

THE HALF-CIRCLE EXERCISE WITH BUCK BRANNAMAN

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ECCLECTIC HORSEMAN

EST. 2001

[SOME THOUGHTS
ON "THE SPADE"

[STRAIGHTEN
THAT HORSE OUT

[SHELIA VARIAN'S
JOURNEY OF SUCCESS



ECLECTIC

1 : selecting what appears to be best in various doctrines, methods, or styles
2 : composed of elements drawn from various sources

HORSEMAN

1 : a rider or driver of horses; especially, one whose skill is exceptional
2 : a person skilled in caring for or managing horses

In This Issue



5 Straighten That Horse Out by Martin Black

Without straightness you will never achieve fine horsemanship. Martin shares his thoughts on this essential topic.



18 What Humans Can't Teach by Nicole Allison Schultz

Nicole examines the importance of herd socialization for the future of the performance horse.



6 The Half-Circle Exercise with Buck Brannaman

A powerful exercise to focus on your horse's front quarters and check out how respectful your horse is of your space.



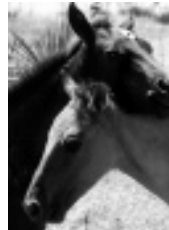
20 Improving Your Weight Aids by Wendy Murdoch

By thinking about what Wendy calls the "Pelvic Clock," you can improve and refine your weight aids for refined horsemanship.



10 Some Thoughts on "The Spade" by Gwynn Turnbull Weaver

Revered by some, despised by others, this piece of equipment stirs emotions on both ends of the spectrum. Learn more.



24 Genetics Basics by Sue Stuska Ed.D.

Think the genetics of coat color inheritance is too confusing? Guess again. Sue gives you a genetics lesson.



13 Doing Well by Doing Right by Kara L. Stewart

Take a look at Shelia Varian's remarkable program that approaches breeding, training and selling from the horse's point of view.



26 Bucking Rolls by Cary Schwarz

Are these common pieces of equipment utilitarian or fashion in nature? Cary examines the past and present of the bucking roll.

In Every Issue

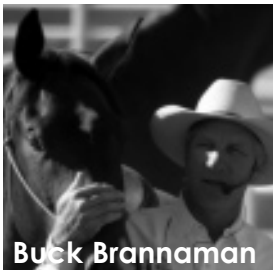
4 Classified Ads and
Community Listings
29 Eclectic Mercantile

30 Directory
31 Calendar of Events
32 What Were They Thinking?

On the Cover: Merlin and Joe Bruce hard at work at a ranch roping contest in Peyton, Colo.

An Eclectic Mission: *Our mission is to bring "Just What Works" information to a knowledge-hungry public. We will create and present only ideas and techniques that work with and educate humans about the nature of the horse.*

Contributors



Buck Brannaman

Martin Black is a 5th generation Idaho rancher and 4th generation rodeo competitor. He has a lifetime of experience in handling horses, cattle and roping. In his youth there was a strong influence of the California-Spanish style of horsemanship. He has released his first DVD, *Colt Starting Philosophy*. Visit martinblack.net to order.

Buck Brannaman, a phenomenal cowboy and clinician, has traveled the United States and Australia conducting colt starting, horsemanship, cow working and ranch roping clinics. He has authored the book *Groundwork, The Faraway Horses*, and *Believe*, and has produced many educational horsemanship videos.



Kara L. Stewart

Wendy Murdoch has taught riding internationally since 1987. She trained with Linda Tellington-Jones in 1985; she has trained with Sally Swift since 1986, and apprenticed with her in 1992. Her book *Simplify Your Riding* has been such a hit, it's already in its second printing! To learn more, visit her Web site at wendymurdoch.com.



Sue Stuska

Nicole Allison Schultz has a natural flair for words and wit, which she utilizes in any creative writing project. She spent the most perfect years of youth growing up in the barn with the horses, chasing butterflies through the wooded trails on horseback. The rhythm of the horse runs through her veins, and she just can't shake it. Currently, she is working on her thesis, which explores the horse and rider transcendence into a "third, much greater thing."



Gwynn Turnbull Weaver

Sue Stuska wrote Equine Technology curriculum for her doctorate from Virginia Tech, then guided Martin Community College's change to a needs-based equine curriculum. Her broad-based equestrian science undergraduate study included dressage training at William Woods University. In addition to teaching

equine studies at several colleges and universities, she has worked at various jobs in the equine industry; her current position centers around the wild horse herd on Shackleford Banks, a barrier island in coastal North Carolina.

Cary Schwarz began building saddles in 1982. He is a founding member of the Traditional Cowboy Arts Association (tcowboyarts.com). Today he builds saddles at his home in the mountains of central Idaho. He enjoys studying all aspects of saddlemaking be they historical, the relationship of function and art, or the thought processes of craftsmanship.

