

2013 Performance Horse Sale at the Cal Poly Equine Center

A Senior Project

presented to

the Faculty of the Animal Science Department

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Science

by

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The Cal Poly Equine Center (CPEC) takes the Cal Poly “Learn By Doing” motto very seriously. This is evident from the proliferation of enterprises, classes, and riding teams that take place at the center. The value of the Equine Center is demonstrated not only by how many opportunities students have, but also how successful they are. Both the Equestrian and Dressage teams routinely win at the regional and national levels. The Mare Care Enterprise teaches students who have never been near a horse how to safely handle and care for one. The Advanced Reproduction Class is working with Dr. Fernando Campos-Chillon to produce foals for the preeminent Arabian breeders in the world using advanced techniques like ICSI (Intra-Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection) and embryo transfer.

Students at the Equine Center have the nearly unique opportunity to take part in every aspect of a horse breeding program. The Breeding Enterprise is responsible for impregnating the 15 or so Quarter Horse mares that Cal Poly maintains. The Mare Care Enterprise manages the mares by regularly assessing their health and administering vaccinations. Foaling Enterprise takes care of prenatal care, parturition, and postnatal care, including preliminary handling and halter breaking of the foals. The following fall, the Halterbreaking Class (ASCI 265 Equine Behavior and Training) continues training the foals and introduces them to everyday experiences like loading in a trailer and being bathed.

The culmination of the Quarter Horse program is the Quarter Horse Enterprise. This enterprise involves select students who have taken part in Colt Breaking (ASCI 345 Equine Behavior Modification). The students are each assigned to start one of the Cal Poly two year olds under saddle. At the end of the enterprise, the horses are sold to the public. They have the breeding and training to become top reining and cutting horses, as well as fantastic pleasure, trail, or ranch horses. Most end up as one of the latter.

Selling the Cal Poly Horses is one of the primary moneymakers at the Equine Center, and the focus of this project. Starting in 1996, the Cal Poly bred two year olds, as well as a few extra consigned horses, were sold at an auction put on by the Equine Center. By 2012, the auction was no longer drawing enough buyers to sell the horses at real market value. For 2013, the horses were sold by private treaty, primarily using the Performance Horse Sale website (www.ranchhorse.calpoly.edu).

1. Senior Project Background

My senior project had several different components. The first was to restructure the sale website in order to make it more professional and geared towards selling the horses. Once the horses were sold, the second part was to transition the website to encompass the whole of the Equine Center; promoting the services available and the other horses that are for sale. As with any project, there were a number of challenges and successes along the way.

I first came up with the idea of working on the Quarter Horse Sale after working at the auction in 2012 as a CPEC employee. The sale was very disappointing for a number of reasons but it primarily boiled down to a lack of advertisement. People simply did not know that we were selling high quality horses. In today's world, the Internet is an integral part of any marketing program, and the Performance Horse website did not become available until two days before the sale, nor did it present the necessary information in a meaningful way. The Facebook pages were active, but are somewhat limited in the audiences they can reach. I decided to focus on improving the website because I thought it had huge potential. No other students were interested in working on it and I had some experience with web design. In 2009, I redesigned and maintained the website at the veterinary hospital, Sunset Veterinary Hospital in San Francisco,

where I was working at as a veterinary technician. In 2012, I was responsible for redesigning and maintaining the website for the Cal Poly Bull Test (www.bulltest.calpoly.edu) under the supervision of Mike Hall and Ricardo Mercado. With the support of Pete Agalos and Alaina Parsons, I became the student manager of the sale site.

I was responsible solely for the Performance Horse website (www.ranchhorse.calpoly.edu). The Quarter Horse Enterprise students typically run any events that take place. Pete decided that he would not do an auction for 2013. Instead the horses would be sold by private treaty through the website and other online resources. As this was unfamiliar territory, I didn't have much to draw on in terms of past experiences. The Equine Center differs from the Beef Center in that we don't have as large a network of supporters interested in our animals. There is also a lower turnover rate for a horse, since it can be useful for 15-20 years, in contrast to three or four years of productivity for a bull, so we need more new buyers. The Bull Test also has several other advantages. It has been around for over fifty years, is one of the largest bull sales on the west coast, and sells approximately 150 bulls per year. There is an entire enterprise devoted to all aspects of the sale that begins working almost a year ahead of time. In contrast, the Performance Horse Sale is small, with only ten to thirty horses a year. The students who run the sale were primarily responsible for training the horses, and didn't begin preparations until three to four months in advance. Without a catalog, mailing list, or website, there were few ways for anyone to be aware of the sale.

