

Draft Animal Power NETWORK

I've said it in the past but it's worth mentioning again; DAPNet is only as strong as its members. If you look at the professional website, the well-run Field Days and the complicated DAPMap that lists all the members, the organization looks glossy and well groomed. The reality is that it's run by a volunteer board of draft animal enthusiasts on a grant-funded budget. With lots of Zoom meetings and two in-person events a year the magic happens. One of the fundamental parts of the organization is Maggie Smith. She tirelessly gets things done while working towards her own draft animal power goals. The following is a nice article she wrote about some of those goals being accomplished.

—Anna Knapp-Peck

Raising My Own Team

By Maggie Smith

Spring feels extra hopeful this year, with a colt running around kicking up his heels.

My draft colt Hank was born at 6 a.m. on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, after an unseasonably warm night. He was welcomed into the world from the start, by the weather, by the intense interest of his future herd mates, and by my friend Liz Brown and me, who carefully attended his delivery by the veteran Percheron mare, Lady.

At five weeks, his charmed existence continues: from evading getting shocked by the electric fence despite my attempts to teach him what it means, to countless naps flaked out on snow-flattened, sun-warmed grass. His windswept legs have straightened out, and the muscles are rounding out his little body, so incredibly angular when he was born. There was a moment this morning that took my breath away. The bedded pack in the nursery stall is getting pretty thick, and he must have jumped out into the larger barnyard, because I found him at morning chores,

quietly surveying the valley with his big sister, Hazel. My first impulse was stress, since he hasn't been trained on single-strand electric fence yet nor fully integrated with the other three horses in the herd (which has run-in stalls emptying into a barnyard that opens onto a mile-long narrow circular track). However, something about the way they stood together, Hank looking so tiny and yet so calm next to his fully grown, 3½-year-old full sister, stopped me in my tracks. Hazel was gently and calmly resisting the advances of the huge curious gelding Reno, and Hank was completely comforted by her presence. Lady, who could see her offspring from her vantage point in the stall, was watching them but was not at all distressed. It was as if she knew this was the future team. Hazel and Hank together, that's the whole plan. Might as well start now.

I didn't always plan to raise my own team. When I first fell in love with driving horses seven years ago, I thought my first team would be an older, experienced pair. I tried a couple different combinations of older horses for a couple years, hovering around that holy trinity of experienced, affordable and sound. This was a great learning experience for me, teaching me about what's available and giving me numerous opportunities to grow my skills as a teamster. By the summer of 2023, I was ready to let myself be talked into taking on Hazel, who had been born on the farm in late summer 2022. I still worried I would screw up her training terribly, but my friend and mentor Donn Hewes assured me he'd help when I wanted it. He reminded me how much time I had to get her ready to work. Importantly, I also knew I had the ever-gracious Liz Brown, on whose farm this was all taking place, whenever I needed an extra set of hands. I live there in a tiny house, just through the trees from the barn.

Fast-forward two years of playing and training, tears and joy as that wonderful filly grew into a powerful mare. I figured out that two steps forward, one step

back is the name of the game. Hazel was dragging sleds and things around the farm by the winter. It was so much fun that we bred Lady to Northland's Red Oak again last February. Fast forward another year, and Hazel skidded 4,000 board-feet of spruce in her first real log job this January. She pulled with so much heart. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, that first job off the farm. And 348 days after she was bred, the indomitable 23-year-old Lady delivered little "Hanky Panky."

My dream is for Hank and Hazel to be as strong a farm team as they are in the woods, and good in public too. My philosophy is to integrate them as

deeply into my life as I can and make them earn their hay all year round! I work as a natural builder, and my coworkers are also excited to market horse logging to our customers. I grow a half to 1 acre of dry beans for a local bean company every year. This year's farm team will be Lady and Hazel, and by the time Hank is ready to help, his mother will be ready to retire for real. I'm casually looking for a good people-mover, so we can give rides at public events. Looking farther ahead, I can't tell you exactly what my life will entail, but I can say Hank and Hazel will be at the center of it. Raising your own team: it takes a while, but it sure is fun!

RH



Hank, Lady, and Hazel out for a drive with Maggie.