

Steeped in Mystery

The Gypsy Vanner Horses
of Feathered Gold Stables

Ogdensburg, Wisconsin

by Ruth Johnson, Editor



All photos in this article
by Denise Krause,
Feathered Gold Stables.

"It is impossible to imagine a more complete fusion with nature than that of the Gypsy."

~ Franz Liszt, Hungarian Composer



Imagine a breed of horses so rare that it was only in the last decade of the twentieth century that they were discovered, officially recognized and registered as their own unique and truly majestic breed.

Strange as it may seem, the magnificent Gypsy Vanner horses did not have a name and their lineage remained a closely guarded secret held within the world of Gypsies.

It was not until 1996 that the first Gypsy Vanner horse was imported into the United States. There are now 3,500 Gypsy Vanner horses in the nation, a small number when you consider there are over 120,000 horses in Wisconsin alone*.

ENIGMA

Gypsy tribes, discriminated against and persecuted in Europe since the 19th Century, became a nomadic race, never really assimilating with the cultures they encountered. They did not develop a written language, preferring instead, to communicate family history and information verbally. This practice helped them maintain the level of secrecy they needed to survive.

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*According to the National AG Statistics Service of the USDA, December 31, 1998.

Top: Trainer Audrey Nusz (R) of Waupaca, WI, on Lance and 10-year old Mia Wandtke (L), one of Audrey's students, on Princess. **Right:** Derek Krause walks Shanti. **Opposite Page:** Price Almighty, cloaked by trees.





*"The world is but a canvas
to the imagination."
~ Henry David Thoreau*



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BEHIND THE LEGEND

Traveling in richly ornate, horse-drawn Vardos (bow-top style, lightweight living wagons), which stored the family's entire possessions, the Gypsies recognized the need to develop a strong, hardy breed, preferably small, no more than 15-hands high, yet capable of pulling up to 5,000 pounds.

These horses were selectively bred not just for strength but also spectacular beauty, intelligence and perfect, friendly and engaging temperament.

Drawing from the bloodlines of the Clydesdale, Shire, Dell and Fell Ponies (DNA proven), these horses are easily recognized by their long, flowing manes and tails and the profusion of signature lower leg feathers. When they run, they are pure poetry in motion, a spectacular delight!

ENTER DENISE KRAUSE

At the age of two years old, Denise Krause, owner of Feathered Gold Stables in Ogdensburg, WI, slipped away from her parents at a parade. Sure she was lost; they scoured the area and were astonished to find her playing amidst a group of horses, oblivious to any possible danger. That chance encounter was the first step towards a life dedicated to horses.

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Top: Mickey Finn with Audrey Nusz of Waupaca (L) and Sir William with Courtney Casey of Stevens Point (R) demonstrate their stately form. **Left:** Audrey Nusz competition jumping with Mickey Finn.

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“No hour of life is wasted that is spent in the saddle.”

Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, WWII

Growing up in Nevada where her father was a District Ranger, Lake Mead National Recreation Park, Denise (who moved to Central Wisconsin when she was 18 years old), lived and breathed horses. She handled many breeds before she met her first Gypsy Vanner horse.

Like many other enthusiasts, Denise caught her first glimpse of these gorgeous horses online, “While I was initially drawn to their breathtaking beauty, I quickly became captivated with their incredibly docile nature, intelligence and vigorous athleticism. I decided we needed one so we purchased our first Gypsy Vanner, Feathered Gold Moe.”

PROFESSIONAL BREEDERS

Together with husband, Derek, Denise owns Feathered Gold Stables in Ogdensburg, Wisconsin, home to 33 horses, 25 of which form the foundation of their Gypsy Vanner horse breeding operation.

Although Denise enjoys showing her horses at local shows throughout the Midwest as well as breed shows specific to the Gypsy Vanner horse, her primary focus is producing high quality Gypsy Vanner foals.

She is present at every birth, either in person or via cameras installed in the stables, which send live feed to the house, keeping her informed.

This is a true family affair. Denise handles all of the daily chores, regular routines, sales and interacting with the veterinarian and trainers.

Derek, who has a full-time job outside the stables, helps exercise and train the horses, overall show preparation and participation and assists Denise with foaling of the mares.

Denise shares her appreciation of Derek, “He and I actually are a very good team in the barn when we have a mare ready to give birth. The two of us work together in a very intricate fashion to get baby dried off, blanketed, up on its feet and nursing as well as attending to all mama's needs during this time. Unfortunately, Derek is often on the road with his job. The past three foaling seasons, he was only able to attend about half of the births.”

“If he is not here and I need an extra set of hands in an emergency situation, my twelve-year old son, Justin is always willing to get out of bed (the mares foal at night 95% of the time), and help with whatever I need.”

Justin also runs his own “Baby School” for the foals, who follow him like puppies throughout the corrals.

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Top: Denise and Sera going through the paces. **Middle:** Watch out Derek! Avalanche is showing off his playful side. **Bottom:** Meanwhile, Lady decides it is time family dog, Cory, needs a little prodding.



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Denise utilizes the services of professional trainer, Audrey Nusz of Waupaca, to teach the horses to accept a rider and perform various skills. Denise also works with 4-H Club students and interns like 17-year old, Courtney Casey, Stevens Point, WI, who handled all of Feathered Gold Kolbe's training and has been showing Jasmyn this past show season.