The 2012 sale was not very successful. Twenty-five horses, only seven of which were Cal Poly bred, were offered for sale. The sale average was just above \$2,500, though the Cal Poly bred horses fetched a higher average of \$3,300. Several of the horses did not even sell in the auction, but were later sold by private treaty, earning much higher prices than their compatriots

in the auction. Two of the consigned horses are still at the Equine Center as of December 2013. Very few bidders attended the auctions and many of the horses were purchased by their riders, which did little to improve the reputation of the sale.

My goal for the website was simple: make the horses sellable online. To do this, I had to make a website that was attractive, informative, and easy to navigate. The previous site (from 2012) was designed to showcase the riders and program more than the horses. I decided to style the site as a normal breeding farm would, with a program description, stallion page, and pages for each horse.

The first obstacle was gaining access to the website. Ricardo Mercado, the Information Systems Coordinator for CAFES, provided all the technical assistance. Dustin DeBrum, the Web Accessibility Coordinator for Cal Poly Corporation provided me with FTP access. From there, I could download the files and edit them using Adobe Dreamweaver CS5. I first started working on the computer in Pete's office (Building 10, Room 110B). After a month or so, I was given access to the Animal Science Media Room in Building 10, Room 129A and the files were transferred.

2. Restructuring the Website

The Homepage

After gaining access to the files, I started to restructure the site. The homepage suffered from a lack of information. The design was somewhat lazy in that it gave very little information for visitors who didn't necessarily know about the Cal Poly program. The homepage contained rotator headers with images of the students and their horses, short, vague descriptions about the program, and external links to the Performance Horse Facebook page and the YouTube videos.

The image for the YouTube link was extracted from the video so it was poor quality and not visually appealing.



Figure 1: Original Homepage (Above)

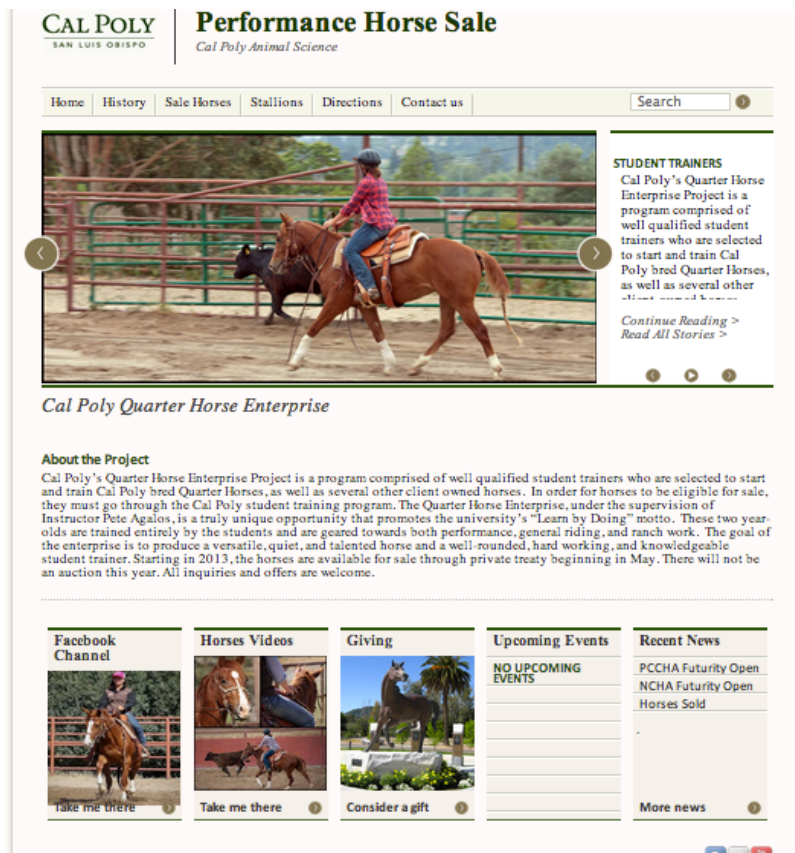


Figure 2: Updated Homepage (Above)

Unfortunately, I could not immediately get current pictures because the horses needed time under saddle before they could be photographed. I added a description of the program to inform visitors about the unique nature of the program:

