

She started training horses and now holds down the fort at their home and 160-acre farm near Goldston, N.C., about an hour southwest of Raleigh.

It's here the couple—and all their animals—find refuge, as well as the hard, honest work that fills about every one of Melanie's days, and her husband's, when he's off the road. They have a growing herd of beef cattle, which now stands at about 25, as well as several dogs and horses.

It, too, says Keith, is a tangible benefit of his and Melanie's careers. To him it's where he can both work on his act and train his animals, and then decompress from the stress of spending 8 months on the road in a typical year.

"We just happened to run across this piece of ground," Keith says. "We pulled up there and I said, 'Lord, I'll never be able to pay for this.' I mean, it's pretty nice. Our house sits right on top of a hill and you can see for quite a ways."

"I think it's the highest point in Goldston," says Melanie, "but my favorite part about living here is just how peaceful it is. Outside of that, the people here are just so charming. They're always helping each other out. And when Keith is gone, they really take care of me. Then they pick at him and tell him how many of them it takes," she adds, laughing.



"IT'S LIKE A CHEAP PETTING ZOO," says Keith, of their farm. "If it was up to my wife, she would have every animal there is."

"Well, I am on him to get another puppy," admits Melanie, who has four dogs, not including Cooter, the rodeo star. "Keith never knows what he'll find when he gets back home."

"But they're like our children," she says. "We don't have any kids, so the horses and dogs kind of fill that role." Especially the dogs, Melanie says. They follow her everywhere she goes, even on long horse rides on and around their property, which she says is one her favorite pastimes.

Being gone most of the year, Keith gives credit



to Melanie for keeping the place in order. "She feeds all the animals, keeps the house, and runs the tractors," says Keith. "She pretty much does it all. She even likes to cut the grass."

Now, he says that, but I'm not so sure," adds Melanie. "Let's just say that by the end of the summer, I'm usually ready to quit."

As for why she likes living on a piece of property that requires so much work when her "help" is out on the road, Melanie explains, "It's a lot of work, but the rewards are at the end of the day, when you just kind

TEACH A HORSE TO SMILE

Keith Isley shares 6 steps for a trick that's sure to earn a few laughs.



Place your horse in its stall, outfitted with a lead rope and halter. Pick his head up and, with your finger or a feather, tickle the small, fine hairs across its upper lip. Most horses will naturally curl that lip.

Say "smile" as you do this. Keith will also use a subtle cue with his hand, such as a slight wave.