Kara L. Stewart has been around horses most of her life, which has thus far been spent in Colorado. Enthralled as a youth with showing her Arabian geldings, both English and Western, in Arabian breed shows, she and Eddie, her beloved Arab, now dabble in classical French dressage and spend more time trail riding than in arenas. Thanks to Eddie, she was put on a whole new path of horsemanship nearly 10 years ago and is enjoying the delicious paradox that the more she learns, the more there will be to learn. Through her articles, she tries to share pieces of other's horsemanship journeys.

Gwynn Turnbull Weaver, a Northern California horsewoman, has been immersed in many different equine disciplines. In 1996 her interests finally found a home in the old California reined cow horse. She created and directed The Californios Ranch Roping and Stock Horse Contest in 2000 to give followers of the discipline a place to compete. Gwynn Turnbull Weaver and David Weaver winter outside of Orland, Calif., and spend summers traveling the western U.S. doing ranch roping clinics while still working for various "big outfits" on the northern ranges.

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Hi All,

Happy New Year! For the staff here at *EH*, my husband, Steve, our accountant Shawna and me, the start of a new year, a time when we back on what we did well in the past and look for areas that we must improve for the future.

Circulation growth is one of those things in the publishing business that is a constant burr under our saddleblanket. It's a burr for large established magazines and even more of one for us little guys.

In order for us to continue to publish this magazine and serve the horse community, we need to keep growing. We have spent money on direct mail, horse expos, and advertising, and over the last five years, we have found that our most successful advertising campaign is you, our happy reader.

Your renewal rates tell us that you are finding the articles useful. Your comments in your

phone conversations, emails and letters are clear: you enjoy the magazine and you are happy to have a publication that reflects your horsemanship values.

When you encourage your friends to subscribe or give gift subscriptions, you are ensuring that *EH* remains in print, providing you with the thought-provoking and insightful articles you crave.

You can help us change the world for horses one reader at a time. Thoughtful and educated horseowners translate directly into horses getting a better deal.

Our New Year's resolution is to keep you happy, so happy you tell all your friends about this marvelous little magazine that you've been reading. You are our marketing staff, and what the position lacks in salary, it more than makes up for in satisfaction and appreciation.

Take care, thank you.

Classified Ads

Horse For Sale: AQHA gelding, 5 years old, 60 days of NH training. Gentle disposition, willing to please. Very athletic and cowy. Contact Jolynn for more information. Asking \$3,000. 970-278-0234 CO

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Classified Ad Rates: For subscribers only, \$24 for 50 words. Ads will be run for one issue. Payment is due in advance. Call for deadline 303-449-3537.

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Community listings are \$75 for one year. Please call 303-449-3537 to place a listing.



Straighten That Horse Out

by Martin Black

How straight can you ride your horse?

If you think your horse can ride in a straight line, pick an object like a fence post 50 or 100 yards in front of you and another object farther away, maybe a power pole or a spot on a ridge. These two fixed objects can be your sights. See if you can ride for 50 or 100 yards with your horse going straight without you needing to help. If it feels like your paddling upstream with one oar, you can work on this to see if you can get it feeling like your paddling downstream with two oars.

First of all, a person needs to stay focused. You can't drive a car straight looking at the hood ornament. You need to be looking out ahead of you a hundred yards or more to send the car straight. As the road pulls you one way, you can make a slight correction earlier the farther you are looking ahead. When you ride your horse in this manner, you are giving your horse a more precise objective. If you can be clear on where you want to go, and aware of how your horse is interpreting this objective, your horse will likely put his ears forward and

be looking for what you are looking at. Then you will be looking directly between your horse's ears to your two targets with all three lined up.

This may not come quick or easy, but the more consistent and persistent you are, the better you can develop this and the more enjoyable your horse will go somewhere for you and the easier some performance maneuvers will be to work on also. To get a high-performance straight sliding stop, your horse needs to be running dead straight. To send a rope horse to a cow, he needs to run straight, and you need to be able to communicate this desire to your horse to be right when you get where you are going.

You can find many ways to get this accomplished, and I will just try to give you some thoughts that might help. Think of yourself riding your horse down the bottom of a ditch, the sides slope up gradually and get steeper until they are very difficult to negotiate. When your horse is traveling in the bottom of this ditch, that should be the least resistance. As you vary off your line and the bottom, it becomes more difficult as the slope increases. But as you come down the slope toward the center, it immediately becomes easier. If you pass the center and start out the other side, you run into more resistance until you start back down toward the center.

Don't pressure your horse to the line, only while he is going away from the line. If he can interpret that he is running into his own pressure, it will make sense to him. But if he feels pressure going away and pressure coming back he just learns to tolerate it as nonsense. When your horse can feel your support to stay in the middle with you, follow the path of least resistance, reinforced by the knowledge of running into his own pressure, the choice is easy for him. You can use your reins, your outside leg to push him over, your inside leg to bend him back. It doesn't matter what or how he gets into trouble. The important thing is he interprets the trouble with leaving the line and the relief with hunting to stay on the line.