Cal Poly's Quarter Horse Enterprise Project is a program comprised of well qualified student trainers who are selected to start and train Cal Poly bred Quarter Horses, as well as several other client owned horses. In order for horses to be entered in the sale they must go through the Cal Poly student training program. The Quarter Horse Enterprise, under the supervision of Instructor Pete Agalos, is a truly unique opportunity that promotes the university's "Learn by Doing" motto. These two year-olds are trained entirely by the students and are geared towards performance, general riding, and ranch work. The goal of the enterprise is to produce a versatile, quiet, and talented horse as well as a well rounded, hard working, and knowledgeable student trainer. Starting in 2013, the horses are available for sale through private treaty starting in May and there will no longer be an auction. All inquiries and offers are welcome.

I also edited the descriptions for the five rotating headers on the homepage. Each image needs to be representative of the program, whether the work the horses are involved in or the students handling them. I requested pictures of cattle and hill work to showcase the abilities and advantages of a Cal Poly horse. The descriptions mirror the program description visible below. One of the main draws of the Cal Poly horses is their breeding. Their sire, Backdoor Cat (Highbrow Cat x Genuine DeMoco), is out of one of the premiere cutting sires, which makes his offspring valuable. To that end, one of the sliding headers features a picture of BDC and

mentions that he is nominated to the NRCHA (National Reined Cow Horse Association), which makes his offspring eligible to compete at the highest levels and therefore more valuable.

Once the horses had begun their training, I worked with Mel Carter to get photos taken. I ultimately chose pictures of a student on her horse working a cow, the Enterprise students lined up, three students riding their horses down a hill, several students and their horses learning to work a cow, and Backdoor Cat for the rotating images. I edited the raw images using Adobe Photoshop 5. In order to fit with the programming for the headers, they had to be 733 x 330 pixels. I also enhanced the colors of several of the images in order to make them more appealing.

The new format for Cal Poly websites utilizes widgets located at the bottom of a page. While they can be placed on each page, for the Ranch Horse website they are only located on the homepage. Because the site is relatively small, it is very easy to navigate and doesn't need the widgets repeated. The original widgets, to the Facebook page and YouTube were kept. They were renamed, "Facebook Channel" and "Horse Videos" respectively. The images were also changed. For the Facebook Channel, I used a photo of a student teaching her horse a sliding stop. The Videos widget contains a composite photo to increase the visual appeal. Additionally, three more widgets ("Giving," "Events," and "Recent News") were added. Currently, "Recent News" mentions the success of two Cal Poly bred fillies, Miss Meradas Choice and Blue Door Sue, as well as the sale of three of the 2011 horses.

History of the Cal Poly Equine Center Page

The biggest change to the Ranch Horse website was the addition of a History of the Equine Center. I wanted to add a history to give visitors the opportunity to see how the program has evolved over time. It ideally keeps visitors on the site longer as there is more to see besides

just short blurbs on the horses for sale. When I spoke with Pete Agalos about adding the page, he thought it was a great idea because there was no comprehensive history of the equine program on record. He suggested that I speak with Mike Lund, one of the previous lecturers at the Equine Center, who had been at the Equine Center through some of its major changes. Pete also gave me information that had been compiled for the anniversary book. After speaking with Mike Lund, I compiled all the information into a 1500 word page (www.ranchhorse.calpoly.edu/history.html), focusing on the significance of enterprises at Cal Poly and the evolution of the Quarter Horse program. I also listed many of the supervisors and professors who have contributed to the program and a timeline of the facilities' construction at the center.

Home : History of Cal Poly's Equine Center

History of Cal Poly's Equine Center



The History of the Cal Poly Equine Program

The California Polytechnic School was established in 1901 and the Horse Unit was quickly developed by 1903. Originally, the Horse Unit was located where the current Transportation Pool is and was used for the breeding, training, and selling of registered Percheron horses. These horses were used for farming programs and provided students with a "Learn By Doing" opportunity in horse husbandry. Cal Poly's tradition of excellence started early; in 1905, five mares and fillies, including a mare named Patroness, won blue ribbons at the California State Fair in Sacramento. In 1927, Cal Poly exhibited the Champion Group of Percheron Mares.

