

# First-Time Owners Win **BIG**

BY PAM ROHUS AND CATHY RAYMOND

***The first reining horse Paul and Pam Rohus ever owned ended up reserve champion at the NRHA Open Futurity. Here's how they did it.***



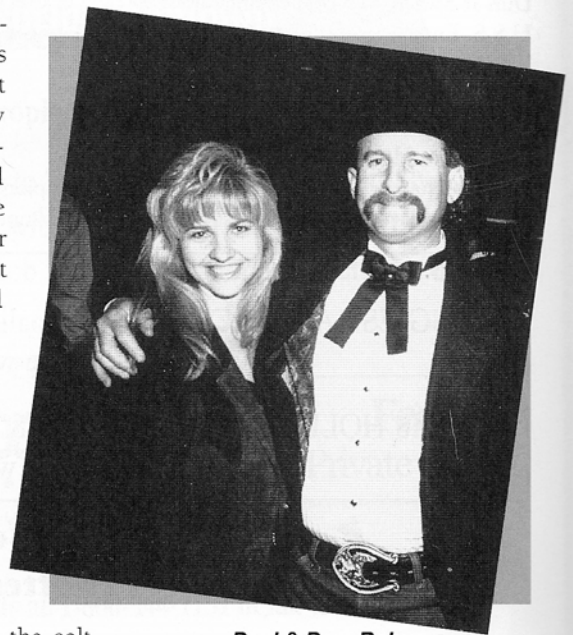
*Colonels Smokingun, affectionately known as "Gunner" to those in the reining horse industry, made a dynamic appearance in the 1996 NRHA Futurity. He and rider Clint Haverty wowed the crowd and were Reserve Champions in the Open. For first time reining horse owners Paul and Pam Rohus of Quinlin, TX, their futurity experience was truly the stuff that dreams are made of.*

**P**aul and Pam Rohus of Quinlan, TX, made their first trip to the 1996 NRHA Futurity as owners of their first reining horse. In itself, that's nothing special, except for one fact—their horse was Gunner, or Colonels Smokingun, the flashy Paint who wowed the crowd and took the Reserve Championship in the Open Futurity with Clint Haverty. What makes their story even more surprising is that they hadn't bought Gunner as a futurity prospect, but as a horse for Pam to learn and show on.

Paul and Pam may have been newcomers to reining, but they were longtime horse enthusiasts. While Pam's interests had focused on riding for pleasure, Paul had learned to rope and had started to compete in APHA shows. "He'd rope and I'd videotape him," says Pam.

In 1995, Pam had decided to enter the show ring herself. "I was interested in barrels, so we went to the 1995 AQHA World Show to look at barrel horses," she recalls. But when they watched the reining and reining freestyle classes, something they'd never seen before, Pam's interest shifted. A lot of women, noted Pam, competed and did well in that event. "That's what I want to do," she told her husband.

Their search for a reiner began and ended at the show. Friends introduced them to Tennessee trainer Charlie Hutton. He mentioned that he had a young crop out paint stallion by Colonefourfreckle. Although the colt,



**Paul & Pam Rohus**

then two years old, showed a lot of ability in reining, Charlie's emphasis is on AQHA—not APHA—events, so this wasn't a horse for him. Pam wasn't enthusiastic about showing a stallion, but the couple was extremely busy at home (he's a general contractor and she's a payroll administrator). So they decided not to spend time doing any more serious looking and waited for Charlie to send them the video tape of the colt. The tape showed that Gunner had the build and the movement of the top horses they'd seen at the World Show, although, at this point, neither Pam nor Paul really knew what to look for in reining maneuvers. Paul was very impressed with Gunner's strong pedigree, observing that it's hard to find a paint with such good bloodlines. He liked the colt's flashy looks. Gunner also seemed very quiet, with a kind look in his eye. Pam still worried about showing a stallion, but Paul was sold and, on the telephone, finalized the deal with Charlie.

### BRINGING GUNNER HOME

All that remained was to travel to Charlie's farm in Fayetteville, TN, (a 12-hour drive) to take a real-life look at the horse and complete the transaction. Just how certain was Paul that this was THE horse for Pam? He hitched up the trailer. After a good night's rest, they arrived at the ranch at 7:00 a.m. on December 12<sup>th</sup>. They were a little surprised by their first view of Gunner—he was a lot smaller than expected (especially in comparison to Paul's 16-hand roping horse), but he was definitely cute, with little flop ears and a very kind expression.

Charlie rode to show how far along Gunner was in training. Pam liked what she saw. "Stallions can be rowdy sometimes. I liked the fact that Charlie just got on and the horse did whatever he was supposed to do. He had a great attitude," she recalls. One bit of evidence concerning his reining ability (and attitude) that Pam and Paul did note—Gunner was already sliding about 25 feet. Pam finally asked to ride, despite the fact that she'd never even been on a reiner. Gunner showed, once again, that he was a perfect gentleman. Paul remembers that, in the barn, Charlie had said that Gunner

had world-champion ability, but that the colt had just too much white for him.