Once you develop this with your horse, you will be able to send him straight down the arena, straight to the far ridge, or keep your focus to one side slightly, and he can make a round circle. After you are able to turn him loose to go where you want and he only meets resistance when he varies right or left, he will follow your arc like he followed your straight line.





The Half-Circle Exercise

with Buck Brannaman

I learned this exercise by watching people get taken advantage of by horses. This is the exact opposite of what horses typically train you to do; they gradually advance toward you all the time and you end up back pedaling to avoid getting stepped on. So your horse ends up taking you closer to his buddy or the gate, wherever it is that he wants to go. So what we are doing here is reversing the roles so that all the forward steps are coming from you.

Once you feel as though you have a pretty good handle on the basic driving your horse past you and changing directions by moving your horse's hind and front quarters on a circle, the next piece you need to add is what I like to call the half-circle exercise.

Simply put, you will start your horse around you in a circle, then walk forward in a straight line, working your horse back and forth in front of you. You will continue to advance at a steady pace. You might need to walk slower than I might to start until you get your timing sorted out and your horse gets the idea of the exercise. This exercise puts emphasis on your horse's front quarters. His hind will step over, but not quite as cleanly as they will when you are working on a full circle.

The half-circle exercise builds directly on how I had you starting your groundwork by first clearing out the front quarters to initiate your circle (EH #26). This is that same maneuver repeated over and over while you are advancing. By moving across the pen, you are giving yourself the angle that you need for the front quarters to repeatedly sweep across.

This will put quite a bit of pressure on your horses, because you are crowding them quite a bit to accomplish this exercise. With some horses, especially young ones, it can bring up some fear, but this is where I want to find out about that concern, before I get on.

In addition to focusing on the front quarters, this exercise also teaches your horse a little leg yield. He has to move a little bit sideways as you advance to respect your space as he moves around you.

I will often do this exercise with my flag; in fact, I prefer to, because then my horse can get used to the flag at the same time. Granted, you have to be a little handier because you are switching directions so quickly. But once you feel more confident with your halter rope, you might challenge yourself to use the flag.

If you find your horse is going too far past you, getting behind you, it might be because you are not switching your hands on your rope early enough to change directions. Remember, your horse should be operating on a half-circle directly in front of you.

Once you get this half-circle exercise working for you, your horse running over you will be a thing of the past. I'm not saying that learning this exercise will be easy. It will challenge your timing and coordination, but it is essential. It is something you really have to have working on the ground.

Remember, all these exercises we do on the ground are connected to what we do with our horses, and how they operate when we get on their back. All that is changing is the position from which you lead the dance.



1. Starting from my circle, I will walk a straight line and work my horse back and forth in front of me.



2. I switch hands early so that I can bring my horse's front quarters across before he goes too far.



3. I keep walking at a steady pace. Now he continues his half-circle around me.



4. Here I've switched hands early, and am getting ready to bring his front quarters across.



5. I use my rope to help drive his front quarters. Here he's getting ready to move his front quarters to his left.



6. Now he's come through and is starting his half-circle back the other direction.



7. I'll switch hands, knowing that I want to bring his front quarters through before he goes too far.



8. He'll have to make a big move here to move his hind-quarters out of the way, then bring his front quarters.



Building a Foundation



9. The hind steps over, making room for the front quarters to come through.



10. My right hand drives by swinging the rope; my feet are still moving forward in my line.



11. His front quarters step through. Notice the distance he stays from me has stayed consistent.



12. Now he'll travel in a half-circle around me. I'm still focused straight ahead on my line.



13. I get ready to switch my hands on the rope before he goes too far past me.



14. His hindquarters didn't prepare as well this time, making it a little more difficult to bring the front.



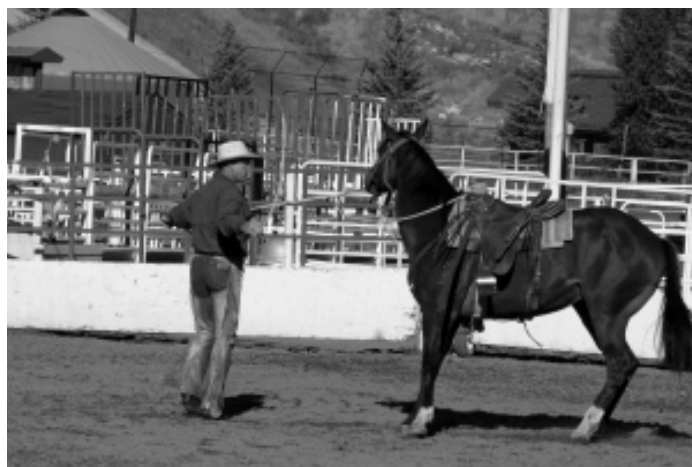
15. But he makes it just fine. I'm still walking forward as he travels around me in a half-circle.