Beginning in the 1940s, Percherons were phased out in favor of tractors and Cal Poly adapted by beginning to breed Thoroughbreds. The California Thoroughbred Breeder's Association (CTBA) was instrumental in jumpstarting the program. Prominent breeders including C.E. Cooper, A.T. Jergins, C.E. Perkins, and Bing Crosby, donated mares to get the program off the ground. The CTBA also made provisions for annual stallion services and other resources needed to keep the program active and to educate students for future work in the industry.

Lyman Bennion, head of the Animal Husbandry Department in the late 1940s, also oversaw operation of the Thoroughbred program. He taught the first lecture-laboratory equine production class until 1954. Animal Husbandry students were hired on a part-time basis to live and work at the Horse Unit, providing a true "Learn By Doing" experience that is continued today.

Enterprises

Enterprises are a crucial part of both the Animal Science Department and Cal Poly's "Learn By Doing" motto. They are designed to give students "real world" experience by mirroring standard industry practices. The first enterprises started in 1924 when President Ben Crandall authorized "earn while learning" programs that allowed students starting and training horses to keep a portion of the profits.

Current Enterprises at the Equine Center include the Mare Care Enterprise, Foaling Enterprise, Breeding (Artificial Insemination) Enterprise, Thoroughbred Enterprise, and Quarter Horse Enterprise. Cal Poly offers the unique opportunity to participate in all aspects of horse husbandry, a claim that few other schools in the United States can make. A complete list of current enterprises can be found on the Animal Science Department's [Equine Science](#) page.

The Thoroughbred Program

The Thoroughbred Program became self-supporting with the donation of an Argentinian Thoroughbred stallion, *Zuncho, by Mr. Walter T. Wells in the 1940s. During World War II, racing and travel were restricted, so most of the Cal Poly mares were bred exclusively to *Zuncho until the early 1950s. Beginning in 1945 and continuing until 1975, the Thoroughbred yearlings were sold at CTBA sales at Del Mar and the Cow Palace.

Figure 3: History of the Cal Poly Equine Center page

Sales Horses Page

The most important part of this site is the presentation of the sales horses. The previous website had a single page for all of the horses, with a box for each horse. Each box contained an image of the horse, a short description of the horse, and a link to the pedigree on an outside website (allbreedpedigree.com).

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Performance Horse Sale

Cal Poly Animal Science

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Home : [Sale Horses](#)

2012 Quarter Horse Enterprise Descriptions:

For More Info, click on the picture below.



PERFORMANCE HORSE SALES



Aristokat

2010 gelding by Backdoor Cat out of a Smart Aristocrat mare

"Larry" is a flashy two year-old gelding who is built well and has a great mind. He is a natural stopper and steps over himself well through the turns. Has spent time riding in the hills. Larry is a fast learner, a hard worker, and pleasant to be around!

Pedigree:
<http://www.allbreedpedigree.com/aristokat2>
[Back to top](#)

