



Loren Booth loves the sport of reining and all that comes with it, including this 2012 filly by Smart Spook out of Ms Ida Dun. —Photo by Tricia Gilson

Juiced on Horse

Farming, horses, cattle and philanthropic interests keep Loren Booth involved with life's challenges and pleasures. By Annie Lambert

Thousands of acres of orange groves, like the ones behind these colts, are the foundation of Booth Ranches. —Photo by Annie Lambert



Tucked away in the foothills of California's San Joaquin Valley lies the agricultural town of Orange Cove. Reining enthusiast Loren Booth lives amid the horses she loves and citrus trees she grows, nearly two miles from the entrance to Booth Ranches LLC.

Booth has always ridden horses and is now raising foals from some of the top broodmares in the reining industry. But those mares are not alone in possessing solid pedigrees. Loren's own heritage reads something like a historic novel.

Raised in Southern California, this business lady has worked hard to grow the enterprise

her father started as somewhat of a sideline to his other ventures. Once Booth became involved in the cattle ranching and farming interests, nothing was about to deter her.

"I went to the California Agricultural Leadership Program in the late 1990s and realized what an opportunity I had," Booth said of taking on farming full bore. "I started getting involved, and the more I got involved, the more I thought I should be – it just started snowballing. I didn't know anything about citrus; seriously, it was education by emersion."

Booth and her father developed Booth Ranches into the largest independent grower/shipper operation in California.

Living for Wednesdays

Booth was raised and began her romance with horses in the Southern California town of Pasadena. By the fourth grade, she was taking a weekly riding lesson at Flintridge Riding Club and relishing every moment.

"I loved it," she reiterated. "I lived for Wednesdays. I grew up in Pasadena, then my parents were divorced and my mom moved to Covina, a great horse area. I rode my horse to shows at Ridge Riders [a local arena] because we didn't have a trailer. My horse wasn't even registered, but I'd ride to the show bareback so he wouldn't have saddle marks for the showmanship classes."

During her early years with horses, Booth showed in everything – pleasure, Western riding, showmanship, halter and even reining if she "could talk a horse into it." Booth rode with and worked for some very respected horsemen, too – Billy Harris, Roberta Poe and Mack Linn to mention a few. In fact, her first American Quarter Horse Association horse was purchased from Harry Stickler, father of trainer Jimmy Stickler.

"I got married in 1975 and lived in Bakersfield," Booth said. "I worked for Mack Linn a lot and went to work for the Rio Bravo Equestrian Center east of town and ran it for about 10 years. I learned to start colts at Mack's and started a lot of colts at Rio Bravo, fit horses for the Rancho Vistadore's ride every year, as well as taking a couple kids to local Quarter Horse shows."

By the late 1990s, Booth was divorced with two children – Blair Sill (Moffett) and Jake Sill. She continued her interest in horses, although finances dictated that she cut back. She'd always owned a horse or two and believes, "Once you're in it, you're in it." She'd been running her father's commercial cattle operation for some time before she started eyeballing the citrus industry.

"Some grove property was the only asset I had, so I went to see if it was being farmed to



Booth's home overlooks rolling pastures with quality mares and foals by top stallions in the reining industry. —Photo by Tricia Gilson

its best advantage," said Booth, a fifth-generation Californian. "That's when it started; I thought we could probably do better."

Business mindsets

Booth's father, Franklin 'Otis' Booth Jr., was a brilliant mind and impressive businessman. His portrait over the mantel and his daughter's stories would make anyone wish they'd met him before he died of ALS, better known as Lou Gerigs disease, in 2008 at the age of 85. The family tree is nothing short of compelling.

Otis was accepted to the California Institute of Technology at age 16 and graduated in just three years with a bachelor degree in electrical engineering. After serving two years in the United States Naval Reserve, he earned a master's degree in business administration and a graduate degree in engineering from Stanford University.

Otis, a great-grandson of the founder of the Los Angeles Times – General Harrison Gray Otis, began his tenure at the newspaper during the 1950s. In 1968, he was named corporate vice president of the Times Mirror Corporation in charge of forest products and commercial printing.

Over the years, Otis invested in real estate with his close friend Charlie Munger, now vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, Inc. Munger introduced his friend to Warren Buffett in 1963 and Otis became an early investor in Berkshire Hathaway. Otis loved farming and became involved with citrus after inheriting 40

acres, which he planted in navel oranges. He continued to purchase land and plant oranges; he planted the first groves in the Orange Cove area during the late 1960s. After retiring from the publishing industry in 1972, he continued to expand.