16. I've switched my hands. I'll get his hindquarters first, then ask for the front.



17. My right hand will drive the front across. My feet are still in motion.



18. He's maintaining his distance even as I ask for the front to come through.



19. Now I've reached the end of the arena. I could send him in a full circle and start back the other way.



This is the same thing I might do with my horse when I get on to ride. I can ride my half-circle exercise. Roll the hindquarters, bring the front, roll the hindquarters, bring the front. I can work my way down the pen just as I did on the ground. I'll just lead him through the dance from up here. When I teach these exercises, I break them up, the full circle, the half-circle. But actually when I'm working my horse, I'm doing both at the same time as needed. I might work a full circle, get the hind-quarters shaped up, then do a few half-circles, then come back to the full circle. I'll just adjust to what my horse needs.



Some Thoughts on "The Spade"

The philosophy, art and practice

by Gwynn Turnbull Weaver

I stood at the corner of one of the hundreds of booths that checkerboarded a huge asphalt parking lot. I'd ridden along with my friend's parents to the sprawling Los Angeles swap meet. Leaning lazily on a folding table covered with cheap trinkets, I glanced down into an old milk crate. The sun slanted in past a crack in the booth and glinted on its contents. The crate was full, of what I now know to be an assortment of old California spade bits, misused and misunderstood, tossed aside as junk. The year was 1969; I was seven years old.

I had just begun the journey of my life, riding horses and studying them. I remember my impression of the bits then. Their silverwork and design enthralled me, even at that age, but the mouthpieces, keen old spades, frightened me. With my limited knowledge I concluded they looked intimidating and severe.

It would be many years before I would meet "the spade" again: before I would painfully learn that the contents of that crate, so long ago, would have been worth enough to buy my house.

Just as I was new to the horse scene back then, so are many other people of different ages just discovering it now. Their response to the spade bit is very similar to my initial reaction.

The spade is not a bit for the beginner either human or equine. It does not come with a set of instructions. Only the passing on from one generation to the next, the subtle verbal mention of what it is and how it is best used. There are no books that truly explain the delicate use of the spade bit. I think, perhaps, it cannot be put into words. It is

an illusive world of "feel" and sensitivity.

If one of the old vaqueros were alive today, their responses to questions about the spade would probably be vague and unassuming. A subtle nod or the slightest of hand movements might be offered. I sometimes wonder if the old vaqueros designed it that way, building it intimidating enough to scare off the novice. Many of the arts around the globe intrigue us but cannot be taught in an easy step-by-step model.

Those who are drawn to the spade bit and its use find themselves enveloped in a unique world. As information is difficult to obtain, the student of the spade will find himself moving ever deeper into a vast and complicated culture. Many of the horsemen who have dedicated their lives to knowing the discipline are hard to find and even harder to get to know. Theirs is a world unruled by the clock. They take the time it takes to "make" their horses according to the horses' time table. Each step of training determined by the horses' response and mastery of the steps leading up to true bridle horse distinction. The road is long, but the riches are great for the student of the spade.

Leverage? No, but thank you.

To understand the spade, you must first understand what it is not. Most other shanked bits are what are known as "leverage" bits. The standard curb, the Texas born grazing bits, the Buster Welches and the new flexing "broken ports" are but a few examples of the low-port leverage bits of our modern day.

A leverage bit works predominantly

off of pressure on the curb strap. This is supported by the fact that leverage bits typically have a low port and are often coupled with a chain curb strap to increase the intensity of the pressure when needed. Since it is the pulling or in some cases yanking on the reins that immediately engages the curb strap or chain pressure, a port of any size is of little importance.

The horse trained and ridden in a leverage bit is not taught to carry the bit or have any sensitivity to its shape or configuration. He most often just responds to the curb strap pressure. A rider's goal when using a leverage bit is to engage the curb strap as quickly as possible to achieve the expected results, that is to stop or at least slow down.

The vast majority of horse owners use leverage bits. The leverage bits are simple to understand; pull until they stop, and if that doesn't work, pull harder. For those who only want to dabble in horse ownership, those who do not want to completely submerge themselves in the unplumbed depths of horsemanship, the leverage bits are probably the best answer. They will require more effort and energy to operate but require less preparation, sensitivity and knowledge to learn.

The platform

In order to understand the spade bit and the effortless manner in which it is used, a horseman first needs to understand the difference in how the vaquero of old and now the buckaroo of today uses his mount.

Different riding competitions today require various levels of training. In the

vast majority of them, the rider need only concentrate on the riding of his horse. Riders sit in the middle of their mount preferably and focus their attentions on their horse and his way of going. What usually adds difficulty to an event is the inclusion of other things a rider must handle or consider while riding his horse. Jumping over fences, working a cow or going down the fence are a few examples of this. The buckaroo has another element to contend with—his rope.

