

# RW TROPHY RANCH

**RW**  
Trophy Ranch Ltd.  
TX: 0018



## **I** *SkyBeauty*

It was over a plate of tacos in a little restaurant in Terrell, TX that I heard some of the truest words ever spoken by a deer breeder. “When I picked up my first newborn fawn, I just knew...” Maree Lou Williams laughed as she said it, not realizing that she had touched on that moment each of us have had when we realized we’d found a home in this industry. Recently, one of her bucks, RW HighArchy, was named 2018 DBC Golden Buck Champion. This gave me the opportunity to take a trip to RW Trophy Ranch, and sit down with Robert and Maree Lou, for a visit about some of the exciting things that they have been up to the last few years.

Many people have stories of deer pen adventures with Robert in the not so distant past. Although the whole family is still involved with many of the decisions, his daughter Maree Lou is calling more of the shots these days, and making adventures of her own. But getting to make decisions isn’t just handed to you when your dad has built himself a legendary operation, you have to prove yourself. With a lot of hours, blessings, and determination, she has done just that. When I asked her about the process, she simply stated, “I’ve

been told all my life that I’m hard headed and stubborn. But when things that are important to me, it doesn’t matter what other people think, my top priorities must get done.”

It was November 2010 when life circumstances lined up just right, and Maree Lou, after deciding not to return to work as a dental hygienist, came to the ranch full-time. She laughs as she says she was just a “city girl, it was her sister who was the animal lover”. She gleefully tells a story about finding her first fawn in the pen and realizing on the way back to the fawn barn with it, that this is what she was meant to do. But it wasn’t the easiest road. Being a woman in agriculture comes with its own challenges and, adding to that, her training was not in the animal husbandry area. However, as many of us know, this doesn’t stop someone with “the deer bug”. “A lot of people can’t believe that I learned this many pedigrees in this period of time,” says Maree Lou when I mentioned how hard she has worked to learn all the things that she has. “I think it’s really been more like a gift. You know how people are blessed with different gifts? My gift is organization, and with that pedigrees just seem to stick in my mind.”

## FEATURED BREEDER

After spending several years learning the ropes, she was encouraged by a student who was helping in the fawn barn to pursue the idea of going back to school for a degree in Animal Science. In 2016, she took the leap, enrolled at Texas A&M-Commerce, and began to absorb every ounce of knowledge that she could get her hands on. She became fast friends with faculty members, and a few of the things that she speaks most proudly about learning are the science behind a lot of reproductive and nutrition techniques that are common in deer breeding operations. She will graduate in December 2018, having achieved her goal in just 2 years. She is also taking her first graduate class and will be pursuing her Master's degree, angled towards genetics and / or reproduction.

When asked about how things have changed over the last few years, Maree Lou just smiled and said, "The matter of it is, when I arrived here Dad already had the genetics. I just feel like I fine-tuned the nutrition to bring out the best of Dad's genetics. The other part is that Dad loves big mainframe typicals, he loves width and frame, and we have that in common. I remember when Bambi Winchester came along. We brought him in and,



*RW HighArchy*



*Bambi Winchester*

## FEATURED BREEDER



as a 2-year-old, he was 36" inside. I can still remember the astonished look on Dad's face and him needing to measure and re-measure before he said, 'Maree Lou we have got our first 3-foot-wide deer!' I knew at that instant, we had bonded at different level because our love for big, wide, typical deer was the same. The next year he went on to be 43 1/2" inside, which really blew our minds"

The relationship between Robert and Maree Lou is a fun dynamic to witness. He greeted us at the barn, and visited for a while about how RW Trophy Ranch started, and some stories about creating the DBC. But he made it clear several times that Maree Lou is who the day was about, beaming as he stated, "The thing I want everyone to know from me, is that I'd put this girl up against any man in the deer industry. It doesn't matter if its nutrition, genetics, reproduction, or animal health, she can do it just as good or better than any man. I taught her everything that I knew, but after 2 years of college she has taught me some things. The deer business is tough but even tougher for a woman." She modestly laughed him off, and told me again that the part that excites her about what they are doing together is just having the chance be able to apply what she has learned in school to bring out the full potential of what was in the herd to begin with.



We also paid a visit to the fawn nursery, where even though it was a hot August afternoon, we were greeted by a handful of healthy, sparkly-eyed bottle babies excited to see who had arrived. All of the supplies were neatly lined up on shelves, and all the health and feeding information was well-ordered on dry erase boards. It may not be the biggest nursery, but she can tell you who everyone is, and what the current happenings are with each fawn, without a second thought. We easily chatted about each of their pedigrees and personalities while they were preparing and feeding bottles. Although it is easy to see her love for the animals anytime she tells a story, a different kind of smile washed across her



## FEATURED BREEDER

face when asked what her favorite task was after we had returned to the barn. “That’s gonna be real close,” she says. “Going in and finding new babies, or being in the pens with my gentle does. To see the trust that they have in you, and how they express their individual personalities.”

Robert explained that they like to keep their pens larger than many operations, but Maree Lou is still diligent about building the animals’ trust in the pens to keep them at a lower stress level. She has also experienced the benefit of this, combined with a well-planned feeding program, in relation to reproductive efficiency. She truly is putting into practice both the science and the art of animal husbandry. That is, of course, unless something needs to be darted.

Robert chuckles as he tells me how she always

defers that task to him. He says, “She is a good shot, but won’t dart them because they won’t like her!” She chimes in and says, “I let him do it, so the deer don’t like him.” Although it has seemingly become a long running family joke, the smile on his face says he doesn’t mind that he’s still needed for that job.

Making the transition to the next generation of a family operation is never easy. It can be such a challenging process that they teach courses on it at agricultural colleges. Deer breeders are lucky because families getting to work together, and involve everyone, is one of the most loved aspects of what we do. The Williams family is making it look easy, and continuing to add chapters to their own story. One thing is for sure, there’s no slowing down in sight at RW Trophy Ranch.



*Ellis*

*Chanel*