Booth referred to her father as a "brainiac," a hard-working, smart guy. In the case of his daughter, the apple didn't fall too far from the tree.

Being an absentee owner, Otis had outsourced the farming operations. By 1999, Booth had taken the farming in-house and by the 2002-2003 growing season, she had purchased their first packinghouse in Orange Cove. At that time, only the marketing was handled outside the company. Today they do it all – grow it, harvest it, pack it, sell it and ship it.

Running Booth Ranches kept Booth's horse interests simmering on the back burner for some time. In her words, she "went underground," working seven days a week, nose to the farming grindstone. There was a horse or two, as usual, but they didn't see much of their owner.

"When I started working up here, I was commuting from Bakersfield and it was so overwhelming," Booth said. "I was so over my head initially. Every decision I made really impacted somebody's life. When I got a handle on things in the farming, I started getting back into reining a little bit."

Booth has always liked breeding horses and has managed to raise at least one or two colts most years. She had a horse with Benny Guitron in Merced for 11 of those early farming years, but horses were not her main focus.

In 2000, Booth attended a Quarter Horse show in Bakersfield with her daughter, Blair, who was about to head off to Santa Barbara City College. Blair commented that she had always wanted to try reining. At that time, Booth was riding the "really cool reiner" Miss Ida Dun, a mare she had purchased from Frank Bolea.

"I didn't have a lot of money at the time so I sold Ida [Ms Ida Dun] back to Frank to buy a horse for Blair," Booth said. "I thought reining would provide a positive focus for her during her college years. Todd Crawford found a Smart Chic Olena gelding out of a Doc's Hickory mare [Hickochicoluck] for her and she qualified for the Youth World Show."

Crawford relocated his operation to Oklahoma at which time Booth's horses moved to Tom Foran's barn. When Blair married Bubba Moffett (president of the beer distribution company Crescent Crown) and moved to Scottsdale, Ariz., Tracer Gilson started training the horses. Booth was still tied down as general



John O'Hara
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manager of Booth Ranches, so she enjoyed few lessons as she commuted to ride.

Following Otis' passing in 2008, Booth became president and sole owner of Booth Ranches. This slowly began to free her time to partake in a few added horse activities.

Oldies but goodies

Booth has no interest in standing a stallion, but she loves owning broodmares with quality pedigrees and performance and production records that attract top reining sires.

Eleven years ago, Booth headed to Frank Bolea's dispersal sale in Gilroy, Calif. Her main intent was to buy back Ms Ida Dun, which had been Bolea's first reining horse. In addition to that 18-year-old, she purchased Smart Little Devil (Smart Chic Olena x Juanita Brownburn x Sonny Brownburn), a 1995 mare, and Vons Sparky (Von Reminic x Sailing Spark x Shining Spark), a 2002 mare.

"Now we're in the breeding business," Booth said with a laugh. "I started building fence everywhere. Then Tracer called me two or three years ago about a mare package for sale – Taris Little Vintage (Peppy San Badger x Taris Vintage) [1991], My Lucky Moonstone (Topsail Whiz x My Moon Stone Chex) [1995], and Dun Its Miss Kali (Hollywood Dun It x Kaliflower) [1990]. It was an opportunity."

Taris Little Vintage had finished third in the 1995 NRHA Futurity Open and was second in the **Equi-Stat** Dams All Ages/All Divisions in 2011 with \$655,998 in produce earnings. She is the only mare to produce two NRHA Futurity Open Champions and the first dam inducted into the NRHA Hall of Fame.

My Lucky Moonstone has more than \$200,000 in produce earnings and sits in the top 50 of the 2011 dam's list. The 18-year-old was an NRHA Futurity Open and Non-Pro finalist with \$45,505 in earnings. Dun Its Miss Kali has offspring earnings of more than \$25,000.

"These great, older mares are a short term investment," Booth said. "If I could get five [embryos] out of Tari, which we did last year, I'll feel lucky, considering the small window we have. I'd like to have 10 to 15 foals a year; we're at 20 for next year [2013]. But, there are only a handful of mares as good as some of these, so if I can get more foals, I won't complain."