Figure 4: Original sales page

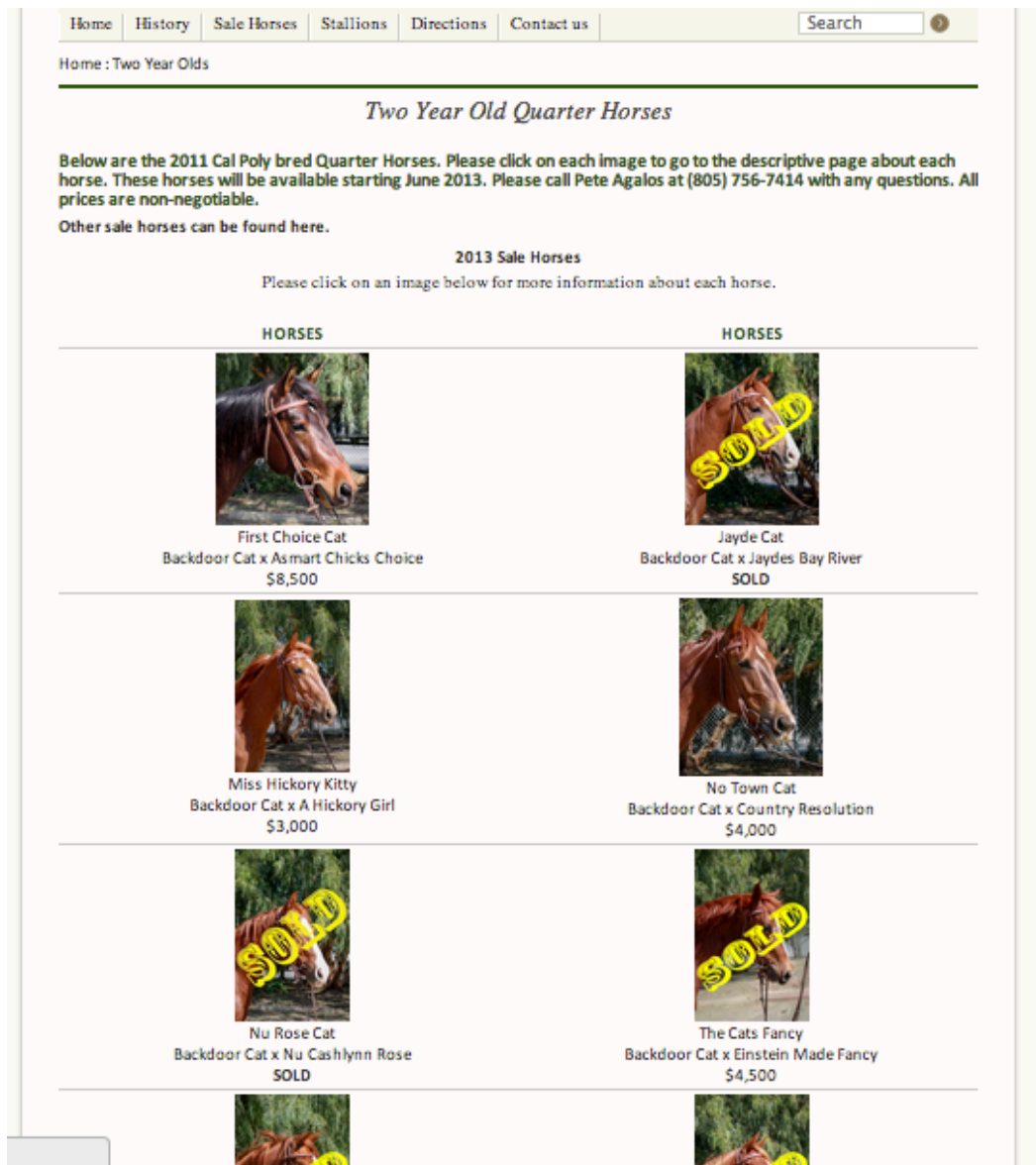


Figure 5: Updated Two Year Old Quarter Horse page

While this format required less clicking than the new format, it suffered from several flaws. First, the short amount of space dedicated to each horse did not have enough information. The images were smaller than the new format, and having a full URL as a link to the pedigrees is messy and unprofessional. We also do not want to steer visitors and potential buyers away from our site. Additionally, in 2012, over 25 horses were up for sale, which meant a lot of scrolling down the page.

For the new site, I wanted to make accessing a particular horse easier, as well as provide more information about each horse. I based my design on the format of the very popular horse sales website, Equinenow.com. This site sells horses of all breeds and disciplines and is clean, informative, and easy to use. In order to organize the horses' individual pages, I created a menu page (found under the navigation tab "Sale Horses") with profile pictures of each horse's head, registered name, parentage, and price. As the horses were sold, I added a large 'SOLD' tag to their image.

For the Ranch Horse site, I duplicated Equinenow.com's format and gave each horse its own page. At the top are the registered name, parentage, and price. In the center of the page is a large image of the horse under saddle. Beneath the image is a table detailing sex, markings, height, weight, temperament on a 1-10 scale, and registration number of the horse. Those are the quick facts that a potential buyer will want to know first. Next is a description of the horse written by the horse's rider describing its qualities under saddle. Each description is approximately 80-100 words and contains a link to a YouTube video of the horse under saddle. Finally, to improve on the previous site, I created three-generation pedigrees for each horse using Adobe Illustrator and Preview. This way, visitors can see the horse's pedigree without having to visit an external webpage. The pages for the two horses consigned by Riedel Ranch (Ms Smart Starlight and Delica Lenas Cat) also had a link to a downloadable PDF provided by the Riedel Ranch.

