

Charger and Charlie

“Whether it’s breeding future rodeo performers or taking the best possible care of the one he has now, AQHA member Hunter Cure focuses on his four-legged partners.”

By Mary McCashin

Steer wrestler Hunter Cure of Holliday, Texas, has a proven mount – Lenas Little Dasher, aka “Charlie” – who helped him win a 2013 world championship and who finished second in the 2015 AQHA-Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Horse of the Year balloting.

There’s no question that Hunter is well-mounted. But rodeo professionals are always thinking about “What if?”

What if 15-year-old Charlie gets injured? Eventually, his age will tell on him, and then who’s the backup?

Hunter hopes that he has answers to those questions in the form of his hazing horse, Easy Native Charger. Hazing horses are the sport’s often-unrecognized but essential athletes. They run on the right side of the steer, keeping the animal running straight and hard, so that the cowboy on the steer’s other side gets a fair shot at a paycheck.

As an ex-racehorse, Easy Native Charger is good at his job, but the 2005 stallion is also excelling outside the arena, siring some promising foals for Hunter and his wife, Bristi.



"He has proven to be a professional-level hazing horse and is at the head of our breeding program," Hunter says.

He bought "Charger" as a 3-year-old from Larry Dawson, raising and training the stallion himself. Charger has only sired six foals, but they've given Hunter a sigh of relief.

"I know that if Charlie ever got hurt, I'd be able to pick back up on a good horse that I know would work. I would've trained them myself, and I'd know their genetic background. In the next four or five years, I won't just have two great horses, I'll have a team of great horses," Hunter says.

The Cures own three of Charger's offspring, including a 4-year-old out of a Thoroughbred mare Hunter owns and a 1- and 2-year-old

out of September Eleven, a granddaughter of American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame racehorse Streakin Six.

Could we get some more info about the mares? Does Hunter own any broodmares currently? Or are they breeding in partnership with some people? Looks like Larry Dawson owns the three foals that Hunter doesn't have. I'm assuming that Hunter is liking the race-bred mares to breed this stallion to?

Easy Native Charger, bred by Claude Wassom of Pawhuska, Oklahoma, is a paternal grandson of Hall of Famer First Down Dash who traces on his bottom side to Raise A Native (TB) and Hall of Famer Easy Jet.

It's not just the bloodlines that make the horse, however. Hunter is quick to point out that consistency can be a steer wrestler's greatest ally.

"You just have to consistently make great runs. Once you know how that feels, you know when you're slipping or when something needs work. Your horse will know how he's supposed to work. It makes it easier to tell when they're not performing like they should be."

And Hunter is all about keeping his horses performing at the top of their games.

For one thing, he takes a "forage first" mentality when it comes to their nutritional needs.

"I like to keep a top-quality alfalfa in front of them. They need that constant forage to keep things moving through their system. It helps prevent colic, ulcers and a whole other mess of problems," Hunter says.

To keep Charlie in top shape, Hunter trusts Dr. Brandon Broyles of Spur Veterinary Hospital in Spur, Texas.

"Dr. Broyles has a very common sense approach, and I value that when it comes to my horses' well-being. We'll inject hocks about May, do a follow-up visit the end of July, and then the first week of November, we'll inject hocks and stifles as a precautionary measure before putting Charlie back into work and before we head to Vegas," Hunter says.

Because this time of year, as this issue of *America's Horse* went to press, all thoughts were on Las Vegas, where the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo will run December 3-12.

As Hunter and Charlie head toward the bright lights of Vegas, Hunter is going above and beyond to make sure his four-legged partner works his best during the NFR'S 10-day stretch.

"I'll probably rest him for two to three weeks, just turn him out to pasture and let him be a horse," Hunter said in October. "I'll slowly leg him back up and start jumping steers on him in November. We do our best to match the steers in the practice pen to what awaits in Vegas. I don't want him to feel like he's being surprised by anything."

Charlie is worth all the extra care, after, all because as Hunter says, "he has proven himself time and time again."

Hunter bought the now-15-year-old gelding from fellow steer wrestler Matt Reeves in July 2012. Charlie had been a hazing horse, but Hunter thought he could be a great steer wrestling horse, as well.

"I just noticed he could really run. He ran flat across the line, and I just thought I'd try him," Hunter says. Without even jumping a steer off of him, Hunter bought him and decided to give the moody gelding a chance.

Hunter began taking Charlie on the road in 2013, limiting the green horse's mounts until he knew what Charlie was capable of accomplishing. It didn't take long for Hunter to realize that while Charlie had made a nice hazing horse, he was an exceptional steer wrestling horse. However, it took a bit of retraining to reach that potential.

"Initially, he really had issues with giving me enough space between me and the steer. He'd swerve in and pinch me off. It took about six months for him to learn to take half a step away from the steer versus running into us," Hunter says. Hunter discovered that the more consistent he was with how he rode Charlie, the more rapidly the horse seemed to improve.

It took the stout gelding about seven months to really start earning his keep. The horse with the difficult personality had finally found the right home.

"I think he and Hunter just really complement each other," says Matt, Charlie's former owner. "Charlie would pull antics that would make me angry, and Hunter just laughs at him. They're the right match for one another."

Charlie helped Hunter win his 2013 world championship and RFD-TV's inaugural The American Rodeo in March 2014.

And, of course, when the Thomas & Mack Arena lights up in December, Hunter and Charlie will be a pair to watch.

"He's just one of a kind," Hunter says of his brown gelding. "He has proven himself as a unique horse. He has proven he's a horse capable of winning world championships on. He has allowed me to accomplish my goals, and we're still accomplishing great things."

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Watch www.aqha.com for updated news during the NFR. America's Horse will be on scene, keeping tabs on Charlie, the AQHA-PRCA Horses of the Year and other American Quarter Horses with great stories!