

## How To Learn All About Camels

Interested in camels? You can learn everything you ever wanted to know at a clinic organized by Don and Michelle Strobel, Clinton, Mich.

Strobel and his wife breed and sell camels. Breeding camels is something he advises people to do only after they've become very familiar with the unusual animals. Bull camels in rut are not fun to deal with, he warns. After the clinic, he had his vet demonstrate castration on three young bulls. He also showed attendees a bull in rut, breeding a cow.

"We covered a lot of things you couldn't learn anywhere else," says Strobel. "We also covered basic training, like how to get them to lie down, how to get them on and off a trailer, and general behavior issues and problems."

One of the big benefits of attending the camel clinic is exposure of new people in the industry to a number of long time owners.

"If you can't get hold of your vet and it's 10 p.m., but you have a list of contacts you can call for advice, what is that worth?" he asks.

The Strobels raise Dromedary camels, the ones with one hump. Dromedar-

ies have no problem adapting to Michigan weather, Strobel says. He also prefers their personalities, and an adult can carry three riders.

Offering rides at community and corporate events and having a traveling petting zoo are a big part of what Stro-Bull Farms does. However, Christmas nativity scenes are the cash cow for camel owners.

"Three or four nativities a season will pay for your camel," says Strobel.

That says a lot, considering a baby female on bottle can sell for \$6,000. Price depends on sex, age and training. A bred cow will run \$8,000 to \$10,000 and more, if well trained. Strobel says he has a 14-year old gelding that he wouldn't sell for \$25,000 because it's so well trained and crowd friendly.

"You can charge \$1,000 to \$3,000 for a few hours, depending on if you include other animals," he says. "I have friends who charge a \$1,000 fee for just one camel."

Strobel adds that camels, unlike other exotics, have never gone through a boom and bust cycle, but have kept their value year in and year out.

He points out a male will reach 1,800 lbs. or bigger. "For the most part, they are easy keepers, and females and geldings make



Don and Michelle Strobel breed and sell camels, and also offer clinics that cover all the basics on how to handle the animals.

great pets," he says. Strobel advises folks interested in buying a camel to attend a clinic first. "I had a young couple who wanted an animal," he says. "I suggested they attend the clinic. It cost them \$300, but at the end they knew they still wanted a camel, and I was com-

fortable they knew what they were doing."

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## "Get-Away Farm" Becomes Special Event Hot Spot

Got a set of farm buildings that aren't being used? Maybe you can turn them into a special event location like Cedar Lake Farm near St. Louis, Mo. While not everybody has a large population center nearby, the success of Cedar Lake shows the attraction old barns have to many people.

"When Carl Bolm bought it in 2002, he envisioned a retreat for himself and his business and personal friends," explains Michelle Tinker, farm activities director. "After a wedding was held on the farm, he started getting requests to hold other events there and things just spiraled up from there."

In the past 7 years the farm has evolved into a special events site that can hold up to 700 people. The main barn itself can handle a dinner of up to 75. A recently completed 30 by 50-ft. deck on the second level provides socializing space for dancing or more dining. The covered space underneath the deck offers semi-outdoor space, protected from bad weather.

Tinker says a large part of the attraction Cedar Lake holds for guests is the restored look of the barn inside and out. The exterior is the classic red painted barn wood. The inside has been left with open beams and the original barn interior. Where changes have been made, they have been made with authentic barn wood. Pulleys are in place and the hay barn doors can be opened for a view of the surrounding countryside.

A small watering hole was cleaned out and expanded into a small reflecting pond alongside the barn and deck. On the other side of the barn is a three-acre lake complete with paddleboats and a scenic waterfall.

"I've noticed a lot of people fall in love with the relaxed setting," says Tinker. "They feel like they are back on Grandpa's farm, but with an upscale touch."

That touch includes flat screen TVs, radiant heating in the floors, and comfortable couches instead of hay bales.



Carl Bolm converted a set of farm buildings into a special events site near St. Louis, Mo. It can accommodate up to 700 people.

"Every event is priced differently depending on what's included," says Tinker. "Weddings range from \$1,000 to \$3,000 for space, chairs, tables, etc. Catering is extra. We can do a simple barbeque for \$20 per person or higher for a plated dinner."

The farm has grown as business has grown. Currently Cedar Lake Farm is refurbishing another barn with a slightly different style. Tinker says the goal is to increase daytime business.

Currently there is no double booking of the site, another attractive aspect to many guests.

"People feel like it's really theirs for the day," says Tinker.

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## "Goat Mowers" Clear Brush, Weeds

If you've got brush and weeds in a pasture, woodlot, orchard or field, Goat Mowers can help. For \$300 a day plus setup and mileage, the goat and sheep rental firm will clear up problem acres.

"We put some sheep in the mix to take care of grasses, while the goats take care of the shrubs," explains Allison Sluis. She and her husband Todd operate the business along with his two brothers. "We'll go anywhere people will pay us to go. It's most cost effective to work in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio and Indiana."

Sluis says their goats clear on average 183 sq. ft. per day. Cost estimates are based on the level and type of vegetation, size of the area to be cleared, and how quickly it needs to be cleared. All jobs have a two-day minimum and mileage is charged one-way. Costs also vary depending on whether fence lines need to be cleared.

"We have a guard dog in the area with our animals," explains Sluis. "Plus we have electric netting around the perimeter so stray dogs or coyotes are kept away."



Rented goats clear up brush and weeds.

The Sluis' just started the business this spring, but say demand has been strong. Customers like the idea of controlling vegetation without chemicals or heavy equipment. The goats can clear steep slopes and rough ground as easily as they can flat, and they don't mind problem weeds.

"People really like to use them for poison ivy and poison oak control," says Sluis. "They eat it down to where it's more manageable with chemicals and other control. Of course, you have to be careful handling the goats then as they have the plant oils on their hair and skin."

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