Name : First Choice Cat

First Choice Cat

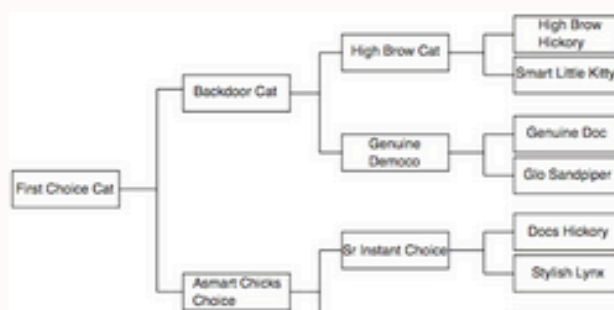
Backdoor Cat x Asmart Chicks Choice

\$8,500



| | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Sex: Stallion | Markings: |
| Height: 14.0 hh | Weight: 880 lbs |
| Temperament: 3/10 | AQHA Reg #: 5420498 |

This is a very flashy two year old stud colt who shows a high degree of athleticism. He is a natural stopper with solid, quick turns on a cow. He is very light in your hands and has smooth comfortable gaits. Moreover, he is a quick learner and has a great attitude that is easy to work with while being willing to please. From the start he has proven to show great potential and has what it takes to be a winner. He is extremely cowy and has great stamina making him an excellent performance horse prospect. To check out First Choice Cat in action, please watch his [YouTube video](#).

**MORE HORSES
OPTIONS**

First Choice Cat

Jayde Cat

Miss Hickory Kitty

No Town Cat

Nu Rose Cat

The Cats Fancy

Special Aristocat

Squallin N Cattin

Delica Lenas Cat

Ms Smart Starlight

Figure 6: Individual Horse page

Stallion Page

A breeding program is only as strong as its breeding animals, particularly the reputation of the stallion. In this, Cal Poly is fortunate enough to have an own son of High Brow Cat, the top cutting sire of all time. Unfortunately, Backdoor Cat was donated because of an injury he sustained before he could compete in his three-year-old year. While his pedigree is impressive, he has no personal accomplishments and so is not well known enough to draw interested buyers on his own merits. However, High Brow Cat was declared infertile in 2010, making his breeding offspring, including Backdoor Cat, more valuable.

The previous Ranch Horse website made no mention of our stallions, other than being the sire of the sales horses. I believe that highlighting the stallions makes the site more professional and legitimate to be more appealing for discerning buyers. To that end, I added a “Stallions” tab to the main navigational menu. The page currently contains images of Backdoor Cat and As Smart as the Fox. ASTAF was an exceptional and well-known stud out of Smart Little Lena and was the backbone of the CPEC breeding program for several years. He became infertile in 2011 and was euthanized in 2013 but remains a recognizable part of the CPEC program. We currently have one of his offspring. Two new stallions were recently donated to Cal Poly, and will eventually be added to the page when they begin breeding.

