



# THE HOME PLACE

## Larson Ranch, LLC: Five generations working together

By Kendra Paulton

Audie Larson and his family are no strangers to the hard work, dedication, and teamwork it takes to operate a ranch on the rolling prairies and river breaks of south central South Dakota. Audie is a fourth generation cattle and horse rancher, raising up a fifth generation close behind.

The Larson Family Ranch is located near Hamill, S.D., a tiny town of a population of only 15 people, two churches, a post office, and a rodeo arena. Though it is a small town, its community with the surrounding rural residents makes Hamill a special place to live, Audie says. "If somebody needs something the whole community really rallies to it."

The ranch is located on the south side of the White River in Tripp and Lyman counties, boasting approximately 25-30 miles of river frontage plus acres of river breaks above the White River/Missouri River. It includes miles of native grass interspersed with cropland and food plots for wildlife to winter on.

### A family heritage along the White River

Both sets of Audie's great-great grandparents, Nels and Sena Larsen; and Andrew and Mary Larson; moved to the wide open spaces of South Dakota from Minnesota and Nebraska, respectively, in 1909, staking their claim and building their homesteads, one of which still stands on the ranch today.

The ranch has stayed in the Larson family through the generations. Today, the 20,000+ acre ranch is home to Audie's parents, Darrell and Fran; Audie and his wife Holly, along with their son Jesse (10) and daughter Kaylea (21) who recently married Shay Littau.



Part of the Larson Crew

Also on the ranch are: Audie's siblings, Monty and Vickie (and husband Joel Stuart) and their families; as well as their cousin, Dennis. This driven family works together every single day to operate a ranch that is much more than first meets the eye.

### Beef, it's what's for dinner

The Larson family maintains a herd of 570 registered cattle, mainly Black Angus and Charolais. They also raise registered Simmental, Short Horn, Red Angus, and Maine Anjou cattle for their annual bull sale each February. The operation also supports a herd of 150 commercial cattle, 100 fall cows, and 800 bred heifers for resale.

"We always try to buy our customer's calves back," Audie explained. "It really makes for a

good herd."

"We have had some of the same customers since 1969. They will call us and say, 'Save me 25 heifers out of this group' and then come and pick them up without hardly even looking at them."

And for good reason. In the little bit of cattle showing the Larson's have done at Rapid City, various county fairs, and a few others, the Larson cattle have placed high. For example, Jesse and Kaylea have won Champion Beef Showmanship each year they have been in 4-H.

One year a neighbor borrowed a Short Horn heifer and took third place at Junior Nationals in Grand Island, Neb. In 2012, one of the Larson's Maine Anjou bulls was Champion at the South Dakota State Fair.

That same year, the Larsons showed one of

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their Charolais heifers and within 10 months she had won enough points that nobody could catch her. She claimed the title of the high point Charolais bred heifer in the state of South Dakota that year.

### The right equines for the job

Naturally all of this cattle work requires excellent equine partners. The horse program on the Larson Family Ranch has been an integral part of their operation since the ranch was homesteaded.

The Larson family knows the need of breeding and raising horses that are versatile enough to be used on the ranch and in the arena. They stress great dispositions, athleticism, excellent minds, while still making top quality confirmation and breeding a priority.

"Our horses are cowy, willing to learn, have great depth, good bone, and good wind," Audie said. "They don't play out on a guy. You get on them in the morning and they're still going in the afternoon."

Kaylea and Shay, both certified equine massage therapists, break in the colts. Jeff Schonenbaum (Bonesteel, S.D.) puts 30 days on a lot of the colts, and then the Larsons use the horses on the ranch to finish them out. Audie also noted his wife's special contribution to the training of their horses.

"My wife [Holly] is really good at working with the colts," Audie said. "She's great at catching them, picking up their feet, and gentling them down."

### AHL Firewater and Ice

The Larson Family Ranch is now home to over 80 horses which includes two studs, a Dash for Cash grandson and a 2007 Palomino stallion named AHL Firewater And Ice, or Shilo for short.

Shilo was born and raised on the ranch and was proven as an excellent working ranch horse before they decided to try him out in the competitive roping and barrel racing world. Currently Shilo is in Oklahoma, being raced by cowgirl Jennalee Thompson.

A full brother to Shilo, as well as four full sisters, are used on the ranch currently.

