

# Dauntless



*Montana cowgirl*

*Gary Lynn Olson*

*has never backed*

*down from a challenge.*

Gary Lynn Olson and Light N Luce

**By Larri Jo Starkey**

AT 5, GARY LYNN OLSON WAS IN A PASTURE on the back of a half-wild runaway pony.

At 12, Gary Lynn Olson was in the show ring on the back of a half-crazy Morgan.

At 35, Gary Lynn Olson was going down the fence against the pros at the AQHA World Championship Show.

Fear has never been part of this cow-girl's life, and it certainly didn't enter her mind when she turned 50.

## Half-Crazy Ponies

GARY LYNN AND HER PARENTS, DICK AND Margaret Olson, lived in the city.

"We had friends who lived on the outskirts of town who had horses," Gary Lynn remembers. "They'd set me on a horse at 3 or 4 years old. Big, expensive mistake, there. That led to me hounding my parents for a horse. I was about 5, and we found a half-Welsh, half-Shetland pony."

The family loaded the bay into a pickup with a homemade stock rack in the back and trundled him home. "Trigger" ran off with Gary Lynn a few times before a stern intervention from her dad made the pony a more amiable companion.

"That was my first horse – a rotten little pony," Gary Lynn says. "It was my thrill of the year to ride in the rodeo parade in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, on Labor Day."

Her next mount wasn't much better.

"I started showing in open shows when I was 9 years old on a Morgan," Gary Lynn says. "She was crazy. I don't know what else to call her. I have home movies from one of those first years on her, and when I watched them, I had the reaction, 'If I didn't know it was me, I'd think, 'What the heck are her parents thinking?' ' (The mare) was spooking and running sideways and backwards, spinning and trying to leave.

"I probably have her to thank for learning how to get along with difficult horses."

Dick and Margaret supported their daughter's passion for horses – even the difficult ones.

"Neither were very horsey people, but once I started showing, they were all in," Gary Lynn says. "We sold our cabin in the mountains and just went to horse shows every summer. Dad had ridden some as a kid, so he was my groom, but Mom was always scared of horses."

As Gary Lynn continued to show, she noticed that "those horses with the big rear ends were winning all the western classes."

So her parents bought Dakota Flyer, her first American Quarter Horse. He was a 1966 dun gelding by Ignition and out of Dakota Blossom by Hickory McCue. He was bred by Cathy Cooper, now of Mesquite, Texas, but back then from Montana.

"He was unbroken, at 4 years old, but you could jump on him bareback in a halter," Gary Lynn remembers. "A very kind horse, just like his dam."

Gary Lynn did everything on him.



Many open shows had combination English-western classes that required a quick change. Dick and Margaret Olson were Gary Lynn's helpers. "We were pros at quick changes. Better than a NASCAR pit crew," Gary Lynn says.



Gary Lynn's first Quarter Horse, Dakota Flyer, went with ease from English to trail. "His form was always way better than mine," Gary Lynn says.

COURTESY OF GARY LYNN OLSON

COURTESY OF GARY LYNN OLSON

“Pleasure, trail, horsemanship, jumpers, hunters,” she says. “We still did the open shows and showed in Quarter Horse, too. He was amazing. He wasn’t a big horse, but he could jump so big. He was a perfect kid’s horse.”

Gary Lynn’s next Quarter Horse was Ivanhoe Skip Bob, aka “Power.”

“He was ahead of his time, especially for Montana, because he was so big at 16.2,” she says. “He was strictly shown in western in California open shows before I got him.”

Once again, Gary Lynn did everything on the 1968 black gelding by Skip Beau and out of Ivanhoe Betsy by Brown Bob. He was bred by the Ivanhoe Ranch of El Cajon, California.