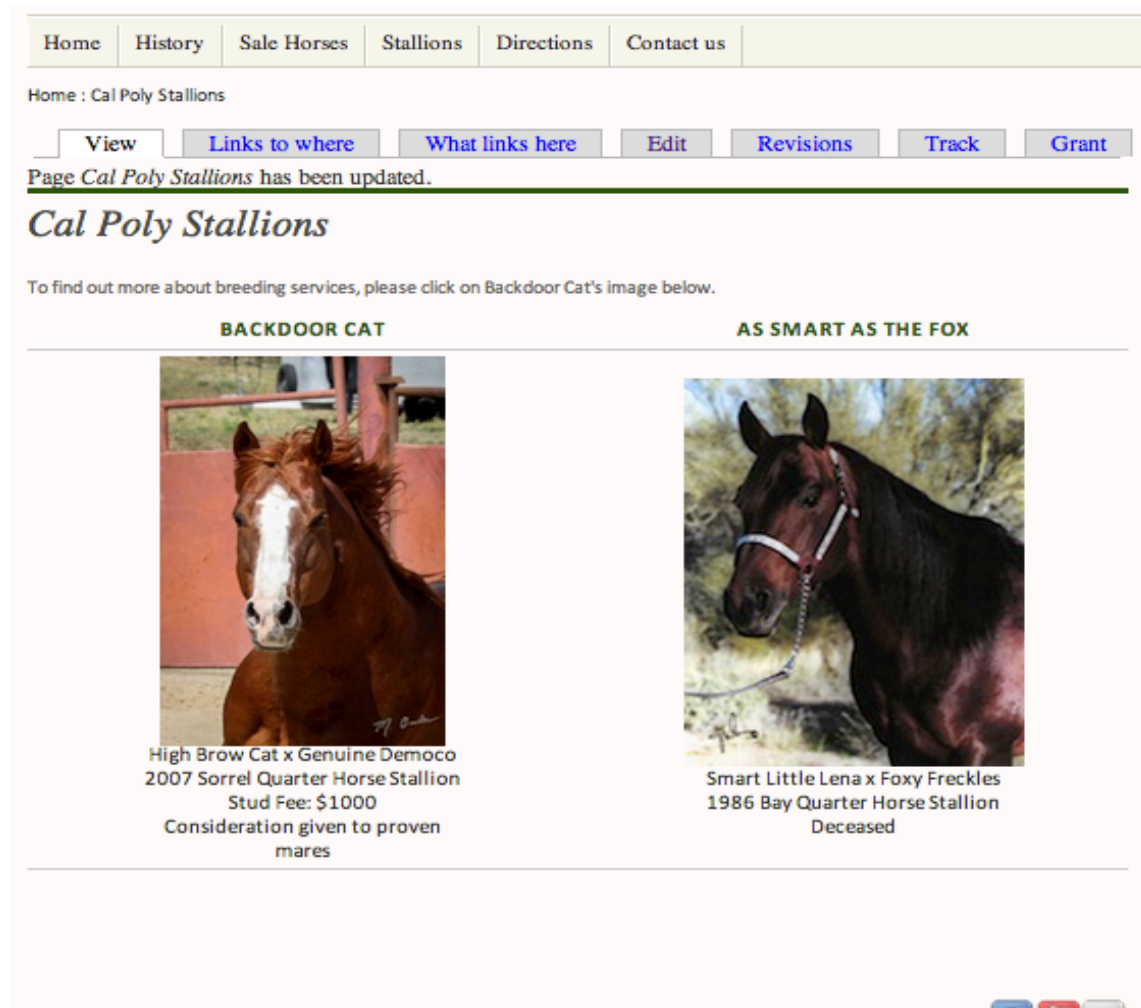


Figure 7: Stallion page

Currently, each image links to the 'Sales and Services' page which details the costs of breeding services including stud fees, embryo transfers, ultrasound fees, etc. A page for Backdoor Cat is currently in the works; it will be similar to the individual sales page, highlighting breeding, value as a sire, stud fee, pedigree, etc. It was mentioned that there was a possibility of developing some sort of advertisement campaign for Backdoor Cat (which typically involves an image- and accomplishment-filled advertisement placed in several relevant magazines), but that was probably rejected because it is very expensive and time consuming.

However, Backdoor Cat will never be a prolific or successful sire without some sort of promotion.

3. Advertising

The only form of outside advertising that I assisted with involved a relatively small and new sales website, ShowHorse.co. Pete suggested I contact the owner and Cal Poly Animal Science alumnus, Jayne Wayne, about advertising on that site. They donated advertising space and each horse is currently listed on the site. The site caters specifically to Western performance horses, the market we need. However, while the site does have a beautiful and efficient design, it is very small and does not appear to see a lot of traffic. Only 130 horses (including our ten) are listed, and many of the currently available horses were listed in May when I created the Cal Poly profiles. I do not know if any of our horses sold because of their exposure on that site, but hopefully, in the future, as we improve our marketing and their site grows, we can sell horses through ShowHorse.co. Alaina Parsons also posted the horses on DreamHorse.com and Craigslist.org, which probably accounts for the sales.

4. Problems with Site Migration

The Ranch Horse website was originally created using Adobe DreamWeaver. In the past year or so, Cal Poly has switched from using Adobe DreamWeaver to using the open source Web Content Management System (WCMS), Drupal. Drupal is significantly more user-friendly than DreamWeaver because it is web-based, so it can be edited anywhere, and designed with ease of use in mind. While a basic understanding of HTML coding makes editing easier, any user familiar with word processing software can edit the site using Drupal. DreamWeaver requires

more coding knowledge as well as an understanding of FTP (File Transfer Protocol), which can be complicated and finicky. DreamWeaver files are also centrally located on one computer, and so can only be edited from that computer. That made maintaining the site more difficult for me because I was limited in the hours that I could work on the site. Towards the end of April 2013, the permissions on my account were somehow tweaked, and I can no longer upload pictures directly to the site. I have to email them to Ricardo Mercado (the Information Systems Coordinator for CAFES) who then uploads them. This was extremely inefficient and so at the beginning of June 2013, I requested that the site be transferred to Drupal. A test site, www.ranchhorse-test.calpoly.edu, was created and ever since then I have worked almost exclusively on the test site. All the above images are from the test site. I have only updated the live site to reflect sold horses.