A buckaroo must ride his horse with quality and simultaneously be able to use him as a platform from which to throw. Polo players can appreciate this dynamic. The greater the horse's ability to maneuver and position quickly, the greater the chances of landing a truly great shot. A horseman who could make all of the adjustments needed with very little hand movement was a gifted horseman indeed. Small hand movements allow the buckaroo to keep his coils in order, his swing smooth and delivery accurate. Small hand movements cannot make a horse respond. He must be taught to listen and feel for the slightest of signals.

The signal

The spade is what is known as a "signal" bit. The long tapering port, complete with spoon, cricket and copper-covered braces, is configured in such a way as to encourage and allow the horse to "pick up" the bit in his mouth and "carry it."

Ironically, horses trained in this discipline are not to be yanked on. Their mouths are respected and protected, saved at all costs. The sensitivity of the spade bit horse is prized. That sensitivity would not remain if the process of making a spade bit horse were severe. The truly great "velvet mouthed" spade bit horses have benefited from a long intricate series of training steps that have prepared them to carry the spade.

The old vaqueros started their horses in hackamores, then moved on to



the two-rein process involving a small hackamore known as a bosal that fits under the bridle and is used in conjunction with the bridle, and then finally into the bridle alone. Modern horsemen have added a snaffle bit to the beginning training of a young horse and then move on through the traditional stages from there.

Horses are suppled and softened, trained in all maneuvers and movements that they will later be asked to perform in the spade. By the time a horse carries the spade, the bit's only purpose is to receive the subtle signals sent by the rider's hands. Note the soft thin leather curb strap used on the spade. It has little or no function. Messages are delicately telegraphed down the reins and to the shank of the bit where its slightest movement equally moves the long intricate port. The horse feels and responds to a message, not to pressure. While the many leverage bit user's hands scream their instructions, the spade bit horseman's hands softly suggest their requests.

Mechanics

Spade bits are no different from any product. There are good ones and there are bad ones. Horsemen sift through them in search of the bits that have the qualities horses respond comfortably to. A bit maker must make a bit not only beautifully crafted but also liked by horses. The greatest of bit makers can do both.

Balance is something often talked about and it encompasses many things.

Many think that means left to right; that is, one side of the bit is the same or in balance with the other. Though this is obviously important, real balance is speaking to the design of the bit and how it balances in a horse's mouth. This is really a front-to-back balance.

Many things influence whether or not a bit will be one horses like. Are the length and thickness of the cheeks complementary to the size, shape, placement, and angle of the mouth-piece? Is the shape of the cheek (i.e., where in its design does the majority of the weight of the iron lay) suitably placed? The old makers, back before the automobile, hand forged and hammered the cheeks to differing thicknesses in different places, loading the weight exactly where they wanted it. Some claim that horsemen lucky enough to have access to the older models made in this way will notice a difference in the softness and vertical flexion of their bridle horses. The same horse ridden in a newer model with cheeks of uniform thickness (originally stamped out of newly available car frames) will feel heavier and duller in their hands.

Another point to note is the placement of the braces; specifically, where they tie into the cheek. The length, width and angle of the mouthpiece helps to determine whether or not a horse will pick it up and carry it. Braces should tie into the cheek not just above but slightly behind the bar of the mouthpiece, thus increasing the surface area of the bit and making it more easily carried. Braces set



this way will come into contact with the tongue independently but simultaneously from the bar. Surface area distributed in this way helps to disperse the weight of the bit more evenly across the tongue. Even disbursement of the weight means that no area of the mouth will receive a concentrated dose of pressure. Remember that the spade is a signal bit not a leverage bit.

Tongue relief?

Leverage bit makers came up with a design they called “tongue relief.” This is really a misnomer. The novice would assume that the word “relief” implies a certain lessening of the pressure or severity of a bit. The opposite is really true. Tongue relief amounts to a gap left in the bar of the mouthpiece. That gap rests on the tongue and makes it more difficult for a horse to use his tongue, or “brace” with his tongue, to keep the pressure from reaching the sensitive bars of his mouth. The true spade has a straight bar in the mouthpiece with no tongue “relief.”

The spade bit horseman is not overly concerned about a horse bracing against it. He does not advance his horse into the spade until all the brace and resistance has been worked through and solved during the long preparatory training steps taken on the way to the spade.

Brace or resistance in the spade is a red flag to the bridle horseman. It serves as an indicator that inconsistencies exist. A review of the training steps is required to find out where the deficiencies lie. A bridle horseman will often step back down into the two rein or hackamore to check, fix and double-check the thoroughness of his training practices.

Ballet

The disbursement or diffusion of pressure is what helps the spade bit horse find the correct place to carry himself. When the horse is carrying himself in a balanced relaxed fashion, no matter the speed, the spade will feel good to him if it is designed properly and all the

angles are right. If the horse leaves that zone and falls apart or loses its correct way of going, the spade will be less comfortable to carry.