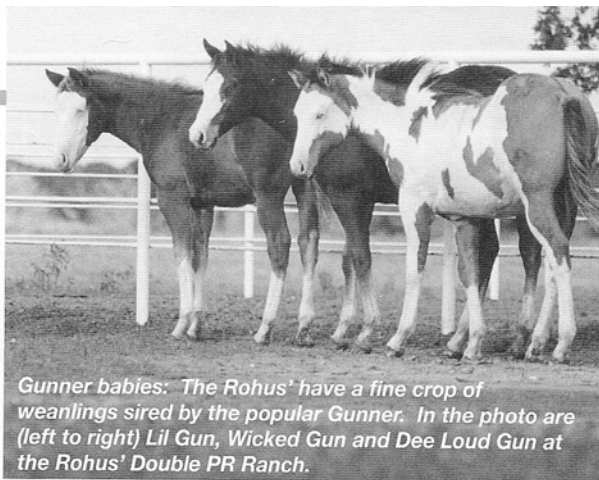
They loaded Gunner in the trailer and headed back to Texas. Gunner's first stop was with Paul's roping trainer, Pat Crawford of Royse City, TX. Pat reinforced what Charlie had told them—Gunner was a very nice horse with a lot of talent. Paul and Pam decided to ask John Hoyt for an evaluation. He suggested that she start with an experienced reining horse. But what about Gunner? After further discussions with Pat, they decided to keep him, send him to a reining trainer and enter him in NRHA competition. It turned out that finding a reining trainer for Gunner wasn't as easy as they'd imagined.

They first tried to contact Charlie Hutton, but he was out of town. They approached Hoyt, but his barn was full. He suggested some other trainers. Some were too busy, several said they'd have their assistants ride the horse, and some didn't return phone calls. Finally, they called Clint Haverty, who was both friendly and helpful. He told them flat-out that he didn't want the horse in his barn if he couldn't win with him. But he'd be happy to evaluate the horse and tell them what he thought.

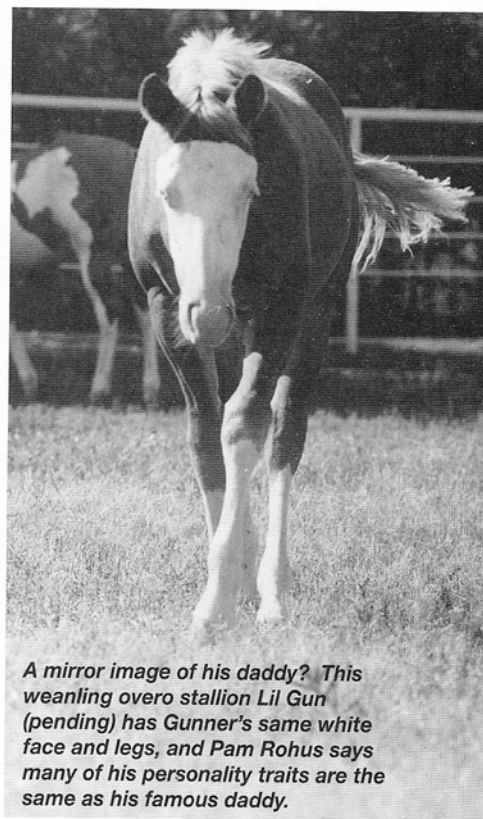
### MAKING THE PERFECT MATCH

On a Saturday in February, Pam, Paul and Gunner set out for the Haverty ranch in Krum, TX. Clint saddled up Gunner and took him to the outside arena. While it was clear that Gunner responded easily to Clint, Pam and Paul still didn't know enough about reining to know exactly what Clint was trying to accomplish. "We were just sitting in the dust, the wind was blowing it in our faces—so I'm not sure how much we could have seen, anyway," says Pam. "Plus, we still had no idea what Clint was looking for in Gunner."

After the ride, Clint just got off without saying anything. When Pam and Paul



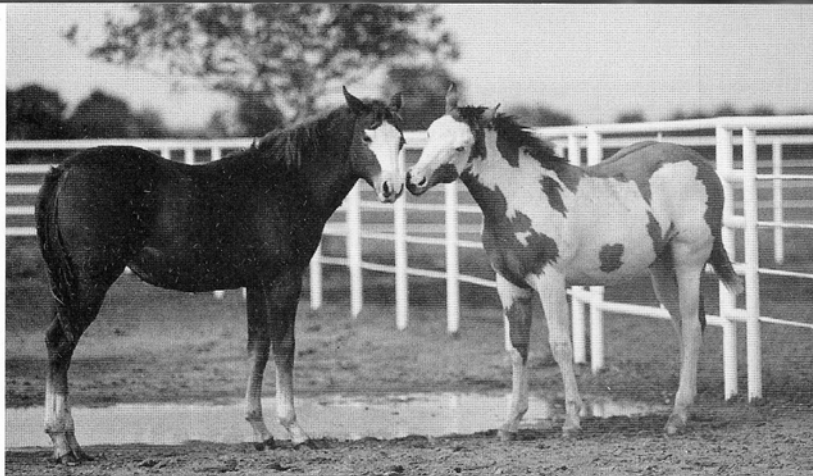
*Gunner babies: The Rohus' have a fine crop of weanlings sired by the popular Gunner. In the photo are (left to right) Lil Gun, Wicked Gun and Dee Loud Gun at the Rohus' Double PR Ranch.*