In early July, I requested that the site be transferred completely to Drupal, so that the test site would be live, as the current live site does not reflect the majority of the work I have done or the horses' up-to-date information. Unfortunately, it was put on the back burner over the summer and ADA compliance issues have all but stopped the migration. In recent weeks, I have been copied on emails indicating that the site is approved for migration. Hopefully, by the end of Fall Quarter 2013, it will have been transferred.

5. Expansion of the Site

One of my original goals for the project was to transition the website from being dedicated to the annual Quarter Horse sale to encompassing all aspects of the Equine Center. Because the Quarter Horse sale is only relevant for two or three months, the site languished for the rest of the year. The Equine Center always has horses of all disciplines and uses for sale, and

it would be nice to have a place to advertise them. Unfortunately, because the Quarter Horses for sale this year did not sell as anticipated, I did not start working on expanding the site over the summer. Alaina Parsons, the Equine Center supervisor, left Cal Poly prior to Fall Quarter, and I began working with the new supervisor, Natalie Baker, on the website. She has a list of horses that need to be sold and thought that the Ranch Horse website provided a good place to start. As of the beginning of November 2013, we have three additional riding horses for sale on the website. I created a new sales page that lists Two Year Old Quarter Horses, Riding Horses, and Broodmares for sale. From there, each link goes to the respective subpage. While there is more clicking for visitors, it allows for many horses to be listed in an organized fashion. Hopefully, the backbone of organization will hold for any subsequent administrators of the site.

6. Recommendations

As with any project, particularly one with as many moving parts as the Performance Horse Sales, not every goal can be met. Unfortunately, sales were not as brisk as anticipated and three of the horses remain unsold as of December 2013. Ultimately the project suffers from the same problem that plagued it in the beginning: lack of advertising. While I have significantly improved the site and made the horses more easily marketable on the web, which was my primary goal, I could not actively promote the horses without funding and support from the administration. Below are a series of recommendations that could help improve sales in future years.

1. The website should be constantly maintained and updated with current sales horses. If people learn that Cal Poly is always selling well-mannered, quality

horses, they are likely to continue using the website, which could boost sales of all types of horses. The stallion pages should also be created and maintained to establish the prestige and value of our program. In addition, adding other aspects, like the History of the Equine Center, can appeal to potential students and donors, as well as buyers. Cal Poly and the Equine Center have well-established reputations, and we need to capitalize and build upon that.

2. The site should be utilized for all aspects of the Equine Center. It can be used to promote events like a Dressage Team or Equestrian Team show or even new enterprise projects. Students should be familiar with the site, because they might network for potential buyers.
3. Alternate sources of free advertising need to be explored. While the Animal Science Department does not have a Facebook page, other Cal Poly groups do. The CAFES (College of Agriculture, Food, & Engineering Sciences) Facebook page reaches a large audience and could be used to advertise our horses. The main Cal Poly Facebook page could be used as well, particularly with the big push to promote the new Mustang mascot, who is housed at the Equine Center.
4. If there is a serious interest in maximizing advertising, the best solution would be to cross disciplines and look for a student majoring in Marketing or Agribusiness who might be interested in a senior project. They would have the marketing savvy needed to get the horses exposed to the widest audience.
5. The only way to successfully advertise these horses is to invest financially in them and pay for advertising in magazines and websites. Also, creating an

advertising campaign for Backdoor Cat would promote the program and his offspring.

6. An alternative method of advertising would be physically taking the horses to local sales or competitions and futurities, as Cal Poly had done in the past. Although it might be difficult to get any Cal Poly horses entered, the Flying T Cattle Company/Madonna Inn Quarter Horses and the Main Event Horse Auction hosted by Rick Machado are both huge annual sales that offer potential. If the Equine Center is truly interested in selling their horses, they need to be open to alternative solutions.
7. My final recommendation is to start looking for a trustworthy and competent student to replace me on the Performance Horse Sales site because I will be graduating in Spring 2014. While a Graphic Communications or even an Agribusiness student might be more tech and marketing savvy, I think an Animal Science student's intrinsic understanding of the program is more valuable to the overall project. Having a student who can handle the minutia of web maintenance relieves some of the pressure on the Animal Science faculty who are ultimately responsible for the project.