The family raises all AQHA registered horses, the mares going back to Paprika Pine, Frenchmans Guy, Sun Frost, Poco, and Snippy's Cowboy.

"I did buy two Thoroughbreds a couple of months ago," Audie admitted as he chuckled. "My kids thought I was nuts. They go back to Unbridled and have pretty good bloodlines. This guy needed some money, and we made a good deal. I told my kids, 'Well, you gotta take a chance, you might stumble on something good.'"

Audie says that the AHL Firewater horses are really quiet. "Two years ago at a play day at the arena [in Hamill], I noticed a little girl having trouble with her horse, so I loaned her a five-year-old filly to try out. I haven't gotten it back yet."

Audie also noted that his mother likes to ride an AHL Firewater horse that his 21-year-old daughter currently runs barrels on. Growing up, Kaylea qualified in the state high school finals four years and in the state 4-H finals nearly every single year. She has claimed the title of Champion Horse Showmanship on county level as well.

She won "quite a little" on her family-raised American Quarter Horses in goat tying, breakaway roping, and barrel racing. She continues to compete in roping and barrel racing now.

Kaylea isn't the only rodeo-goer in the family. Audie and his siblings grew up rodeoing, with both he and his brother Monty staying in the money in the SDRA in saddle

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Moving cattle on the Larson Ranch.



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bronc and roping. In fact, Audie met his wife Holly at the White River Frontier Days Rodeo before getting married in 1991.

Their son Jesse enjoys many facets of cattle showing and rodeoing, including the flag race, breakaway roping, goat tying, and his favorite: bull riding, which he began when he was only nine-years-old.

"I asked Jesse one time, 'For every event at a rodeo there is a purpose on the ranch,'" Audie said. "But what in the world is the purpose of bull riding?"

"Jesse thought about it for a minute and said, 'Well dad if I'm out in the pasture and my horse goes lame, I can just ride one of the bulls home!' I guess you can't argue with logic like that," Audie chuckled.

### Diversification on the Ranch

Because raising registered

cattle and quality equines is not enough to keep the Larson family busy, they also open their ranch to hundreds of hunters every year for turkey, pheasant, prairie chicken, deer, fishing, and coyote hunting.

For decades, the Larson Ranch has promoted the necessity of conservation of natural habitat and care of the wildlife. In 1982 they started a subsidiary "White River Sportsman, Inc." They have been honored to receive numerous stewardship awards.

"We have our pastures on a seven or eight year rotation," said Audie, "leaving some lay idle for a year. We leave a lot of food plots plus feed them if it gets real bad weather. We even have certain pastures that we don't allow hunting in so the wildlife has a place to escape to."

Since 1981, the Larsons have worked with the South Dakota Governor's Hunt hosting groups and enjoying excellent success each fall. Private hunts for handicapped have also been hosted.



Kaylea (Larson) Littau

"We get a lot of city folk [out to the ranch]," Audie said. "Sometimes they're just amazed. They can't believe [where we live]."

"One time a guy came out to go hunting, and he came in that night and told me, 'Audie, I done something today I've never did. I heard nothing.'"

The Larsons don't have lodging on their property for all of these visitors, but Audie says they are always welcome to come to their personal house and have lunch afterwards.

"My wife, mother, sister do the cooking for the hunting operation," he explained. "I can't remember the last time Mom didn't have somebody extra for dinner."

It is this kind of hospitality and friendship that has brought back some of the same visitors and friends for over 30 years. Through simple word-of-mouth, the Larson Ranch has hosted hunts, camping, and simple getaways for people

from all walks of life and all over the world, including visitors from Russia, Japan, South Africa, Kazakhstan, and Mexico.


"It's so neat because we don't have the opportunities to go those places," Audie said. "It gives us the opportunity to learn about their cultures."

### Blessed by the Creator

The Larson family walks through faith each and every day on the ranch they call home. "The Lord has truly blessed us with an opportunity to be stewards of a little piece of His Creation," Audie said.

"We feel we have an obligation to leave the land and livestock better than when we started, and to make each person we meet a little better than before we met."

For more information on the Larson Family Ranch, visit [www.larsonranchllc.com](http://www.larsonranchllc.com), or check them out on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/larsonranchllc](http://www.facebook.com/larsonranchllc).




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