A homebred favorite is Alrighta Ida, (Top Dun Cody x Ms Ida Dun x Dun Commander). The 13-year-old buckskin earned 72 AQHA reining points, according to Booth, and is producing

Loren has won more than \$55,000 on Brennas Dream but plans to give her a little time off soon to harvest some embryo transfers. —Photo by John O'Hara

some ranch favorites by popular stallions like Smart Spook.

Booth also invested in Whizzin Easy (Topsail Whiz x Miss Poco Easy x My Lucero), a full-sister to Easy Otie Whiz, a multiple champion and sire with lifetime earnings of \$243,441.

Booth is a horsewoman with a knack for spotting good horses. Whizzin Easy was 14 and had been shown in mostly Green As Grass classes when Booth had an opportunity to show her at Scottsdale. She figured the veteran would cut corners, pin her ears and wring her tail. The pure-hearted mare "ran down there like she'd never run a pattern in her life" and found a new home at Booth Ranches.

Brennas Dream (Magnum Chic Dream x Brennas Red Dunit x Hollywood Dun It), a 2006 mare, is Booth's current show horse, but she looks forward to seeing her babies in the pasture.

"Brennas Dream has just gone over \$55,000 in earnings with me riding her," Loren said with a smile. "My strategic planning is to stay out of her way, leave her alone. I'm going to give her a little time off and try to get some colts out of her [for 2014]."

Other mares in Booth's band of producers include: Check Your Gun Lady (Dun It Gotta Gun x Cee Blair Lady) [2005]; Jitterbug Banjo (Banjo Whiz x Jitterbug Shuffle) [2005]; Tejons Leanin Fancy (Mr San Olen x Strawberry Lena) [1998]; and Whizard Magic (Whizard Jac x Robin Dun It) [2003].

Most of the mares will be relieved by recipient mares, which are kept at a ranch in nearby Woodlake. Booth purchased that property from her aunt, Ann Reimers', estate last summer. "Auntie Ann" showed Quarter Horses, one of her favorites being Kaweah King, trained by Greg Ward. Reimers had also been an orange grower,



Hall of Famer Taris Little Vintage, the only mare to produce two NRHA Futurity Champions, is just one of several legendary mares at Booth Ranches. —Photo by Annie Lambert

was involved in Thoroughbred racing and about Booth's only relative who shared her passion for horses.

Sell some, show some

Booth purchased 300 acres not too far from her home place three years ago – mainly to protect what she considered pristine property – in the town of Minkler, an old rail stop with a cash store and population of just 30.

About a year ago, Gilson and his wife, Tricia, spoke with Booth about moving to California. With a good trainer/owner relationship, Booth

decided to develop a small portion of the Minkler property. The Gilsons moved in last July with the finishing touches still being completed. Amenities include outdoor and large covered arenas, a 38-stall barn, additional pens and turnouts, a six-horse exerciser and a 60-foot round pen.

"The property is unique with huge oak trees, sycamores and is just beautiful," said Booth. "I put the property into a preserve because I was so afraid a developer would go in there and make it a golf course or housing development. We did not take one tree down; we built all around the big trees. About 30 acres will be used for training."

"The yearlings just went off to Tracer and it was like my kids going to college – I almost cried," Booth added. "In no time, they were already saddled and videoed. They are by Gunner, Magnum Chic Dream, Custom Chrome, Boom Shernic, Hollywoodtinseltown and Chexsmillion."

There is a barn at the main ranch where the weanlings and yearlings experience some early ground schooling. It is also where the ranch horses are kept and cattle are processed.

Booth planned to sell a few yearlings at the 2012 NRHA Futurity, but put it off until 2013

The president and sole owner of Booth Ranches, Loren Booth, appreciates every employee. —Photo by Annie Lambert



Pay It Forward

A philanthropist, according to the dictionary, is "one who makes an active effort to promote human welfare." Loren Booth, president and sole owner of Booth Ranches in Orange Cove, Calif., defines that meaning. Hard work has rewarded her with success and she is constantly paying it forward.

One of the most amazing programs is the Booth Family Scholarship, which

offers qualified children of Booth Ranches full-time employees higher education. Scholars are provided \$1,000 annually to attend a junior college, four-year university or graduate program.

"We have an issue with poverty in this area," Booth disclosed. "We've had great success with the program. For example, one graduate works for us. Another is going on to get her PhD and plans to be a teacher."

