

# Riding for the brand

A new line of equine-related clothing has horse enthusiasts chompin' at the bit

By Mark E. Johnson

**“Warning:** My horse’s hooves are closer than they appear.” This quip is a stark reality of trail-riding — and funny, to boot. To see it printed across the back of a rider ahead would probably evoke a hearty laugh and a “Boy, isn’t *that* the truth!”

And that’s just the reaction Donna Taylor, creator of the Lucky Bucky brand of equine-related clothing, is shooting for.

“We trail-riders tend to read each other’s shirts as we go up and down these Tennessee hills,” says Donna, a Fayetteville resident and customer of Lincoln Farmers Cooperative, where the clothing line became available in August. “My goal with this clothing is to project philosophy — usually fun and sometimes serious — that will strike a chord with horse people regardless of the breed or discipline they prefer.”

The idea for the clothing line, which so far includes caps, short- and long-sleeve T-shirts, tank tops, pajamas, and hooded shirts, began to evolve after Donna and her husband, John, moved from the Huntsville, Ala., area to an 18-acre farm in the Molino community of Lincoln County in the 1990s. Here, she rediscovered her love for horses.

“I had ridden horses as a kid in North Carolina



The Lucky Bucky brand of clothing features earth-tones, a “worn-in” look, and equine-related philosophical quips. Kelly Martindale, daughter Lucky Bucky’s creator, Donna Taylor, is pictured on the tags of the clothing and is active in helping her mom market the products.

and had retained that interest into adulthood,” she says. “Purchasing our farm provided us with an opportunity to have horses and even some beef cattle.”

When a friend convinced her to participate in a trail ride, Donna says, she was hooked. Before long, this self-admitted “city girl” was team-penning with her daughter, Kelly Martindale, a media buyer.

“We had a ball doing that, but it eventually became too stressful,” Donna says of the popular rodeo event that requires two team members to cut and pen selected calves from a small herd. “I decided to stick to trail-riding, which is much more relaxing.”

It was during these years that Donna, who now owns a spotted saddle horse and two quarter horses, began to notice the lack of choices in equine-related apparel.

Taylor’s “Ride for the Brand” design was inspired by her son, Corey Martindale, a U.S. soldier now stationed in Korea.

“I’d go on trail rides and get these ‘destination’ shirts,” she explains. “Well, after you’ve been on a trail ride for a year or two, how many of those shirts do you need? They tended to be made of low-quality fabric, and most of them were aimed toward children and teens, with lots of glitter, sequins, and cowgirl graphics. I was looking for something more mature and classy with a simple, generic, horse message, but it just wasn’t available. It was very frustrating.”

So one fateful day last November, Donna, relying on the experience of her 22-year career with Durham Advertising in Huntsville, decided to take matters into her own hands.

“I started out thinking I could design a couple of clever horse shirts and sell them on [Internet auction site] Ebay,” she recalls. “I presented the idea to my husband, and he thought it was worth a shot.”

Donna and her husband of 23 years, John, a freelance video producer and communications teacher at Oakwood College in Huntsville, quickly began developing a business plan for the company they christened “Lucky Bucky.”

“The name is based on an old saying John and I have,” Donna says. “When we’re having a particularly good day, we say, ‘I’m feeling lucky and bucky!’ It just seemed to fit.”

After the idea and name had been settled upon, Donna enlisted the help of freelance artist Shane Young, to come up with a logo design and the artistic vision for the shirts.

“Shane has grown up with horses and understood the culture,” she says. “It was his idea to go beyond separate shirts and develop a brand with a consistent look and feel. So I started writing the copy, and he would take that and create original artwork for each shirt. Even the typeface is handcrafted. It’s not a font you can buy somewhere.”

As Donna began collecting an inventory of product, which was being manufactured by several different clothing companies, the next step was to locate a retailer for the line. The perfect choice, she realized, was in her own “backyard.”

“Lincoln Farmers Co-op was a natural fit,” says Donna. “Since we began keeping horses and beef cattle on our farm in the early ’90s, we’ve been regular Co-op customers. We know many of the people who work there. Heck, [manager] Ronnie Osteen even sold us a cow one time.”

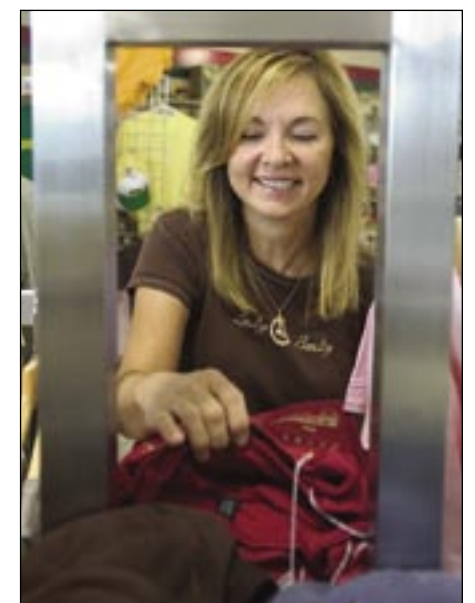
“Along with the storied history and reputation of our Co-op, Lincoln Farmers has an excellent showroom,” Donna adds, and she and John felt that Lucky Bucky would fit right in.

