Texas, where they have a 75-acre facility and approximately 40 horses, including some fancy Gunner and Lil Gun babies. Since Lone Gun was born, the couple have experienced both sides of the life/death coin.

A year after Lone Gun's birth, another of their Gunner foals died, a filly out of a Hollywood Dunit mare. When the baby, who was an embryo transfer, was born, it had an infection in her joints and hind end.

The Rohuses did everything they could to save her, but nothing worked.

"We spent a ton of money, but we finally had to put her down," Paul said.

In 2002, they had another orphan foal whose dam died when the filly was only 2 weeks old, so the Rohuses had to bottle-feed her. That baby survived, as did another foal who was born prematurely last spring.

People still ask the couple about Lone Gun, who gets excited whenever he sees them at a show or with Fred.

"Normally, he's very quiet and doesn't show much emotion," said Paul. "But when Pam and I walk up to him and rub him on the face, he starts moving around and squealing. I think he remembers us and is glad to see us."

People ask the Rohuses the inevitable question: If you had another situation like Lone Gun, would you handle it the same way? Was the gamble worth it?

"Yes," said Paul thoughtfully. "We don't have the heart not to give a horse a chance."