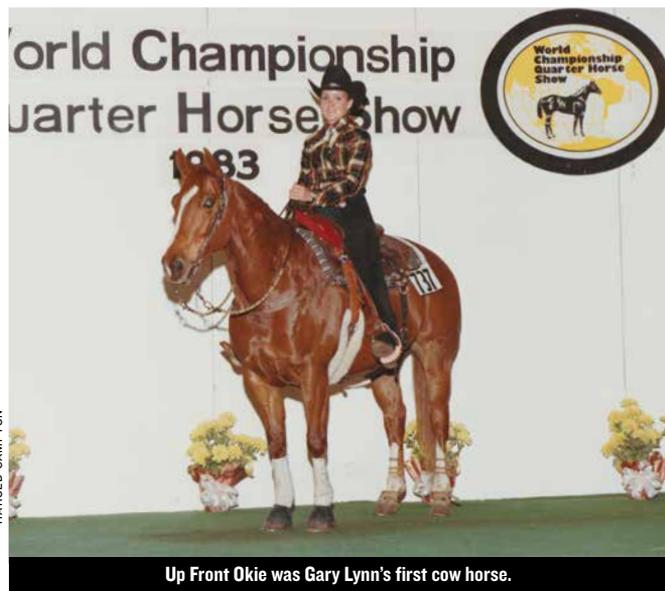
“He was my graduation present,” Gary Lynn says. “He was the horse that made me aware that I could maybe go show out of state. I could change leads literally every other stride. He was so cool.”

In 1978, Gary Lynn and Ivanhoe Skip Bob were ninth at the World Show in senior hunter under saddle – a class then known as bridle path hack. They also earned Superiors in western pleasure and hunter under saddle.

## Down the Fence

GARY LYNN LEARNED HOW TO ROPE, GAVE LESSONS, GOT HER judge’s card, got married, rode a few cutters, trained a few horses and continued improving her horsemanship.

Then she learned to go down the fence in working cow horse, a class that calls for speed and complete trust in a horse. The fearlessness that it demands was a perfect fit for Gary Lynn.



Up Front Okie was Gary Lynn’s first cow horse.

HAROLD CAMPTON

## MONEY EARNED\*

Up Front Okie	\$780
Justa Nutha Tucker	\$13,743
Smart Little Scamp	\$45,598
Kai Bar Fletch	\$16,588
Purple Lights	\$16,303
Light N Luce	\$571

\*earnings from AQHA’s Robin Glenn Pedigrees

“I had decided I wanted a stock horse, as they were called back then, mainly for reining, not thinking at all about the cow work,” she says. “I had qualified for the AHSA Stock Seat Medal class on Ivanhoe Skip Bob in 1975. The California trainer of Power, Scott Nicolaides, arranged for me to lease a horse to show at the Santa Barbara National Amateur Show, a horse that was trained by Jack and Linda Baker of California. I had a blast on that horse and was totally hooked.”

The late Barney Hinds, an AQHA trainer and judge, sold Gary Lynn Up Front Okie, a 1973 sorrel gelding by Okie Leo and out of McCue’s Bee by McCue Bee Line. He was bred by Peggy Frank of Shidler, Oklahoma, and he was a touchy, athletic horse.

“‘Up Front’ turned out to be one of the coolest horses I’ve ever owned,” she says. “I finally got the hang of the cow horse class the summer of 1978 when I went to a circuit in British Columbia.”

There, she worked with Gary Cunningham on a mechanical cow – the one she still uses today – and suddenly the process clicked for her. The challenges of working cow horse suited Gary Lynn, and a little frustration made the class even more enticing.

“Up Front was the horse that I repeatedly took to the World Show, trying to make the finals in senior working cow horse,” she says. “I finally was reserve world champion on him in 1983. I met a lot of great Quarter Horse people because of Up Front.”

## Enter Benny Guitron

IN 1992, A TORN ACL LEFT GARY LYNN UNABLE TO RIDE TWO geldings she had bred and wanted to get started.

“I’d kind of known Benny Guitron for years – I’d known who he was, and he had come to our house for a clinic once,” she says.

She phoned the legendary horseman and asked him to ride the geldings until she could get back in the saddle.

“We took them down there and stayed a day or two,” she says. “Before we left, we had traded the two geldings for a cow horse mare named Sons Appetizer. That’s so typical of Benny because he loved to trade.”

Sons Appetizer was a 1989 bay mare by Sons Margin Call and out of the Benito San mare San Dab. She was bred by Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Cooke of Paso Robles, California, and after her show career was done, she became part of Gary Lynn’s broodmare band.