The brand debuted to rave reviews at the Co-op’s open house on Aug. 18, says salesperson Kathy Hewitt, who, with co-worker Sarah Mac Young, was responsible for incorporating the line into the store’s apparel department.

“It has really been well received,” says Kathy. “Sarah and I wore the brown caps the day of the open house and had a bunch of people asking us about them. Folks have been commenting on the fabric of the T-shirts, which is 100-percent, ring-spun cotton, which makes them incredibly soft and durable.”

Sarah Mac says the earthtone colors and distressed, worn appearance of the designs are popular with the Co-op’s rural customer base.

“Lucky Bucky clothes are designed



Donna Taylor, an avid trail-rider who owns three horses, adjusts some of the Lucky Bucky merchandise displayed at Lincoln Farmers Co-op in Fayetteville.



to look good with blue jeans,” she says. “That’s what most people wear when they’re riding, so it just makes sense. But it’s all those little sayings of Donna’s that create the most interest.”

Donna admits she has always enjoyed writing copy for advertising and marketing, and Lucky Bucky gave her the opportunity to branch out creatively and incorporate phrases that have personal meaning or are simply entertaining. Here are some examples:

**Live to ride, learn to fall** — “I thought this was a good life lesson that applies in a literal way to horsemanship,” says Donna. “Just as you need to learn how to fall from a horse without hurting yourself, you also need to be able to bounce back from adversity in life.”

**Am I over the hill yet?** — “This shirt is most effective when worn by women over 40 who have attitude. The older we get, the more we like this shirt.”

**My best friend lives in a barn** — “We originally made this shirt just for kids, who very often develop incredible bonds with their horses. But I eventually had so many adults asking for it, we started printing it in larger sizes, too.”

But the phrase that Donna points to as most meaningful to her personally is her “Ride for the brand” shirt, which features an American flag-inspired design created by Shane Young.

She says the patriotic theme was inspired by her son, Corey Martindale, who has been in the Army for four

years, including a tour of duty in Fallujah, Iraq.

“I just can’t tell you what it’s like as a mother to have a son over there,” says Donna. “So I thought the old Western phrase ‘ride for the brand’ was a really nice way to honor these young men and women who are displaying their incredible loyalty to our country, much like the old-time cowboys would remain true to the ranch owners for whom they rode. The shirt has a lot of meaning for me. Even something as small and seemingly insignificant as a T-shirt can make a difference.”

For more information about Lucky Bucky clothing, call (931) 438-8383 or visit the company Web site at [www.luckybuckyclothing.com](http://www.luckybuckyclothing.com).



Donna, center, flanked by Lincoln Farmers salespersons Sarah Mac Young, left, and Kathy Hewitt, says the “What happens on the trail, stays on the trail” shirt is her best-seller. “That was a saying among the trail-riding community long before Las Vegas got ahold of it,” Donna insists.

### Ames Plantation hosts Heritage Festival Oct. 14

Ames Plantation, in cooperation with the University of Tennessee, is planning its ninth annual Heritage Festival and Antique Estates Auction for Saturday, Oct. 14, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. in Grand Junction.

The festival includes more than one hundred folk artists, 19th century re-enactors and demonstrators, and musicians playing folk, bluegrass, and gospel music. A wide selection of arts and crafts items will be available for purchase.

Early Tennessee furniture, pottery, art glass, antebellum, and Victorian furnishings and decorations, and antique toys will be sold at the auction, with some of the proceeds going toward the historic preservation program at the Ames Plantation. Quality consignments are still being accepted. Call (731) 610-3693 for more details on selling items.

Admission for adults is \$4 and \$2 for children ages 5-16. Children 4 and under are free. The event will be held, rain or shine, and parking and shuttle service to the event is free. Food will be available for purchase on site. No pets are allowed.

For more information and a map to the location, visit the Web site at [www.amesplantation.org](http://www.amesplantation.org) or call (901) 878-1067.

### Spring Hill antique tractor, plowing event is Oct. 13-14

The Tennessee Museum of Early Farm Life at Rippavilla Plantation in Spring Hill will host its third annual Antique Tractor Show and Plowing event Friday, Oct. 13, and Saturday, Oct. 14. Organizers expect more than 100 tractors to be involved, and additional acreage will be available this year for plowing. There is no entry fee for participating tractor owners.

Admission is \$5 per person and includes a museum tour. Children 12 and under are free with paying adult. Food will be available on site. For more information, contact Joe Roberston at (931) 381-3686.

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