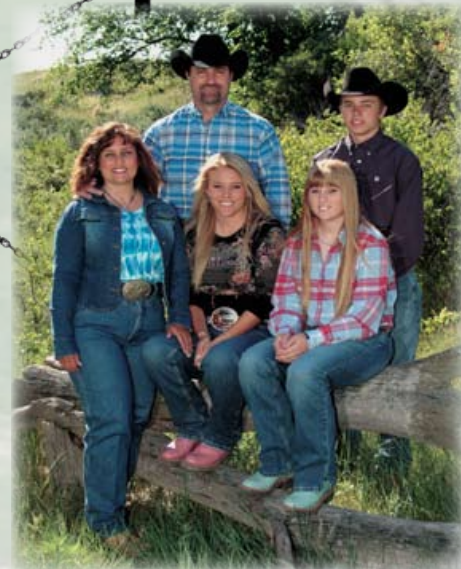


# No Better Life



STORY BY STEPHANIE DUQUETTE;  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF TWOMBLY ARENA



Dan, Ann, Alies, John and Tia Twombly.

## Passion for horses and love of family fuels the success of Twombly Arena

When the bidding starts Apr. 20 on the first horse in the Twombly Arena Sale at the Goshen County Fairgrounds in Torrington, WY, it will mark the eleventh year of the Twombly family's successful auction, featuring one of the most sought-after commodities in the horse market: a sound, honestly represented, pretty, well-trained gelding.

The sale represents the hard work of a dedicated Nebraska family and a thriving horse operation which fits the exception rather than the rule. Dan and Ann Twombly, high school sweethearts who married 25 years ago, were both raised in the North Platte Valley in Nebraska's western panhandle. The family's strong roots grew even deeper when they moved last year to the neighboring 600-acre ranch that has been in the Twombly family since Dan's great-grandfather homesteaded there in the 1880's. The couple and their three children are joyfully committed to the business of raising, training and selling quality horses.

"We are a very rare breed of people," says Ann Twombly, describing her close-knit family. She home-schooled daughters Alies, 21, Tia, 17, and son John, 19, a fifth-generation John Twombly (his father Dan's full name is John Daniel Twombly). All three kids also possess the passion for horses. "They've been really good students because they know that when they're done with school, they can go out and ride the horses," Ann says.

12 — Cascade Horseman, April 2008

Dan Twombly, who started out training horses for the public, gradually began to acquire more of his own prospects to train and re-sell. His eye for an attractive horse, and his ability to make it reliable for any job, helped develop the Twombly's reputation as a source for outstanding roping, reining and ranch horses.

"We ride a lot of colored horses," says Dan, who recognizes the extra marketability of a well-trained horse in a pretty package. But, he adds, a horse from his program has beauty that is more than skin deep. "I want a horse that'll do everything everybody else's horse will do, but I want them to do it on a loose rein."

With his kids riding alongside, Dan puts his horses through a challenging program.

"A couple of days a week, we ride the horses in the canyons and in the hills. A couple of days a week, we work on reining—stopping, turning around. A couple of days a week we track steers, and the team roping horses, we'll rope on them three or four days a week. When a horse leaves, he's pretty well rounded."

Most horses leave via the two annual Twombly Arena sales. The couple's first sale effort, in early April 1997, got them off to the roughest possible start. "We had a huge blizzard. We had to cancel the sale. We had about six- to ten foot drifts in our driveway," recalls Ann. "That was the only sale we've ever had to cancel. But we had it two weeks later, and we had a really decent sale. It was really scary to start out like that!"

In a prudent move to dodge volatile weather, the Twomblys moved the spring sale date to late April, and their fall

production sale takes place in mid- to late September. Catalogs feature between 120 and 160 horses from the Twombly training program and outside consignors. "Usually, about 100 of them are geldings," observes Ann Twombly. "A lot of people will prepare their horses for our sale, and we have a lot of feedlots in our area, so they are either riding them in the feedlot, and of course there are a lot of ranchers, too, who are riding them on the ranch. We have a lot of good consignors who come with really good horses."

In the spacious indoor arena at the Torrington County Fairgrounds, Dan sets up a performance preview for the horses to show their skills before the bidding starts. "It's pretty normal for us to show 60 to 80 of them in the roping; maybe more at times," he says.

The well-planned sale, with its catalog filled with attractive horses, proves the quality of horses from the family's program. Four of the top five sellers at the September 2007 sale were Twombly horses. The high selling horse brought \$17,500, the top five averaged \$14,000, and the top ten averaged \$12,100. Despite the recent closure of horse slaughter facilities in the U.S., widely observed to have a negative

impact on horse sales, the Twombly's numbers remain strong because of the enduring value of a particular type of horse.

"I would say the horse market is down. I think the killer deal has a lot to do with it. But the gelding market, the performance geldings, hasn't dropped any. It's still really hard to buy good performance geldings," remarks Dan. "There aren't very many of them out there, and the few that are there, everybody wants. They're still really hard to find: the good, really trainable, good looking colored gelding. I haven't seen any fluctuation in that. But that might be the rarest thing in the horse business. There are so few people making those nicer geldings."

The Twombly sale offers a winning combination: a product everybody wants backed up by honest business principles. "I tell everybody who is looking for our kind of horse, 'I have your perfect horse, but I have no idea which one he is.' We are totally honest. We tell all the flaws, all the good things about every horse and let everybody make their own mind up which horse will fit," Dan says. "Nobody rides those horses but me and my family, and when I tell someone that the horse is this way...that's the way he is. There's no guess work."

The Twombly sales are populated with offspring of the family's herd sire, Zan It (Hollywood Dun It x Sparkles La Zanna x Zan Parr Bar), a 1997 dun stallion with a performance record in roping and working cow horse. Dan says Zan It is an ideal sire



A couple of days a week the Twomblys ride their horses in canyons and in the hills.

for his program. "Everything I've tried to do, he's producing," Dan says. "I had a (Zan It) colt at 60 days that I rode bridleless. I could lope circles, slide him, spin him. They're so sensitive and so quiet and laid back. We just love those colts," Dan says.

Love of horses and family are the common threads that promise to keep the Twomblys close through future generations. "I have a ready-made business for when the kids grow up and have their

own horses. They can put them in our sale and just continue right on with what we're doing, and it will only help the business we're in," Dan says.

His wife adds, "It's been 24/7 with us, and we all still talk to each other and still love each other. We just wish more people could have this opportunity. I haven't seen any life better than what we're living."

Visit the Twombly's home on the web at [www.TwomblyArena.com](http://www.TwomblyArena.com). 🐾



The Twomblys offer sound, honestly represented, pretty well-trained geldings.

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