

SHERRI BRUNZELL SENTENCED FOR HORSE ABUSE

60 DAYS IN JAIL; FIVE YEARS SUPERVISED PROBATION

By Glory Ann Kurtz

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During an Aug. 13 sentencing in a Colorado Springs courtroom, Sherri Brunzell, 63, was sentenced by Judge Stephen Sletta to 60 days in jail, a \$4,000 fine, five years of probation - the maximum sentence allowed by law for animal abuse. He also ordered Brunzell to sell all the horses she owns and to complete 16 counseling sessions that focus on self awareness, stress and problem solving. Brunzell was also ordered that she could not own, possess or care for any horses, llamas or livestock during her probation.

"I wish I could do more," said Judge Sletta, "but this is all the law allows." He continued that he would have given her a longer sentence if it would have been allowed to do so. The reason that he couldn't is that in Colorado, animal abuse is a misdemeanor; however, starting in 2016, horse abuse will be come a felony with much harsher penalties.

Last May (2014), Brunzell was found guilty of eight counts of animal abuse when the previous Sept. 19 (2013), 10 thin and malnourished horses and four llamas were found at a rented barn on Burgess Road in Black Forest, Colo., by officials from the El Paso County Sheriff's Department, along with the carcasses of 14-18 horses, covered with lye and tarps. One of the thin and malnourished horses was Dual Peppy, a legendary AQHA-registered reined cow horse and cutting sire, owned by Dual Peppy Partners, consisting of Rick and Sherri Brunzell, .

The 10 abused horses, including Dual Peppy, were put in the care of the special law enforcement horse facility outside of Denver until her trial and Sherri Brunzell was ordered to pay \$3,600 a month for the care of the 10 horses and \$1,800 to care for the four llamas that were seized - a total of \$5,400 per month. For unknown reasons, Rick Brunzell was never charged.

The Brunzells had purchased Dual Peppy in 1998 for top California reined cow horse trainer Greg Ward, through broker Jim Babcock, Gainesville, Texas, for a reported price of over \$600,000. They also reportedly purchased several valuable performing and producing Quarter Horse mares, from Texan Kay Floyd at around the same time for \$1.1 million. However, it is still not known whether any of the 18 dead horses included any of those valuable mares or their offspring. In fact, the names and ages of the deceased horses were never officially released.

Sherri Brunzell told the Sheriff's Office that the horses had died of colic over the last year and a half and Rick said the horses died last winter from colic. Sherri said the deceased horses were covered with lye and tarps because she didn't have the money to have the carcasses removed and she and Rick had been doing vet care for the last few years due to the expense and unsatisfactory results of veterinarians.

Also, the remains of the deceased horses were sent to Colorado State University to be analyzed as testing bone marrow can determine fat content and whether the horses died from colic, as the Brunzells claim, or from starvation. A later release said that Colorado State could not determine the cause of death. The American Quarter Horse Association also had the Brunzells' membership,

AQHA horse registration papers, participation in AQHA events and presence on any AQHA show grounds taken away.

Before Brunzell was sentenced, her lawyer asked for leniency, saying Brunzell struggled to care for the horses after her mother's death. However, the judge reminded him that Brunzell's mother had passed away in 2013 and the horses were found in 2014. Also, Chief Deputy District Attorney Shannon Gerhart told the judge that Brunzell lacked remorse and a sense of responsibility. According to an article by KXRM, Gerhart also said, "I don't think she thinks in her mind she's done anything wrong. She came across throughout the trial and even in her evaluation that she knows everything about how to care for horses. Clearly, she doesn't," continued Gerhart.

According to Ratemyhorsepro.com, there were two horses that the jury found Brunzell did not abuse, and along with the four llamas, they will be sold. The judge ordered all the horses must be transferred with their AQHA papers. According to one unconfirmed report, one of those horses was a full brother to Playboys McCrae, an NCHA Futurity Champion. C. T. Babcock, the son of Jim Babcock, went to the trial from Texas, and told the press he hopes to take the horses back to his family's Babcock Farm in Texas. He said he hadn't been able to see Dual Peppy but that he is feeling good about the situation.