*A mirror image of his daddy? This weanling overo stallion Lil Gun (pending) has Gunner's same white face and legs, and Pam Rohus says many of his personality traits are the same as his famous daddy.*

got back to the barn, Clint was unsaddling the horse, and, instead of putting Pam's halter back on, handed it to her and used one of his own. "You lost your horse," he told them. Back at the house, they discussed Gunner's future. Pam and Paul were slightly in shock—after all, they'd only come for an evaluation and to talk with Clint. But this was clearly a place where Gunner could get the training and attention he needed to reach his potential.

Together, Clint, Pam and Paul decided to set the goal of the Paint World Show's reining futurity. Their first outing was the Paint-A-Rama, a six-judge show in



**Double PR Ranch stablemates Wicked Gun (left) and Dee Loud Gun, a sorrel overo stallion.**

Nagadoches held over Memorial Day weekend. Clint explained that this would be just a schooling show for Gunner. If he made a mistake, Clint would fix it in the arena. But it turned out that schooling wasn't necessary—the pair easily won the reining, taking first place from all four judges and earning his ROM in just one show! Clint asked Pam if she collected all her ribbons and then laughed. Of course, Clint was used to winning dollars, not ribbons!

### **WORLD-CLASS COMPETITION**

By July, Gunner was ready for the Paint World Futurity, although Clint and his wife, Liz, were showing at the Appaloosa World Show in Oklahoma City at the same time. Clint flew in about six hours before the first go. The crowd loved them both—they really were a team. But, after the go, Clint dismounted in the arena and Gunner limped as they walked out. "The entire crowd sighed in sympathy," says Pam. Back at the barn, Clint worked with several veterinarians and farriers to diagnose the problem. Fortunately, it wasn't serious—Gunner had clipped his foot in a turnaround. They came back to win the Futurity in a crowd-pleasing performance. Plus, Pam and Paul got more than ribbons—a rosette, spurs, a paycheck, a saddle pad and a blanket! How much better could horse-showing get?

The next stop was the NRHA futurity, and Gunner showed that he still had more powerful performances. After the second go, Pam and Paul recall that they still didn't realize what a great horse Gunner was—after all, they were still trying

to learn the fine points of the NRHA scoring system. Liz Haverty kept telling them that it was an honor just to be a futurity finalist. It wasn't until the night of the finals that the crowd's applause, with high-decibel whistling and cheering, really made it clear to Pam and Paul how awesome Gunner really was.

During the finals, quite a few people wanted to purchase Gunner. This wasn't something they'd expected or even thought about. After the finals, Clint finally let Pam ride her horse out of the arena for the photos. She was in the clouds—after all, they'd bought Gunner for her to ride. But, in the end, after hours of discussion ending at 2:30 in the morning, they decided to sell Gunner to Kim and Debra Sloan of Kebra Ranch, although they retained breedings to him. They have three babies from Gunner's first and only foal crop (1997) and will have more to offer in 1998.

### **A LIFE-CHANGING HORSE**

Beyond his wins, Gunner ended up changing Pam and Paul's lives. Today, they focus on training and breeding quality paint and quarter horse reining prospects. "It was a hobby, but now it's a business," says Pam. "We don't get much rest. I do the paperwork and advertising and Paul takes care of the barn." Yes, at times they regret selling Gunner. But they have foals that look and act just like him—one, says Pam, is a mirror-image of Gunner. "He has the same habits, when you walk up to him, he comes right up to you and licks your hand. Gunner always did that."

Last November, they acquired Gunner's sire, Colonelfourfreckle, and will offer foals by him, as well. "His personality is just like Gunner's," says Pam. "We thought if he could put his mind on Gunner, he could do that a lot more times." They also liked the stallion's record—several of his get have done well in working cow horse competition, competing at the AQHA World. And, yes, Pam is riding reiners. At the Futurity, Liz located a new paint mare. Before long, look for them in Rookie and Non Pro classes. She'll probably also add to her ribbon collection by showing in paint competition. Paul recently sold his roping stallion, taking a back seat to Pam's show ring activities. But he's on the lookout for the right non pro horse for him to learn on and expects to be riding reiners soon. □

**Pam Rohus, finally on her horse!**

