

Cielo Celeste Farm

Santa Ynez, California

By Laura Albrecht

Cielo Celeste Farm, a top of the line breeding facility located in beautiful Santa Ynez Valley, California, is owned and operated by Celeste Huston – a consummate horsewoman and celebrity in her own right. Once married to legendary film director, John Huston, Celeste has lived abroad in Ireland, England, France and Germany. But no matter where she has lived, horses have always been her main focus. Over her lifetime, she has worked with many breeds, including Saddlebreds, Arabians, Paints, Quarter Horses and most recently, Gypsy Horses. While she appreciates all quality horses, she believes that those with unique color and quality are a breeder's best friend. And now her focus is on breeding superior Gypsy Horses of color.

The farm will be standing six stallions for 2009: two AQHA Quarter Horse stallions and four Gypsy stallions. Celeste's AQHAs are Colonels Gotaspot, a smoky black, and Real Cool Scotch, a stunning palomino. Her AQHA horses are foundation bred and have flawless pedigrees studded with names like Colonel Freckles, Jesse James, King, and many other foundation lines.

All four Gypsy stallions – Huston, St Clarins, Cici's Sir Collin and Cici's Sir Keith – are registered with the Gypsy Vanner Horse Association (GVHA), Gypsy Cob and Drum Horse Association (GCDHA), the Gypsy Horse Society of America (GHSA) and the Gypsy Horse Association (GHA). Celeste selected her Gypsy stallion band to pass on exemplary conformation, balance, and dramatic color. While most Americans picture black and white tobianos when they think of Gypsy Horses, the breed is historically solid colored. However, today's Gypsy Horses come in a variety of colors.

Huston is Celeste's first Gypsy Horse stallion, purchased as a yearling from Gold Rush Gypsy Horses. He is a 2003 black and white tobiano with lots of quality, standing a strong, square 14.3 hands. According to the farm's website, his "get are consistently very nice, large and correct...and mostly fillies!" Huston is an



Celeste Huston and Gypsy stallion St. Clarins.



Photo: Gail Bates

AQHA stallion Colonels Gotaspot produces palomino and buckskin offspring.

amazing parade horse and makes quite the picture decked out in his pink rhinestone, gold, silver and diamond encrusted saddle that was originally made for the film *Rhinestone*. With his tail trailing three feet on the ground behind him, it is no wonder that spectators refer to him as the "angel horse."

At Cielo Celeste Farm, St. Clarins stands out not only for his dramatic color, chocolate silver dapple, but for his one of a kind incredibly correct conformation, strength, and presence. In fact, he is one of only seven adult silver dapple Gypsy Horses in the United States. This 2002 son of The Boss stands 15.1 hands and is both conformationally correct and tremendously athletic. He is the only Gypsy Horse *in the world* to perform the art of Marialva, also known as Portuguese or bloodless bullfighting. Marialva requires great agility and precision, and Celeste was pleasantly surprised that a horse of draft type could excel at the sport. Although not as swift as the Arabians or Lusitanos, he is very impressive and capable.

Cici's Sir Collin is a relatively new addition to the farm. This 2006 buckskin tobiano stallion is by Mull of Kintyre and out of Westmorelands Cameo. He stands almost 14 hands. Celeste describes him as "fancy with lots of pizzazz," and he is currently in training for carriage driving. His genetic color profile is as follows: Ee-Aa-nCr-Tt.

Cici's Sir Keith is the youngest Gypsy stallion in the breeding lineup at Cielo Celeste Farm. He is a 2007 son of St. Clarins and CiCi's Saffron Candy, a stunning palomino mare. His eyes were bright green when he was born and have since turned hazel. He is a smoky black silver dapple. He got the silver gene from his



Cielo Celeste's promising young stallion, Cici's Sir Keith.

sire and the cream gene from his dam. He can produce a rainbow of colors, all types of dilutes and silver dapples, depending on the color of the mare. For example, when bred to a black

mare, there is a 50% chance that the resulting foal would be a silver dapple. Celeste believes that he will be truly phenomenal when he matures. He has conformation, substance and color and exhibits the best qualities of both parents. Sir Keith should finish close to 15 hands; presently at one year, four months he is nearly 14 hands. Sir Keith is registered with all four registries.

Cici's Sir Keith has a full brother, foaled in 2008, who is also an outstanding individual. A silver dapple, he was recently purchased by Sharon Schofield of R Ranch Vanners in Lodi, CA, as a foundation stallion. Celeste is so impressed with both colts that she is considering doing some embryo transfers in order to produce more foals from St. Clarins and Cici's Saffron Candy.

Of course, stallions are only half of the breeding equation. To that end, Celeste has some of the best quality colored Gypsy mares. As with her stallions, conformation and athleticism are more important than color. She has a few black and white tobiano mares, plus some palominos and has recently purchased a silver dapple mare and her palomino daughter. Celeste hopes to produce a cremello or perlino, which are homozygous for the cream gene.

When breeding for color, it is important to become well versed in color genetics. Improvements in technology have allowed breeders to test a horse's DNA to determine its genetic color profile. This helps breeders to better predict the color of foals from specific crosses. It also helps prevent unintended defects. For instance, Celeste is adamant that she will never breed a silver dapple to another silver dapple because there is the possibility that the resulting offspring would be homozygous

for the gene. Studies have been performed on Rocky Mountain Horses, Icelandics, Shetlands, and Miniature horses which indicate that horses that are homozygous for the silver gene are predisposed to "ocular changes" or vision problems. No Gypsy Horses were studied, probably because their silver population is so small, but the problem has been linked to the gene itself, and would occur regardless of breed. Besides, the silver dapple Gypsy Horses are all closely related, so interbreeding them could result in magnifying any other undesirable traits.

Horses have a base color of red or black that is then affected by other genes. The silver dapple gene only affects horses with black coloring. Therefore, black horses would become chocolate colored, and their manes and tails would be white or flaxen. In bay horses, the black points remain, but the silver gene can do its magic. Since the gene does not affect horses with red genes, there would be no noticeable difference in chestnut horses that carry the gene. They could, however, pass the silver dapple gene on to their offspring.

The cream gene is a dilution gene that when singly added to a chestnut base results in a palomino, and causes a bay base to become buckskin. Blacks carrying one cream gene are called smoky black and can sometimes hide its silver gene. In a chestnut, two cream genes, (referred to as double dilute), result in a cremello. Two in a bay result in a double dilute, as either perlino or cremello, and when the base color is black, the result is smoky cream. It is sometimes difficult to determine a horse's true color based on looks alone, and genetic testing is a very valuable tool for breeders.

Celeste feels with the many black and white Gypsy Horses, it would be wonderful if owners wanted to color their mares by breeding to a silver dapple horse, which would result in a 50 percent chance of producing silver dapple offspring. Based on the response to her stallions, she isn't the only fan of uniquely colored Gypsy horses. The 2009 studbooks for St. Clarins and Cici's Sir Keith were nearly filled by the beginning of October. One farm alone, Desert Jewel Gypsies, has accounted for six breedings to three of Celeste's stallions.

Celeste is very excited about the coming breeding season and would like to extend hospitality to those who would be interested in viewing her facility on a tour; she can be reached at 805-688-8020 or via email at cchuston@hotmail.com. Visit www.youtube.com and enter "St. Clarins" in the search field to view the horses and activities at the farm, or see the farm's website at www.cielocelestefarm.com. For more information about horse coat color genetics, visit the link to UC Davis from the Cielo Celeste website, or check out www.equinecolor.com. ■