



A GENTLE PHILOSOPHY

STEVE AND DANA COLE TAKE A "RACEHORSE FRIENDLY" APPROACH AT THEIR COLE RANCH

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Although some California horse farms have been forced to close their doors in the last few years, Cole Ranch has defied the trend. The Thoroughbred farm operation is only 10 years old, but it has achieved substantial growth since its quiet beginnings a decade ago.

Owners Steve and Dana Cole originally had a small property in Malibu, but the hilly terrain wasn't "racehorse friendly." When the current Terra Bella property went on the market, the Coles immediately saw its potential.

"It's halfway between Santa Anita and Golden Gate," said Steve. "We have since put in probably 200% more than the purchase price in improvements, and we also acquired the adjacent property."

Cole Ranch now sports a five-furlong training track, a starting gate, two round pens, three barns, and a full-sized professional arena.

"We really do mean full-sized," Steve joked. "It's professional-sized, which we had built, with superb footing."

There are 10 irrigated pastures for the

broodmares, foals, and yearlings, ranging from 2½ to 12 acres. Bermuda grass is the forage of choice.

"Dana and I live here," Steve said. "It's a pretty restrictive lifestyle in terms of mobility, so we don't often get away."

Of the three barns, which comprise about 40 stalls with outdoor runs, one is dedicated solely to training. Breaking and conditioning young racehorses is not only the Coles' forte but their passion.

"A very important aspect of farm revenue comes from the services that it provides, beyond breeding, such as breaking and training yearlings," Steve said. "Sending horses out of state for these services hurts the bottom line of our California farms."

Many young horses bred or bought in California are sent to Arizona, Utah, or Texas for breaking.

"I don't know why we have a tax code that rewards vacating horses from the state," said Steve, "but we do. But our philosophy here at Cole Ranch is to do everything on the horse's schedule, without violence, without undo coercion, and to strive to create a well-balanced horse that has the possibility of a second career afterward."

The horses at Cole Ranch are broken on what Steve loosely calls the "2-2-2 method."

"Our methods are very European, in particular English," he said. "I employ a Newmarket philosophy, with long sessions with the horse. First we spend two months with the horse in the round pen, getting on their back, teaching them to change leads, and then at the end we get them onto the track."

After those lessons they turn the horses out for two months. Although the break takes time, it refreshes the horses.

"It's so good for them to clear their mind and go back to being a normal horse, but they don't forget what they learned," said Steve. "Then we give them another two months of consistent, steady galloping, putting the miles on them to get them both physically and mentally fit."

It bothers the Coles when they see young horses on the track that are bucking or refusing the gate.

"We don't break horses—we start them," Dana said. "It's done with patience and kindness. Don't do too much too fast. We haven't had a rider bucked off in years."

Before the first 30 days of a horse's

“real” training, they are already taught to lead, behave on the walking machine, and load in and out of the trailer. As Steve explained, “On day one of training we put a rubber bit in their mouth without reins, and, depending on the horse, we might use a saddle with no stirrups. We don’t make the girth terribly tight, but the next day we tighten it more. Once they can handle someone on their back in the stall runs, then we head to the round pen, where we give them brakes and teach them to turn right and left.”

Once a young horse has learned the basics of being ridden, it graduates to the arena. “After that, we move to the training track,” said Steve. “It sounds like a lot of steps, but it doesn’t take that long.”

Dana added, “Most horses go through it quickly, but it’s okay if some take longer. They can open and close gates; they can handle dogs being around. After their racing career they will be able to have another life.”

“We like them to do what they do willingly,” Steve said. “When you ask them to go left, they do so, not because you’re jerking on them but because they’ve been well trained.”

Although training horses is the Coles’ joy, they also work with layups as well as mares and foals.

“We have a nutrition specialist who comes out and analyzes our ground to see



The Coles like for the horses to be broken and trained so that they do what they do willingly

what kinds of minerals are lacking or that we have too much of,” Dana said. “Our broodmares get unlimited feed. You’ll never find a rib on a horse here.”

“Which seems silly,” Steve chimed in, “but we take it very seriously. The health of the broodmares is really key in predicting the outcome of the pregnancy and the quality of not only the foal, but everything. Will they be good mothers? Will they produce good milk? If they are healthy, it’s more likely the foal will be healthy.”

The spotless grounds mimic the care that the horses receive. “Our farm represents the way the horses are cared for,” Dana said.

“We feel that everything flows from the top,” Steve said. “The look of the physical plant is a reflection of the care and energy you have to put forth to keep these horses happy and healthy. I’d like to think that a big customer could walk through the door at any time and feel comfortable. We don’t leave repairs unattended; the place is pristine. It’s critical to notice problems and attend to the problems. It all stems from having everything really well organized.”

The Coles look at all 100 horses on the farm every single day. “Without fail,” Steve confirmed. “Are there any cuts? Bruises? Is anyone limping?”

The farm has 35 broodmares on the property, 25 yearlings, and a handful of foals and weanlings.

“We’ve been really fortunate that our clients are so supportive and loyal,” Steve said. “We haven’t lost a customer since we started.”

The farm uses technology to keep both the Coles and their clients up-to-date.

“We have video-monitored stalls for foaling and injury monitoring,” Dana said. “If a horse colics, we have it on camera.”

The technology is portable, so that the



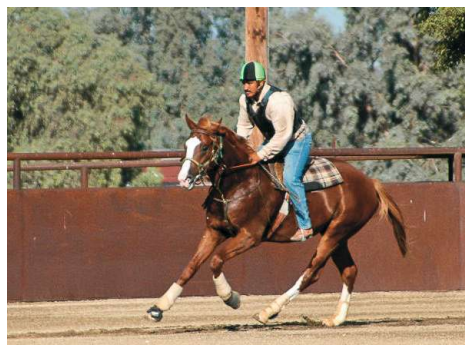
PHOTOS COURTESY OF COLE RANCH



The Coles use modern technology, such as video monitoring of foaling, ultrasound, and automatic walkers to keep themselves and their clients up-to-date on the horses at the farm



Cole Ranch



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PHOTOS COURTESY COLE RANCH

The spotless grounds mimic the care that the horses at Cole Ranch receive and "represents the way the horses are cared for"

stalls can be watched via cell phones or tablets.

"When a mare goes into labor, we call the owner so they can watch on their phone," Dana said. "The download takes just a few seconds. We try to send regular videos to our clients so that they can watch their horse progress in training."

The Coles bred Zinvor, a two-time winner by Tribal Rule—Shady Lady Dancer, by Woodman. The 3-year-old Califor-

nia-bred gelding finished second in the \$87,250 Singletary Stakes at Santa Anita Park June 20.

"He was an orphan that lost his mother in his second week," Steve said. "We hand-reared him with the help of a miniature horse."

The stakes winner Let Em Shine rehabbed at Cole Ranch, and a filly the Coles bred, Star of Munster, won her May 30 debut by 2¼ lengths.

Despite its relatively young age, Cole Ranch is already making its mark on the California racing scene.

"We currently have 25 horses on the track that we either sold as homebred yearlings, or trained," Steve explained. "Almost every day there is a Cole Ranch graduate racing somewhere in this state."

As the Cole Ranch program expands and gains notoriety, their impact is sure to be even greater. **CTB**

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Cole Ranch is a full service farm located half way between Santa Anita Race Track and Golden Gate Fields with a 5/8 mile training track, starting gate, round pens, full size arena, hot walker, multiple barns with adjoining runs, 10 large irrigated pastures, and video monitored foaling stalls.



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