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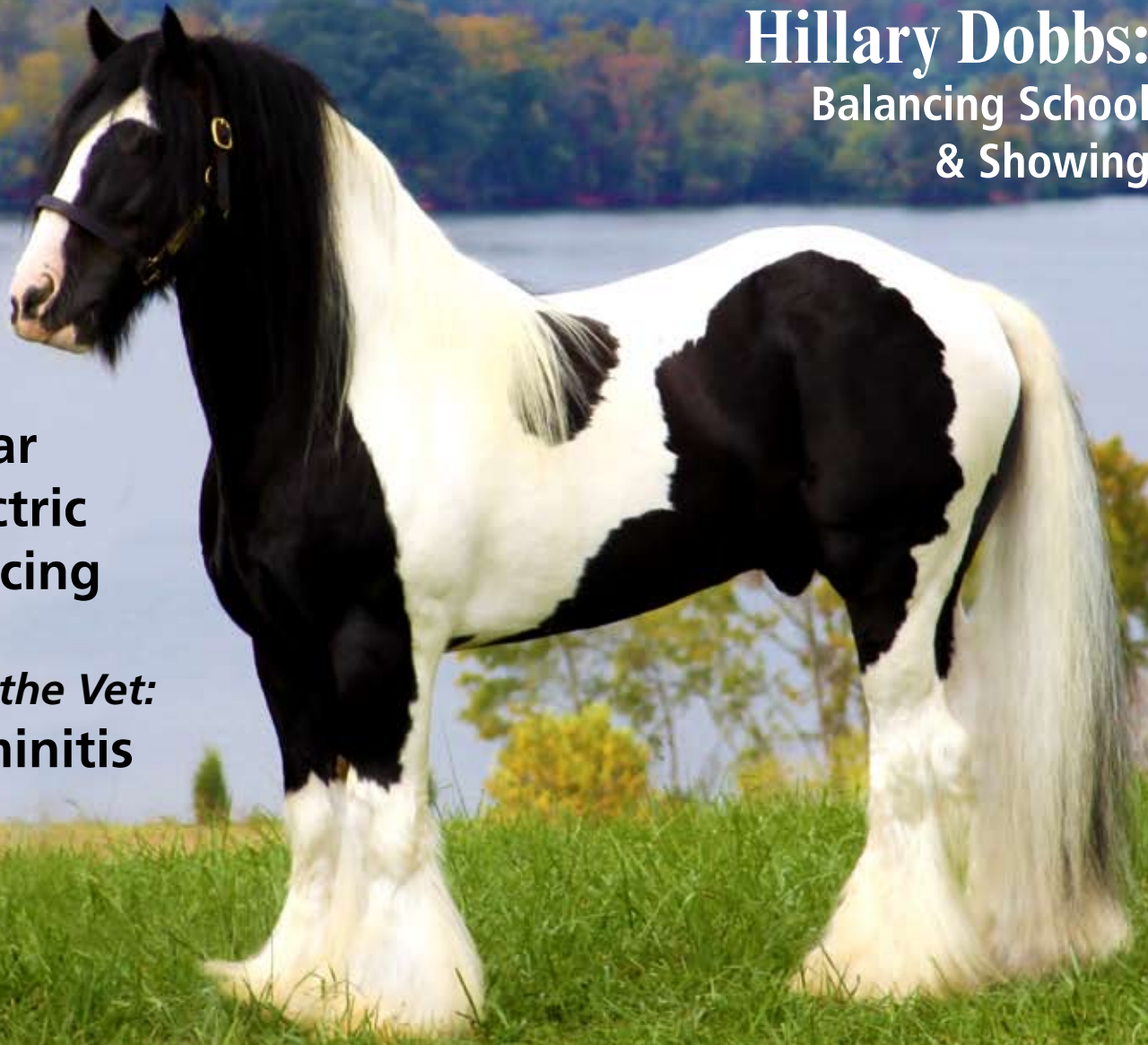
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# LEXLIN

## GYPSY RANCH

*Rockwood, Tennessee*

*By Pat Muccigrosso*



**Mechelle Barton, legendary Gypsy breeder and trainer Tom Price, and Eric Barton.**

Just two years ago there was no LexLin Ranch, no stable filled with the top Gypsy Vanner stallions and broodmares in the world. No fences, no breeder, no operations manager – nothing but an old barn built in 1932 and a dream – Mechelle and Eric Barton’s dream.