But more than that, the trade for Sons Appetizer was the first time Benny and Gary Lynn did business. It wouldn’t be the last. He became her mentor in working cow horse and her frequent partner in the trades, swaps and deals he loved to broker.

He also was responsible for finding the horses that Gary Lynn has had the most success on – and he wasn’t afraid to mount her on tough ones.

“He was really good at watching a person, at figuring out what kind of horse would suit them,” Gary Lynn says ruefully. “I remember saying, ‘Maybe if you run across one who’s a little quieter, that would be kind of fun.’”

Benny ignored that plea. He knew she was cowgirl enough to handle whatever horse she was on. First up was Justa Nutha Tucker, a gray Doc Tom Tucker gelding who was supposed to be a heel horse.

“If somebody said, ‘You’ll never get that horse to do that,’ it’d be ‘game on,’” Gary Lynn says. “Benny would do a lot of stuff by just walking around and sitting on horses, taking his time and messing with them, accomplishing a lot when it didn’t look like he was doing a whole lot.”

At 5, "Tucker" was a failed reiner, still in a snaffle bit, Gary Lynn says, but Benny took him through two-rein training and got him broke. Gary Lynn still had plenty to do, though.

"He was fun and would do brilliant things that would keep me encouraged," Gary Lynn says. "I think I showed him five years before he settled down."

In 2004, they were the world champions in amateur working cow horse.

"I was just kind of shocked when he won," she says.

It wasn't a fluke. He won two Select world championships and a Select reserve world championship before he retired on Gary Lynn's place.

"He's 23 and he's mellower. I give him a spa day every now and then," she says fondly. "He's sound enough to ride, but I would still long for him before I got on him, because he's always so devious about making you think he's going to buck."

## The Quiet Time

IN 1995, DICK OLSON DIED. A FEW MONTHS LATER, MARGARET Olson died while she and Gary Lynn were at the World Show.

Stunned, Gary Lynn returned home to Great Falls, Montana, and took over the family's construction and property-rental business. She let her judge's card lapse. She got a divorce. She re-evaluated her life.

What she didn't do was give up her horses. She stayed out of competition long enough to become an amateur again.

"While I was waiting out my five years, I said to J.D. Yates, 'I'd really love to have a great calf horse, and you could show him. It'd be fun for me to own him. What else am I going to do right now?'" she says. "He had this one cool big horse – great team roping horse – and he ended up winning the all-around one year for me."

In 2000, Zans Tyree was the year-end all-around horse, all-around senior horse and high-point heading horse – among many other honors. The 1994 buckskin gelding is by Zan Parr Eagle and out of Tyrees Patsy by Tyrees Watch.

"It was a fun experience," Gary Lynn says. "When he was done, he got a great home with Mike Wallace (of Los Angeles)."

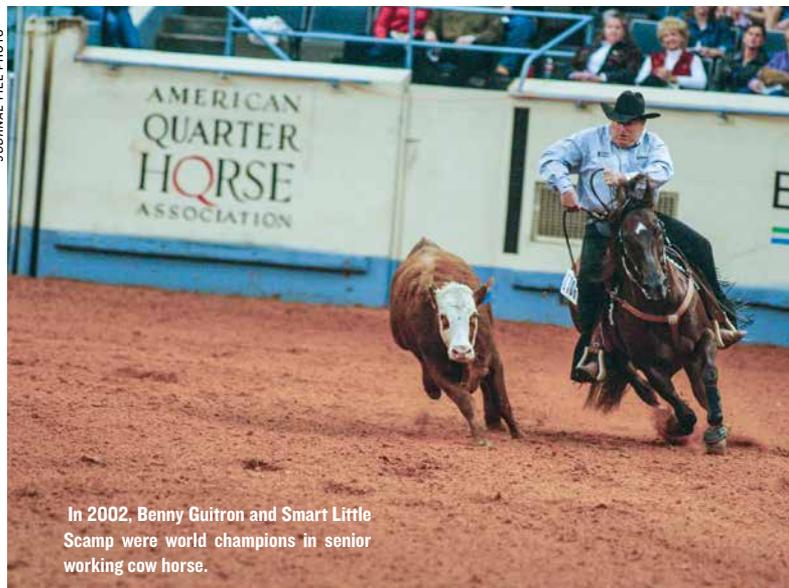
## Smart Little Scamp

A COUPLE OF YEARS AFTER BENNY FOUND TUCKER FOR GARY Lynn, he called again.