Good bridle horses will search for that comfort zone and in so doing correct their way of going and enjoy the ease with which they can travel and work in that way. It is not unlike the ballerina who walks with a book on her head. The book is not painful; it merely reminds her to maintain a posture required for the dance.

A Bit Maker's Responsibility

There are many things that go into the making of a spade bit. Bit makers who tackle the spade have their work cut out for them. There will be thousands of tiny decisions they will make on every bit. They hope that each one leads them to a finished product that is both elegant and functional. It must be beautiful to fully distinguish and pay tribute to the level of training achieved by its bearer; and yet it must be functional to allow that bearer to realize and express his full potential as an athlete.

From choices made in the forging process that determine the flavor of the iron, to the intricate silver inlay that adorns the finished product, making a spade bit of quality is an accomplishment. A functional memorial to the time and patience required in these disciplines.

The Horseman's Responsibility

It is no surprise in the age recently passed, when social trends seemed bent on dodging responsibility, that the spade bit and its use would fall from favor.

The use of the spade bit brings with it a measure of responsibility. Users must handle their mount in a manner that protects and preserves their horse's mouth. Romal reins with accompanying rein chains for balance and presentation are needed. Horses should be managed in a way when bridled to prevent bumping the bit into objects or hanging a por-

tion of the bit on a fence or similar snag. There are some tasks in a buckaroo's work when the spade may not be the best choice. Teeth need to be maintained to allow horses to carry the spade with comfort.

All souls criticize that which they do not understand. These notes are not an effort to get everyone to jump on the spade bit band wagon. The spade bit is not for everyone or for every situation. The band wagon is not very big; but, oh, what beautiful music it plays.

Bon Voyage

The spade bit is not a piece of equipment, it is a philosophy. To use it and use it well, an entire school of thought must be sought and explored. For those interested in doing just that, welcome to the journey of a lifetime. A human life can barely encompass all there is to know about the mysteries of the discipline.

Yes, there are many who use the spade with little or no understanding or appreciation for it. But then, you can kill cockroaches with a violin—yet that is not how the violin might best serve us.

A truly great ride on a finished bridle horse is regarded as a precious gift from above, but the rider must be made as equally sensitive to the spade bit as the horse is for both things to work together. The numb or heavy-handed have no business on a fine bridle horse, and some would argue that they would have no business on any horse.

So while the leverage bit user only wants to get from point A to point B, to the spade bit horseman it's all about the ride. It's the difference between jumping into the pool and climbing to the highest cliff and executing the perfect swan dive. Both ways get you wet; it's just about what you want to experience on the way.

To engage in a discipline that requires and promotes feeling and sensitivity is a noble thing. To feel deeply is to live fully, a goal we would all do well to achieve before the last song is sung.



Doing Well by Doing Right

SHEILA VARIAN'S JOURNEY OF A DIFFERENT APPROACH

by Kara L. Stewart photos courtesy of Varian Arabians

Whether it's her insistence on keeping horses as naturally as possible, her unique beliefs in training or her commitment to working with people in a way that inspires, Sheila Varian's philosophies are the common thread that's been woven into the fabric of Varian Arabians for more than half a century.



A person doesn't stay in business—much less thrive—for 51 years without doing a lot of things right.

That's just what Sheila Varian has done with the Varian Arabians breeding and training operation she started with her parents in 1954. With numerous national champion titles over the years in multiple disciplines and succeeding generations of her horses winning in the show ring, the Varian-bred Arabian has carved a rightful place in the history books.

The Varian horses appeal both to the high-level show competitor and breeder as well as to the amateur who wants a solid lifetime equine companion. Why?

Likely because Varian isn't breeding for fads. All her decisions are made, then and now, to breed for a horse that's athletic, has a superb mind and trainability, is well put together and pretty, and has an affinity toward people. These qualities are found in every horse that bears the trademark "V" following its name or that comes from the Varian bloodlines.

THE VARIAN WAY

However, while the making of a quality, well-mannered horse starts with great breeding, it doesn't end there. Once the foal is on the ground, the way it's handled in the early years can help ensure the horse is a solid partner for the rest of his or her life, or lead to a life of struggle.

Mentored years ago by Tom Dorrance, who saw Varian's deep natural talents with horses, Varian has honed and refined her approach continually since then. "The objective is to always do better and to keep learning," says Varian. "Now my approach is to totally teach the horse from a position of helping him learn to be a good citizen his whole life."

To do this, Varian adheres to several unique approaches to management and training.

Varian believes a horse is a horse and he wants to be a horse, not a person. "That doesn't mean that I don't pet him, love him, play games with him, because I do all those things. But I play with him as a horse and me as a person, not with him as a person."



BACK-TO-NATURE HORSEKEEPING

The motto at Varian Arabians could well be “nothing stays in the barn long around here.”

As Varian explains, “My goal is to keep horses in a way that is as natural for them as possible.” Because horses are social animals, the environment at Varian Arabians encourages and enables the horses to interact with their age-group peers and learn to take care of themselves by following the examples of the older herd members.