A captain in the Marine Corp, a veteran of three overseas tours of duty and almost as many years as a contractor protecting troops at war, Eric Barton spent most of his adult life far away from his wife and five children, in countries most people only read about in newspapers. When he knew he was coming home, Barton and his wife, Mechelle, and their five children set out to fulfill their lifelong dream of owning and breeding horses, but not just any horses – Gypsy Vanners.

It is rare when a dream comes true, even rarer when the dream unfolds, full-blown in less than two years. That is how LexLin Ranch came into existence. Diving into the world of Gypsy Vanners, this Tennessee couple has done everything right, starting with research. “I was so fortunate to go over to Wales before we purchased too many horses, meet Tom Price and learn from him about the breed, about the confirmation, and how he breeds,” explains Mechelle. “I also got to go to Appleby and learn about the absolutely amazing heritage of these horses.”

“We traveled. My wife went to Appleby. We went to Germany and all over the United States to several reputable breeders,” adds Eric. “We were trying to figure out if they (the breeders) could choose any horse, what horse would they

want? What is considered the royalty of this breed?”

Consistently, two horses came out at the top of the list: The Producer and The Midget. The Bartons’ journey to find the best Gypsy Vanners – best conformation, best lineage, best temperament – ended back in the same paddocks where they began, those of legendary breeder and trainer, Tom Price. Price owned both of these stallions, two of the most sought after by all other Gypsy breeders. The Bartons bought The Producer and the Midget, shipping them to Tennessee and their new home at LexLin Gypsy Ranch. “They are foundation stock, with foals in several registries and found in several breeding operations,” says Eric.

With two of the best Gypsy Vanner stallions in the world

now living in their barn, the Bartons began shopping for broodmares. As with their stallions, only the top stock available made the trip to LexLin Ranch. "We went around and tried to find those horses that had proven lineage, the proven look and proven foals, and went from there," says Eric. "If you look at them – Linney's Girl, Savannah Bay, The Bull Mare – and look at the lineage, these are the right broodmares, the right combination, the right lines."

But the Bartons are taking one more step to make sure that what they own and what they sell are truly the best. They are doing DNA testing on their breeding stock. "If I say the horse is 'this,' I want to know it is. I want to be sure that what I am saying is correct," explains Eric. "We just want to do it right. If you buy from us, we guarantee what you are buying."

"The DNA, the lineage is something I feel very strongly about," agrees Mechelle. "We want to have the accurate lineage on the horses. I really think that this is what is going to solidify the breed in North America."

Up until September of 2009, the Bartons put a great deal of effort and money into this enterprise, trying to get the business off the ground quickly. In contrast, Eric says, "...we are going to sell our horses slowly. Our concern is not to sell a horse anytime soon. I think in the next three to five years we can really have something here, but we aren't looking to make money on this breed."

After investing millions of dollars in the business over the last six months, Eric Barton's approach is extraordinary. But his statement that he will not be forced to sell a horse to

pay a bill comes from a brush with financial disaster that he is not likely to forget. Just five years ago, the Bartons were in debt, a lot of debt, and living on credit cards like many people in the United States. Eric had spent his life in the Marine Corp as an Intelligence Officer, and he decided to go back to what he knew best but this time, as a contractor. Today, he and his family are debt free, freedom he paid for literally, with more years away from his loved ones. Now he and his wife are living their dream.

"It has just been an amazing dream. I am very conscious of it, my wife is very conscious of it. We understand that we are atypical in some regard, but we remember where we came from, and we want to make this a fun endeavor that we do with the family."

"I have to pinch myself sometimes. It is just beautiful," Mechelle adds. "We have the water right by us, the green pastures, the horses running in the fields. It is more than a dream. It is just breathtaking."

From buying the ranch just outside of Knoxville, to hiring key staff members, to finding and buying world-class stock, the Bartons have laid the foundation for becoming one of the top Gypsy Vanner breeding operations in the world. For this young couple and their five children, LexLin is more than a business; it is the fulfillment of every horse lover's dream.

To learn more about LexLin Ranch and its lovely horses, visit [www.gogypsy.com](http://www.gogypsy.com). ■