"He said, 'I don't know how your financial situation is, but Smart Little Scamp is for sale, and you need to buy him,'" she says.

Smart Little Scamp, a 1990 chestnut gelding, was by Smart Little Lena and out of Pop A Doc Again by Colonel Freckles. He was bred by George and Juanita Garrett of Allen, Texas, and Debra and Dorn Parkinson owned him at the time. He had earnings in National Cutting Horse Association, National Reining Horse Association and the National Reined Cow Horse Association. In 1998, he was AQHA world champion in senior working cow horse with AQHA Professional Horseman Todd Crawford.

He was as close to perfect a cow horse as an amateur could want. Gary Lynn bought him, and he was a strong contrast to Tucker.



In 2002, Benny Guitron and Smart Little Scamp were world champions in senior working cow horse.

Zans Tyree turns a steer with AQHA Professional Horseman J.D. Yates in the saddle.



COURTESY OF GARY LYNN OLSON

# CHAMPIONSHIP STREAK

Since 2007, when Gary Lynn Olson first became eligible, she has been world champion or reserve world champion in working cow horse at the Adequan® Select World Championship Show.

Year	Horse	Place
2007	Justa Nutha Tucker	world champion
2008	Smart Little Scamp	world champion
2009	Justa Nutha Tucker	world champion
2010	Kai Bar Fletch	reserve world champion
2011	Justa Nutha Tucker	reserve world champion
2012	Kai Bar Fletch	world champion
2013	Purple Lights	reserve world champion
2014	Kai Bar Fletch	reserve world champion
2015	Kai Bar Fletch	world champion
2016	Purple Lights	world champion
2017	Light N Luce	reserve world champion

“When I showed them at the same time, it was like polar opposites,” she says. “One was laid back and easy, and one was lit up like a Molotov cocktail all the time.”

In 2002, “Sam” was AQHA world champion in senior working cow horse with Benny, and in 2003, he and Gary Lynn were reserve world champions in amateur working cow horse. They were Select world champions together in 2008.

“He was so cool,” Gary Lynn says. “He wasn’t a real lovey-dovey horse, but he was easy to maintain, to show, to be around, and he was practically perfect. I had him until last October. He was one of those chubby horses that developed Cushing’s syndrome really fast.”

He’s buried on Gary Lynn’s farm.

While Sam enjoyed his retirement, Gary Lynn kept showing Tucker. In the meantime, Benny had found her two more horses.

## Purple Lights and Kai Bar Fletch

“THE MORGAN MARE WAS A GOOD PREP FOR ‘TUCKER,’ ” GARY Lynn says. “Tucker was good prep for Purple Lights.”

Purple Lights, a 2004 bay mare by Smart Little Pistol and out of Oak N Starlight by Grays Starlight, was bred by Ronald Knutson of Spokane, Washington.

“The first time I got on her, she tried to run off,” Gary Lynn says.

Benny worked his magic on the mare, but she remained a tough ride.

“She’s as touchy as they come,” Gary Lynn said in 2016 after their Select world championship. “She’s been described as a hummingbird on meth. Really really fun to show.”

When Purple Lights gets cow-fresh, Gary Lynn says, she becomes even more athletic.

“I worked cattle out of the herd on her last October at Benny’s,” Gary Lynn says. “She’ll run across and stop one, and then she turns and leaps through the air. I was laughing so hard, I couldn’t even get after her, because she was trying so hard.”



Purple Lights was the Select world champion in working cow horse in 2016.

In recent years, Gary Lynn has also been riding Kai Bar Fletch, a 2000 chestnut gelding by Tanyas Kai Bar out of the Jae Bar Fletch mare Sheza Jae Bar. “Fletch” was bred by Jeanne M. Duffy of Kailua, Hawaii.