BONDING

The entire family loves the foals and finds it very hard to part with them. Denise enthuses, "We want our horses to do well in their new homes. We do not sell in utero because we prefer to fit each horse with the right buyer." Our buyers come from all lifestyles, age groups and rider types. 77% of our clients have purchased more than one Gypsy Vanner horse from us. Two clients have each purchased five horses from us over a three-year span."

Denise relates that they select their mares and stallions for their pedigree, conformation to breed standards and pleasant disposition, which is reflected in their stock's offspring.

Editor's note: "I can personally attest to the breed's docile nature. I am somewhat afraid of horses yet when Denise invited me to visit with the Gypsy Vanners inside their corral; I was surprised to find myself following her. There were about 10-15 horses of various ages and sizes and they quickly surrounded me, nudging me to encourage me to pet them. They all wanted attention and truly acted more like dogs, playful, curious and happy go-lucky.

Somehow, they made me feel complete, as if all I wanted my entire life was to be a horsewoman. I contemplated whistling to see if one would follow me to my car but then remembered I did not have any proper accommodations for them."

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Top: Gypsy mare and foal in a special bonding moment. **Middle:** Justin Krause at his first show. **Bottom:** Justin teaching one of the foals through his "Baby School."



"There are many paths to enlightenment. Be sure to take the one with a heart."
~ Lao Tzu

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*"We are all wanderers on this earth.
Our hearts are full of wonder, and
our souls are deep with dreams."*

~ Gypsy proverb

The Krauses work very hard to educate the public regarding Gypsy Vanners, participating in shows, parades, expos and educational seminars. They are often the first Gypsy Vanners to compete or show in many equine events.

Feathered Gold Stables was the featured act in the 2007 *Dances with Horses* presentation in Waterloo, Iowa, a major charity event. Proceeds benefited Aspire Therapeutic Riding program.

Mickey Finn, one of the Krause's three breeding stallions and the only son of renowned Gypsy Vanner stallion, Drumshambo, in the States, was a major contestant in the 2010 Midwest Horse Fair's *Wind Rider Equestrian Challenge*.

This cross disciplinary course includes challenges such as: circles cantered, lead changes, two-foot jump, trotting while balancing an object in one hand, backing through and around barrels, side passing, ground poles, turns on the haunches or turnarounds, leg yielding, open/close a gate, dragging objects and ring joust.

According to Denise, "Gypsy Vanners exhibit an unparalleled level of versatile athleticism. While many horse breeds only excel I at one type of riding, the Gypsy Vanner can perform both Western and English riding and jumping, hunt, parade, dressage, rodeo, 4-H activities, cutting, roping, barrel racing or anything else a horse can do."

Mickey Finn along with Jasmyn, another Feathered Gold Gypsy Vanner, will compete in the 2011 *Wind Rider Equestrian Challenge*.

Both are also contestants in 2011 Midwest Horse Fair's *Search for the World's Most Beautiful Horse* sponsored by Blain's Farm & Fleet. You can vote for either of them at this web link:
http://midwesthorsefair.com/index.php?page=home_detail&post_id=5725

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Top: Novel displays the overwhelming Gypsy Vanner Beauty. **Bottom Left:** Zetta Rose, Luna and Tiny out for a spin. **Bottom Right:** Ellie finds her jumping prowess at just four days old!





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Denise, who is very petite, is proud that she can run the heavy equipment. In winter 2008, Derek fell off the roof, shattering his heel and ankle, which required extensive surgery and downtime.

The Krauses had just ordered a 4520 John Deere tractor equipped with a 400CX loader from Faivre Implement. Denise was afraid she would not be able to learn to run it. John Shulfer, Faivre's service specialist, worked with Denise until she felt quite comfortable and confident with the tractor.

Now, she absolutely loves her tractor and uses it to move huge hay bales and feeders, plow snow, clean pens and unload pallets of feed and bedding. She easily changes attachments from the front blade to bale spear, pallet forks and bucket and thinks it is one of the best inventions ever.



Denise is the Breed Coordinator for the Great Lakes Gypsy Vanner Presentation at 2011 Midwest Horse Fair, April 15-17, Alliant Energy Center, Madison, WI. All nine Gypsy Vanners were born at Feathered Gold Stables.

Video clip: <http://www.featheredgold.com/Midwest%202011%20Trailer.htm>

Feathered Gold's mares are expecting 11 foals from their spectacular stallions: Mickey Finn, Feathered Gold Moe and young prospect, Feathered Gold Romantic Legend.

For more information on Feathered Gold Stables, see their website, www.featheredgold.com. Contact them at info@featheredgold.com or (715) 445-5345.

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Top: Denise displays her multi-talented tractor skills. **Middle:** Nuala and her foal out for a midday romp. **Bottom:** Derek and Mickey Finn present at a show.



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*"Time, you old gypsy man, will you not stay,
put up your caravan just for one day?"*

Ralph Hodgson, English Poet

No article about the Gypsy Vanner horses would be complete without a few photos of the Romani Gypsy Vardos they pulled. The Vardos were traveling bow-top style wagons, which served as the Gypsies' permanent homes.

LAVISHLY EMBELLISHED

These superbly crafted travelling wagons were prized for their practicality as well as elaborately decorated esthetics full of ornately painting and beautifully executed hand carvings with traditional Romani symbols.

Due to fleeing long-standing persecution and discrimination, the vardos were designed to be lightweight enough to be drawn by one horse, which accommodated the Gypsies' nomadic lifestyle. The interiors master the art of organization beyond compare, storing an entire family's possessions in a very limited space.

Hopefully, these vardos and their Gypsy owners will continue to thrive and prosper, shining their fairy-tale beauty throughout our world.

