



Left to right: Keith in action in Edna, Tex., Keith and Melanie on the farm, and Keith getting into character.



The Isleys own a vintage Massey Ferguson 165. "It's a workhorse," says Keith. "It cranks up every time."

of exhale and you're in your own little paradise.

"Really, including the work here," continues Melanie, "the hardest part of what Keith and I do is being apart. I love this place. The only thing missing is Keith, when he's away."



BACK ON THE ROAD this past April, Keith and his troupe carry on the act, with Badger taking up where the recently departed Amigo left off. As they amble into the nearly packed arena just outside

Edna, Texas, it's hard to tell who's in charge, the horse or his rider. After a month at the farm, Badger strikes a healthy—if not paunchy—pose. On his back, Keith—in a red hat, ill-fitting clothes and face paint—also wears a simpleton's smile that says, "The lights are on, but nobody's home."

The two stop mid-arena, both sort of chew the cud, then Keith hollers to no one in particular and in an accentuated accent from his native state, "We're hur to daince!" The announcer, Boyd Palhamus, notes over the P.A. system that he's got it all wrong. "This is a rodeo, Keith."

The mounted clown takes a comic pause, pleads his case with Boyd, then decides his horse's moves are worth showing off anyway. Badger begins a sort of waltz-like dance, followed by a more up-tempo jig. Being a rancher-heavy lot here at the Spirit of Texana Rodeo, the crowd roars with approval. They seem to appreciate that Badger is no ordinary horse and Keith isn't just any ol' clown. ■



To learn more about Keith Isley and his schedule of upcoming performances, see www.keithisley.com.

The first time you get the desired effect, reward your horse with a carrot, apple or some other healthy treat. Be sure to praise and pet the horse, too.

Repeat steps 1, 2 and 3. Eventually, drop the tickling and treat, just saying "smile" and/or using the hand cue.

Don't overdo it. Train in short doses. If they show signs of being tired or stressed, stop and let them rest. "Do not expect too much too fast," says Keith. "It probably won't happen overnight."

Keep it fun. When you're relaxed, your horse will be, as well.