“Horses need to be out in groups in large pastures,” she says. “If you keep horses in small pens or isolated by themselves, they’re like children who have never gone to town. They’re afraid, timid and worried because they have little experience.”

THWARTING UNWANTED BEHAVIORS

Turnout as a rule rather than an exception also enables young horses to explore age-related behaviors in an



Consistency and honesty—mutual qualities in a good horse and rider partnership. “I’m not interested in showing any longer, but I am having a lot of fun competing in team sorting and that kind of competition,” says Varian, above on Jubilation V. “It’s a lot of fun because it involves so much detail.”

HISTORY LESSON

The Varian horses’ history is like a Who’s Who of Arabian bloodlines, starting with the foundation stallion Bay Abi++, purchased by Sheila and her parents in 1959. Bay Abi++ was named U.S. National Champion stallion at halter and later excelled under saddle, with Varian doing all the training and showing. The next year, the Varians imported three mares from Poland: *Bachantka, *Naganka and *Ostroga. Today, several mares on the ranch are nearing the 10th generation of the original mare line.

The only other stallion ever purchased by Varian Arabians is *Jullyen El Jamaal, who came to Varian Arabians three years ago. This lovely, correct stallion, whose pedigree is unrelated to Shelia’s breeding program, is meshing very successfully with the Varian line and resulting in some stunning offspring.

appropriate manner. Young fillies and colts might be brought into the barn for a couple of weeks to be worked with, but then they go back out into the fields.

Stud colts in particular have a natural genetic tendency during their first three years to practice their play fighting—biting, rearing, kicking and pawing—which are tools that will enable them to be the herd breeding stallion one day. “Horses at this stage of their life have to do these things. They have to!” says Varian.

“Here’s what I think is really interesting,” she shares. “If you turn colts back out with their peers when they start getting nippy and then bring them back into the barn as three-year-olds, they have matured through the combat stage and they seldom bite then. They don’t see humans as the objects to bite or kick because they’ve already done all that with their peers.”

What if a young horse does bite a human? “I don’t slap horses for biting. I turn them out,” says Varian. “If a horse

bites us, we think we have to correct him because we want to discourage this behavior. However, a young stallion sees our behavior differently. To him, our slap means, ‘Well, I’ve got to be quicker! I’ve got to bite faster because that other colt/person/thing bit me.’ At this stage of his life, the horse really can’t help this genetic tendency, so he has to wait and get even quicker the next time he attempts to bite.”

To avoid this counterproductive spiral, the staff at Varian Arabians teach the young horses to move out of the human’s space when asked, and baby foals are not encouraged to rear up, jump on humans or turn around and back up. “If that happens, I’ll just startle them with a noise or movement so they’ll bounce off someplace else,” she says.

STALLION CARE

Varian’s approach to stallion management is to turn them out every day and in a place where they’re comfortable and don’t pace. “If a stallion is pacing, it’s because he feels tension,” says Varian. “I may tolerate him pacing for 10 or 15 minutes, but if it goes on longer than that, I’ll move him or do something to break that pattern.”

At age 19, senior stallion Desperado V receives turnout 18 hours a day in a large area. “He’s the oldest so he gets the first choice. The more walking he can do, the better his health will be because horses stay sound by the concussion of moving all day.”

MARE CARE

The broodmare band at Varian Arabians is a revered bunch, and rightfully so. "Our mares have forever homes here, and we do what they need so they can feel good for as long as possible," she says. "One older mare was lying down a lot due to arthritis so we put her on OrthoCon, a therapeutic joint supplement. That was a couple years ago and she's been acting young since."

BRINGING UP BABY

Varian's horse-centered approach to raising productive equine citizens starts in the foaling stall.

FOAL TO WEANLING

"We always have two people in attendance when a mare foals in case there's a problem," explains Varian. "We can go in and sit quietly with our mares because they know us and trust us, but we don't imprint our foals. My feeling is that this is the mare's time to be a mother."

When the mares are brought in to be palpated, teased or to receive other care, the babies are gently nudged here or guided there as the dams are being rebred. In between this handling, mares and foals live in large grass pastures

where they can roam, run and play.

Foals are halter trained by Mindy Smith when they are weaned at five months old. "At that time, we lead the foals all over the ranch so they get accustomed to things." However, Varian has learned not to tie the foals until they are older.

"I've seen when you tie up young horses, they learn—because they don't know what else to do—to fight the rope," she says. "And once they learn to fight the rope, then you can never really depend on the horse not to pull back later in life, and with a real vengeance, because they learned to do it as babies."

The weanlings are turned out as a group into a large pasture. Those that may need a little more attention or are still a little nervous will be turned over to Mike Perez, head groom, who's the ranch expert at the gentle art of halter training. He also does much of the groundwork with the horses. "Mike might work with a youngster in the round pen getting them used to soft ropes being flopped on them and so on," explains Varian. "We also teach all our horses to come to us by using inviting body language." After two weeks at most working with Mike, they are turned back out to the pasture.



