

Rock & Awe — Utah man carves heirloom rocking horses

THE
Best
OF THE
West

article and photos
by Lincoln Rogers
Parker, Colo.



Different models of hand-carved rocking horses, ranging in breeds from Quarter Horse to Saddlebred to Andalusian and everything in-between, grace the display of Dennis Page's Rocking Horse Ranch booth at the 2005 National Western Stock Show.

Dennis Page never figured he would be doing this for a living, and a good friend of his might be to blame. Jerry Cooke's request a few years ago seemed harmless, not one that would eventually push a high-end construction woodworker like Page into carving breed-specific rocking horses full-time.

"The first one (I carved) took a year and a half," admitted Page, whose company, Rocking Horse Ranch, started in 2003 and is based out of Riverton, Utah. Before it all started, Page's friend, Cooke, asked him to make a rocking horse for his grandsons, but the request

came with a catch. Cooke wanted it to look just like his daughter's favorite Saddlebred horse, one she rode and loved as a youth.

Armed with a photograph of the horse in question, Page went to work on his first creation and what started as a favor for a friend quickly turned into a thriving profession for the horse-loving woodworker. His initial design was such a hit that word of mouth spread like wildfire, leaving Page no choice but to concentrate his efforts



A beautiful Palomino Quarter Horse, carved from Alder Wood.

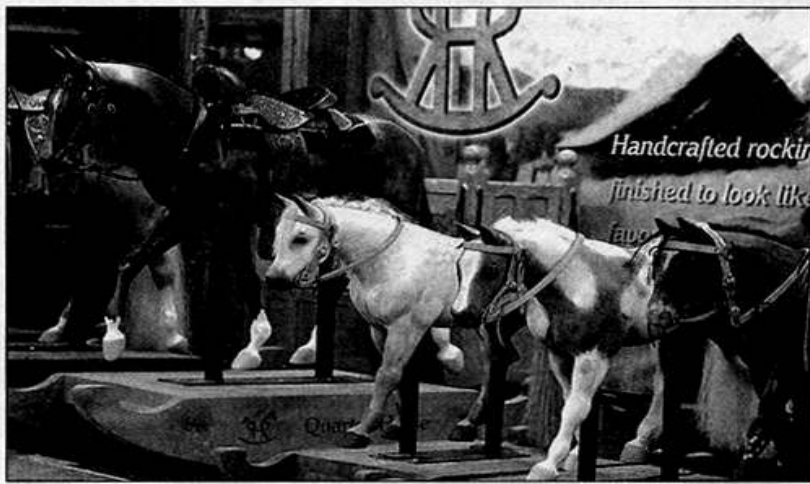
where demand was growing — not that he minded.

"All I do (is carve) horses now," a satisfied Page said, adding that he currently has two men in his employ, Mike Gallenberger and Layne Brady, who help produce heirloom quality rocking horses in a more timely fashion than his first attempt.

"Each one takes six to eight weeks now. We use real mane for the manes and tails (and) a saddle maker adds authentic tack as well."

The 57-year-old Page answered questions while he stood among beautiful examples of his work, describing their origins as the 2005 National Western Stock Show created a backdrop of steady noise. The friendly entrepreneur had to raise his voice in order to be heard over the sounds.

"We take four pieces of wood, glue them together, and start carving," he



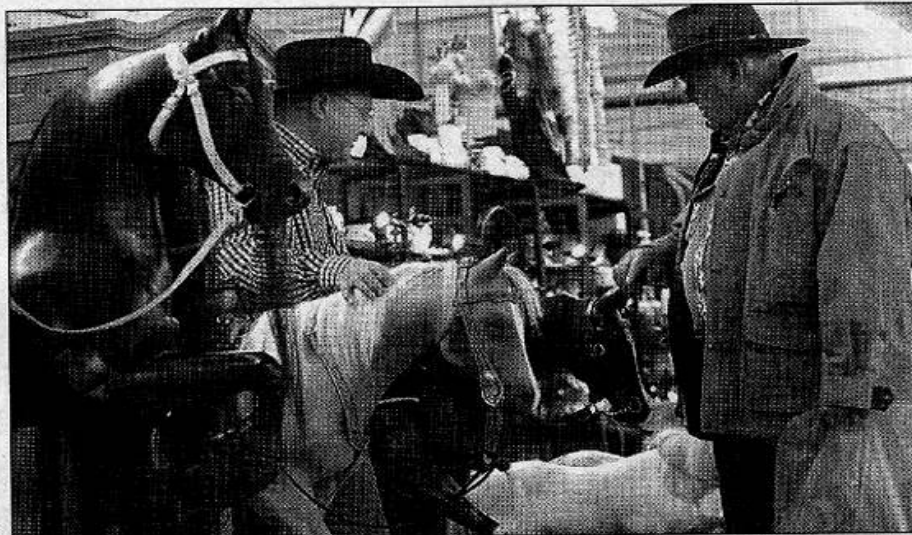
explained of the process. His primary choices for wood are Maple, Alder, Walnut, and Cottonwood, but he will also use Mahogany and Cherry. The types of wood are chosen not only for their color and ability to be carved, Page also has another reason — a more practical one. “I can get (them) in big pieces of wood,” he said, answering a question regarding how he is able to shape the rocking horses in large sizes.

In order to capture the look of someone’s favorite horse, one might guess Rocking Horse Ranch paints the exterior of each product to match a customer’s specifications. That guess would be incorrect, however, as Page and his crew takes pride in replicating a custom request by using numerous coats of stain. He feels he obtains a better-looking finished product, and hand-rubbing stain adds a durable benefit, due to its deep penetration into the wood of the rocking horse.

“Most everything (we produce) is custom,” acknowledged Page, describing how they fashion breeds ranging from Saddlebreds to Quarter Horses and everything in-between, a majority from just a photograph.

“Most everything is made to order. I love it when people send photos (along with an order).

There are a number of sizes his rocking horse company produces, from approximately 26 inches long for the smallest, to over 60 inches long for the large, with a proportioned height almost equal to its length. Prices begin around \$1,400 for the “mini,” and run \$7,000 and higher for the largest offering. Regardless of size or price, every order receives the attention to detail it deserves.



Dennis Page (left), of Riverton, Utah, talks to a potential customer about his hand-carved rocking horses at his booth in the National Western Stock Show. Passersby inevitably stopped to admire the beautiful carvings, giving Page praise and encouragement in his successful transformation from a high-end construction woodworker crafting cabinets and doors to an entrepreneur with a unique and exquisite product.

“They all get the same detail,” confirmed Page.

While the Utah craftsman talked of carving his rocking horses, he rested an affectionate hand on each display piece, showing the passion and excitement he holds for producing these one-of-a-kind carvings.

“I always kind of liked working with wood,” Page revealed with a smile. “Then, when I did the (first) rocking horse, it kind of evolved from there.”

Judging from his story, the evolution from construction woodworker to rocking horse carver was a smooth one — similarly, words of admiration from National Western attendees evolved to awe once they ventured near Page’s exquisite handiwork. Like the Utah carver said, he never figured he would do this for a living, but it is clear the man has no one to blame for his good fortune but his own immense talent.

For more information on Rocking Horse Ranch, visit Dennis Page on the Internet at <http://www.carvedhorses.com>. ❖