

HEAVENLY PASTURES

Exploring Paradise on Horseback
at the Santa Lucia Preserve

BY BRETT WILBUR



The Hacienda at the Santa Lucia Preserve. For over 100 years, visitors have enjoyed the property for equestrian, dining and cultural events.





Clayton Edsall and Bet He Sparks aka “Sparky” in the rein work portion of the NRCHA Derby Finals in Paso Robles, California.

Traveling up Rancho San Carlos Road from the bottom, at the gates of the privately owned Santa Lucia Preserve, one passes through stunning scenery: mountain views, meadows and Redwood groves. Eight miles up, the Santa Lucia Preserve Equestrian Center is set in fields dotted by poppies and lupines. Horses graze peacefully in pastures or rest in the pristine barns.

Equestrian Center Manager Chelsea Edsall explains, “Some Preserve members are at the barn every day, or close to it, taking care of their own horses, and we fill in when needed. We have several members who may be here part-time or just for a season, so we provide the daily care, the riding and any specific needs they have for their horses.”

The appropriate staff are trained to work with each breed, including reined cow horses, hunter jumpers, Friesians, ponies, Quarter horses, Paso Finos, Tennessee Walkers, warmbloods, and more. The Preserve Equestrian Center manages all the horses’ vet records, vaccines and their daily grooming, and also provides turn out to pasture every day.

“We make sure, when their owners arrive back to the Preserve and they want to enjoy their horse on the trails, that they are ready, in shape and healthy in body and in mind,” Edsall says.

Edsall met her husband, famous horseman Clayton Edsall, through her job at the Preserve, after one of her former trainers went to work for Clayton.

“Clayton came up to the Preserve while he was in town performing at the Salinas Rodeo and I was learning to rope at the time,” Chelsea says. “I found a rope in one of the tack rooms and it was old and hard and kind of warped. He came up here and he’s like, ‘That’s the rope you’re trying to learn with?’... Three days later, a

Photo: Suzanne Sylvester



Clayton Edsall giving Metallic Train (owned by Beverly Servi) a rewarding pat during the NRCHA World Greatest Horseman Preliminaries in Fort Worth, Texas.

brand-new rope showed up at my doorstep with a note that said, 'I'd love to teach you how to rope.' I decided, 'I definitely want to go on a date with this guy!'"

Since those days, the couple has gotten married and has two young children, who they take on the road with them while Clayton is competing in horse shows and/or conducting clinics. Clayton grew up on a ranch in Sheridan, Montana, participating in horsemanship clinics

(Above) The Edsall Family—Chelsea, Weston, Rylee and Clayton—at the Santa Lucia Preserve. (Below) The San Francisquito flat at the Preserve.



Photo: Christina Fischer





Photo: Elizabeth Hay

as a young child and selling home-baked cinnamon rolls.

"My family has used horses for ranch work their whole lives," he says. "I grew up being a part of gathering, branding and doctoring cattle on our ranch. Later on, we got more interested in the horsemanship aspect of things and began to ride, train and start horses for the public."

A major highlight for the couple was when they both won titles on a horse that Chelsea describes as "quirky;" a horse who Clayton trained and has now amassed over \$130,000 in earnings.

The popularity of the American West and the cowboy lifestyle resonates with many, including people around the world.

"A career highlight for me was winning the World's Greatest Horseman at the National Reined Cow Horse Association competition in 2016," Clayton says. "Skeets Oak Peppy, or 'Sly,' is a gelding that I bought as a yearling and trained. I also got to watch Chelsea show him the next couple years and win a World Championship on him too."

Chelsea shares that she was shocked when she made it to the finals and won in the NRCHA non-pro category.

"It was the best feeling, and my family and some Preserve members were there," she says. "The Preserve completely supported me. It was perfect. I haven't showed since! I'm like, 'I won the world...I'm done!'"

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Photo: Primo Morales

(Above) The Edsalls with Bet He Sparks and owner, Kathryn Phillips. (Below) Edsall clinching the NRCHA Hackamore Classic Championship in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Photo: LC Lambrecht

The Santa Lucia Preserve is a 20,000-acre luxury community centered around nature conservation. 18,000 of those acres are protected by a land trust. A golf course, equestrian center, pool, trails and more provide for outdoor recreation.

"I've had the opportunity to travel overseas to conduct clinics and help people with their horses," Clayton shares. "What I noticed in Europe was that the opportunity to ride out in wide open spaces was not very accessible, and the sense of freedom that the American West and being a cowboy portrays is easy to fantasize about—saddling a good horse and riding off into the sunset."

"Taylor Sheridan, a member of the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame, and co-creator of the hit TV series 'Yellowstone' has brought a lot of

awareness to the cow horse and Western industries," Chelsea adds.

At the Santa Lucia Preserve, Chelsea organizes a variety of clinics for members, that are led by world champion trainers and clinicians, including some run by Clayton himself. Equestrian camps for youth members go throughout the summer, while adult member programming includes ride and dine events and an annual Fandango with a barn dance.

"I think it's so important to recognize

cowboy history and that's another reason that the Preserve is so special," Chelsea says. "As an original Spanish land grant, there's no better place to showcase vaquero traditions. The Preserve is heaven on earth for horses and people."

For more information about the Santa Lucia Preserve, visit www.santaluciapreserve.com or call 831/620-6700. For more information on Clayton Edsall, visit www.edsallhorses.com or, on social media, @edsallperformancehorses. ■