Booth is trustee of the Otis Booth Foundation, which is active in state and

local charities. The foundation is a major contributor to the Children's Institute Inc. and the John Thomas Dye School. The Booth family also contributes and supports many other charities.

Booth gives her time to many causes and groups such as being chairman of the board for the Hills Valley Irrigation District, a federal water district providing water locally. To list all her contributions would not be possible in limited space. Loren Booth wears a lot of hats. —AL



This posh foaling barn is worthy of the classic foals born here; the upstairs apartment houses cattle managers Buddy and Laurie Montes who also help with foaling. —Photos by Annie Lambert



due to the busy times setting up the Minkler property. They will sell the yearlings that missed the sale privately and already have people inquiring about those offerings.

"My dad had a lot of common sense and gave me a lot of good advice," Booth offered soberly. "He said to do one thing and do it well. Instead of raising cow horses and reiners, be really good doing one or the other. Grow oranges and be the best you can be, don't do stone fruit as well."

It didn't seem hard for Booth to stick with reining and only reining – she absolutely relishes the sport. It is getting easier for her to get away to enjoy shows now, too.

"Reining is so difficult, but so much fun at the same time," Booth said with a smile. "It is just a rush. You can't be distracted; you have to focus. If your mind is someplace else when you're running a big fast, you're going to get killed. It is a great way to just get away. I can go to horse shows and laugh and giggle and act

like a kid, then come back to reality."

Booth finds riding and showing her homebred horses to be one of the most exciting parts of raising equines.

"I just started showing the ones we raised," she said. "Having horses that are quality enough to go on with, I can't begin to tell you how exciting that is. I did raise Ida, but this year she had a buckskin filly by Smart Spook, one of the coolest horses on the face of the earth. The filly looks just like her mother and I can't wait to ride her."

Booth Ranches today

Booth Ranches now farm more than 8,000 acres of Valencia and Navel oranges. They own two packinghouses and many groves in Orange Cove. They also grow fruit in Orosi, Ivanhoe/Woodlake, Lindsay, Porterville, Terra Bella, Richgrove and McFarland, with groves extending south to Maricopa in Kern County – a substan-

tial increase from Otis' 40 acre start in 1950.

There are at least 120 full-time employees, with worker numbers rising to about 500 when they are rolling through the season with all the crews – picking, pruning and packing – working simultaneously. Fruit is sold and shipped all over the world.

"We ended Valencias about mid-October and started the Navels a couple of weeks later, so it is really a full-year cycle," Booth explained. "It does slow down. We trickled through the Valencias, because the prices were good and kept going up. How you manage that fruit is really important. You can frame the timing where the prices are much higher than they were the month before – it makes a huge difference. We have really good people, including a great general manager and CFO."

Buddy and Laurie Montes run the Booth Ranches cow/calf operation. About 350 mother cows graze the rolling foothills surrounding the groves. The ranch is one of 30 certified Angus beef producers who initially participated in the Harris Ranches Partnership for Quality. Laurie is also busy overseeing all the mares and foals.

From her home atop a hill, Booth looks over hundreds of acres of groves and large pastures filled with mares and foals. The spacious house is visitor friendly with three miniature Australian Shepherds and George, the cat. Two larger Aussies – affectionately dubbed Otis and Charlie – reside outside.

Otis took it upon himself to build his daughter the home. He insisted it was the right size, even though Booth insisted it could be scaled down significantly.

"I really had no input on the house," she said with a chuckle. "Dad said he wouldn't scale it back, that I would need it for entertaining. It is fun when all my kids come and it works well for a group. Since we market globally, we entertain buyers from Japan, Korea, Canada and other places."

The Booth family is growing, also. Jake completed his MBA at George Washington University and is married to Chiara, an event planner. He is associated with AGR Partners, an equity fund specializing in agricultural properties and they reside near Booth in Visalia. Blair and Bubba presented Booth with her first grandchild early in 2012. It is anticipated that Eloise "Elle" Loren Moffett will be showing short-stirrup reiners in the future.

And, with work under control and Tracer training horses nearby, Booth finally has an opportunity to ride more frequently.

"The other day I found time to ride one horse, ended up riding two, got home in the dark at seven o'clock at night and I had the best time," she noted with a laugh. "I've always wanted to do this. I am so lucky, so grateful, so happy." ★