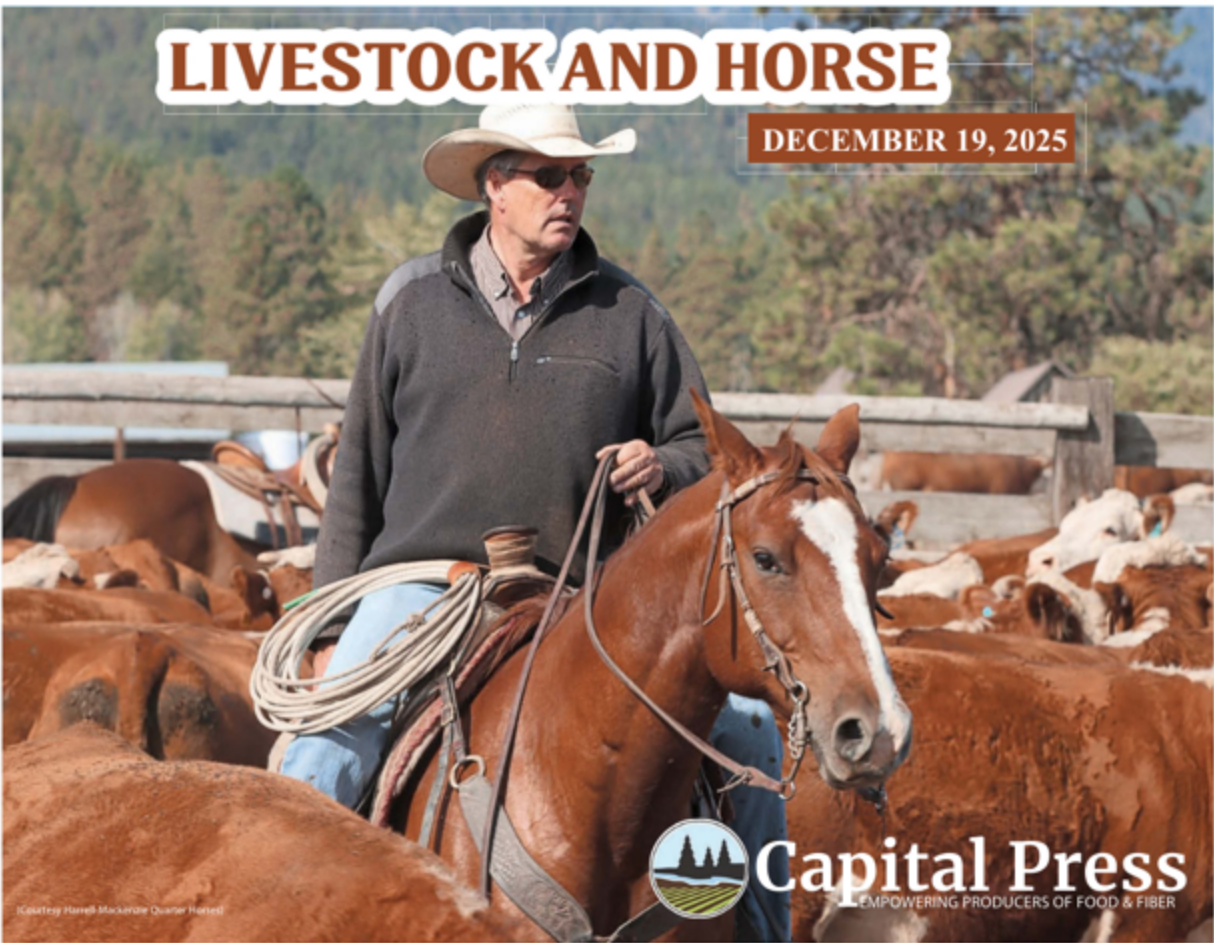


LIVESTOCK AND HORSE

DECEMBER 19, 2025



Courtesy Harrell Mackenzie Quarter Horses



Capital Press
EMPOWERING PRODUCERS OF FOOD & FIBER

Equine experience: Harrell-Mackenzie at home in horse breeding niche

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

BAKER CITY, Ore. — Ranchers Bob Harrell, Jr., and Wannie Mackenzie are big believers in breeding their own horses, which they've done for decades.

The Harrell-Mackenzie Quarter Horses partners — who plan their 28th annual sale March 2 — remain committed to the business.

"We started raising horses for our own use because we couldn't find the horses that we liked," Harrell said. "We started raising horses for ourselves and had extras, and started selling them in the sale. It has grown from there."