Riding him was almost a return to riding Sam – Benny’s answer to Gary Lynn’s plea for a quieter horse.

“‘Fletch’ is the reason I had to go to the gym,” Gary Lynn says. “You needed to get your cardio endurance up with him. If you want to run a fast circle, you have to *make* him run a fast circle. As soon as you take your legs off, he sits back and wants to quit. Those higher, crazier ones are easier to show.”

Despite being laid back, Fletch is still an athlete with some tricky surprises.

“The first time I showed him at Paso Robles, the first turn down the fence was a left turn, and we were hauling,” she says. “He shut down and turned that cow, and I was grabbing anything I could find to stay on. (Trainer) Corey Cushing was at the rail yelling, ‘Stay in the buggy!’ I’m like, ‘I’m trying!’ ”

## Select World

BEFORE GARY LYNN TURNED 50, BENNY JUDGED THE SELECT World and told Gary Lynn that she should think about showing there one day.

“He said, ‘It’s kind of a cool show and a good arena,’ ” she says. “My whole thought was that I could go to that and then to the World Show on a different horse. I still have that mentality that I’d like to do it all.”

She went to her first Select World in 2007, and in 2012, she almost did have it all. She was Select world champion on Kai Bar Fletch and amateur reserve world champion on Chey Little Sister in November that year.

“That first year in Amarillo, every afternoon, we’d be sit-

# 30-YEAR BREEDER

ting up in the bar, watching some of the classes,” she says. “It’s more laid back. Sign me up! I’ve always really enjoyed it, and I’ve gotten pretty good luck there.”

Since 2007, Gary Lynn has been world champion or reserve world champion every year.

In 2016, Benny had been ill with cancer, but he traveled with Gary Lynn to Amarillo, getting around in a golf cart well enough to cheer her on as she won the working cow horse Select world championship on Purple Lights.

“That 2016 Select World was such a joint effort, with so many of Benny’s friends,” she says. “Billy Arthur was working for him then, and Gary and Kelley Roberts arranged for their employee, Emma Bates, to drive the horses out to Amarillo with Benny riding shotgun. That show took a village.”

Benny died in December, leaving Gary Lynn reeling. She almost didn’t return to the 2017 Select World, but made the decision to compete on her homebred Light N Luce, a 2006 bay gelding by Light N Fine and out of Im On The Luc by Doctors Kit.

“He’s got this really cool disposition, and he’s cute,” Gary Lynn says. “I’m just having fun doing some ranch riding, which he hasn’t done a whole bunch of. He’s green enough that when I take him to a show, he still looks around, and he’s 11.”

In Amarillo, the green horse came through. Gary Lynn and “Romeo” were the 2017 Select reserve world champions in working cow horse.

At 60, Gary Lynn Olson is still going down the fence and winning fearlessly. 🐾

---

*Larri Jo Starkey is senior editor of The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to [lstarkey@aqha.org](mailto:lstarkey@aqha.org).*

**Gary Lynn Olson became a 30-year cumulative breeder in 2014.**

**Picking crosses was a hobby she shared with the late Benny Guitron.**

**“He was such a walking encyclopedia of horse pedigrees,” she says. “He always picked the stallions for my mares. He often got free breedings from stallion owners who respected him as a horseman. The babies my mares have produced since they were at Benny’s always found a spot. Even if they didn’t work for me, they would make something.”**

**In all, Gary Lynn has bred the earners of 579.5 points, including the 2017 Select reserve world champion, Light N Luce, a 2006 bay gelding by Light N Fine and out of Im On The Luc by Doctors Kit.**

**“I think it’s pretty cool that I am the breeder, owner and exhibitor of Romeo,” she says. “Benny always said there was a job for every horse, and we just had to figure out what that was. He was the most positive, optimistic person about horses that I’ve ever known.”**



**This year, Gary Lynn was Select reserve world champion with her homebred gelding Light N Luce.**

JOURNAL PHOTO



**At home in Great Falls, Montana, Gary Lynn works over poles for ranch riding.**

NICOLE POYO