Custom beginnings

"We didn't do it halfway," Mackenzie said.

In the beginning, he and Harrell traveled the U.S. looking at different horse programs.

"Bob and I decided to run quality, not numbers," Mackenzie said. Between the two, they market 20 horses a year, "and we really work on quality. We make sure that horse fits the person who buys it. We daily strive to do that."

Genetics emphasis

Quality boils down to genetics and training, he said.

"We have a bunch of old mare lines that fit our criteria," Mackenzie said.

"The horses aren't given special treatment," he said.

"We raise them like we run our cattle."

"We run stallions in

bunches" banded together in groups on open range, Mackenzie said. "It's all old-school."

Over the years, the business has become known for a horse who is versatile on the ranch and also excels in arenas, Harrell said.

Working horses

The Harrell and Mackenzie families have rodeo in their backgrounds.

"We used horses during the week on the ranch and would go rodeo and rope on the weekends," Harrell said. "That's how we got started. These are performance horses that have a lot of athletic ability and have 'a lot of cow.'"

Most ranchers buy horses from a reputable breeder rather than breeding and raising their own, said Rex Hoagland, a past Owyhee

Cattlemen's Association president who raises cattle in the Wilson-Reynolds Creek area of southwest Idaho. Breeders select for specialized traits and "they look through all of the genetics. So they are hand picking everything they want out of that colt."

There was a time when ranchers tried to do more with vehicles, partly because ranchers were getting older on average, Hoagland said.

"In the country we run in, you can't just do it all with motorcycles, side-by-sides and four-wheelers," he said. "You need to have a horse who can get through the willows and



Harrell-Mackenzie Quarter Horses limited annual production from the outset to focus on genetics-based quality. (Courtesy Harrell-Mackenzie Quarter Horses)

junipers."

"You're seeing the value of horses because of how they are being used and what they are having to do with them to run their cattle, which is a good thing," Hoagland said. "I'm glad to see people back using them."

In the West, a good ranch horse is "the best tool we have," said Idaho Cattle Association executive vice president and Idaho Quarter Horse Association board president Cameron Mulrony. "They're able to get out in all the areas we run cattle and do the jobs we need. It's uncanny."

Based on his own experience, cattle are "much more acclimated to other livestock" such that horses don't create a flight response in a cow to the extent that a vehicle can, he said. "A good horse is what we see as the best way to gather cattle and keep a low stress level when done properly."

Mulrony's family has a small-

scale cattle operation in the Wilder, Idaho, area and also raises colts. The colts are bred mostly for the rodeo arena and racetrack — and be fast, smart and work-ready in general.

"In my view the American Quarter horse or the ranch horse is a tool for the cattle rancher and is the basis for everything we do with quarter horses" including on the performance side, he said.

Anecdotally, Mulrony sees a pattern of fewer horses being used on ranches due to industry shifts including lower cattle numbers and more operations running on smaller acreages.

Mackenzie said he and Harrell run their ranch horses similarly.

"We both run in sagebrush," Mackenzie said.

Solid demand

Early on, many of Harrell-Mackenzie's buyers used the horses on their ranches and in weekend events, Harrell said.

"Our client base has expanded on that, what the use of the horse is for" to include competitions, he said.

Prices have been steadily increasing over the past five to 10 years, Harrell said.

"Horse numbers have been dwindling for a number of years, so to go and find good 'using' horses was hard to do," he said. "So that really increased demand for good horses."

More people are getting into the business of raising horses "because now there is enough money to justify starting a breeding program whereas before it was awfully expensive to raise horses," Harrell said.

Veterinary service and medicine costs are fairly high, and "the cost of genetics is extremely high," he said. "The cost of good stud horses, those have gone up dramatically."

"We kind of have our own clientele that keeps coming back, buying the same bloodlines they like."

Breeding

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Mackenzie said. "Plus, we get a lot of new customers just by word of mouth."

A nice horse

"Bob and I, we have focused on the structure of the horses, the bone and their feet — making sure their feet are straight — and a great disposition," he said.

Disposition is important to clients partly because in general, people don't ride as much as they used to and "really don't want to get bucked off," Harrell said. "We're trying to get horses that are not as 'cold-backed' and are user friendly, but still have the athletic ability we are looking for."

They run the business with their wives, Becky Harrell and Beth Mackenzie.



(Courtesy Harrell-Mackenzie Quarter Horses)