The early years of a horse's life can make or break his future. If rushed, frightened or made defensive in his young life, a horse may carry this outlook forever, and it will affect the way he learns and approaches new situations.

MEETING

TOM DORRANCE

In 1961, Varian and her beloved Arabian mare Ronteza won the Open Reined Cow Horse championship at the Cow Palace. Today this achievement would be akin to winning the snaffle bit futurity in Reno, Nev. This win was extraordinary in many ways: a young woman and an Arabian mare trained by an amateur beating the best male professionals on the best stock horses.

After this experience, Varian was back home teaching school and riding horses in the afternoons. One day a small truck rumbled up the hill to the house and a short, stocky man with a shy smile got out. "I saw you and your bay mare at the Salinas Rodeo," he said. "She did a good job."

With that introduction, Tom Dorrance was about to change Varian's world.

"I'm a horse lover," explains Varian, "so hurting a horse to teach him never felt right to me. In the quiet days we spent together at my house, Tom Dorrance helped me understand the mind of the horse: that the horse is a herd animal and what that means; that given a choice, the horse will always seek out the comfortable way; that we need to encourage the horse to trust us as we impart information, but our horse must be a partner in the decision making..."

As simplistic as it sounds, Varian found it mind-boggling to put these notions into actions. "I began to look at everything as very small steps and increments. When Tom left that first time, the possibilities in my mind were swirling. As he drove away, he knew that this learning process would take about a year, and so he waited about that long to come around again."

She adds, "He never accepted money from me—he wouldn't hear of it. He said he was learning as much as I was, and that statement spoke volumes about a man who loved horses and only wanted for them, not for himself."



YEARLING TO TWO YEARS

The yearlings and two-year-olds learn to be cross-tied, but they are only hooked with one line and a person holds the other line until the horse is comfortable in the cross ties. "Once they've gotten really good about cross-tying, they seem to also tie just fine, since they never had to go through the pull-back stage."

The youngsters also receive additional education. "We do a lot of teaching, such as teaching them to put their heads down when we ask," says Varian. "The old excuse of this work taking more time doesn't apply. You're brushing the horse anyway, so you might as well be teaching it to lower its head or to let you fuss with its ears and so on. Then you never have to twitch the horse and you never have to fight."

TWO TO THREE YEARS

"Even if I've used the young breeding stallions at stud as two-year-olds, we turn them back out to the hill pasture with their peers after they've finished their two-year-old breeding season," says Varian.

This back-and-forth process, with lots of turnout time in between short training sessions, continues until the horses are coming three-year-olds. "At that time, they come into the barn for 30 days and we introduce them to a surcingle and snaffle. Then they go back out to the fields again."



A teacher by trade, Varian enjoys teaching, whether it's "horses, people or whatever. In training, I love the journey of getting there."

Horses are started under saddle after they turn three, and they follow a schedule that is used with every horse on the ranch, even the finished show horses.

Explains Varian, "Our horses are ridden one day and turned out to grass paddocks the next day. For the young horses especially, this one-day-on, one-day-off schedule actually makes the process of training quicker rather than slowing it down. Heaven knows these babies haven't yet built muscles for carrying a rider or setting their heads or any of the rest of it. Because we alternate riding with pasture turnout to prevent muscle soreness, we avoid the 'training issues' and potential fights caused initially by soreness."

INTO THE REAL WORLD

In addition to receiving ample turnout, the horses are ridden out on the ranch as well. "We ride out of the arena and into the hills pretty soon after they're started under saddle," says Varian. "All our horses ride out with the exception of the English horses after they are shod up for the show classes."

Situated on 250 hilly acres near the central California coast, the ranch offers a perfect training ground. "I'm not a person who sticks to trails," says Varian, "so we go up and down hills, through brush, around bushes and into gullies."

TRAINING FOR A LIFETIME

In training, common beliefs include either fighting with a horse and making him do things, or getting nothing done. "Some people think training is one extreme or the other," says Varian, "but I like to see training in the middle. We expect a lot of our horses and we get things done, but our horses are content because we've taught them in small, digestible pieces so they never are made to feel afraid or defensive."

While some might think the secret to training is taking things slowly, Varian sees it a bit differently. "Some people say they want to take things slow, which is fine. However, truly it is the clarity of the lesson that matters, and then you allow a horse to learn at his own pace, easily and comfortably."

On the other end of the training spectrum is rushing the process, which doesn't work either. "I've found it actually takes me longer when I hurry," Varian explains. "If we don't hurry our horses, they stay quiet, they don't become defensive and they remain comfortable with and interested in learning. If I hurry, I have to go back and fix the holes."

The "secret" to training, then, is actually not skipping steps. "If the training process is rushed, sometimes steps are skipped in that haste. We don't skip any steps. But I think we can get horses trained about as quickly as anybody because our horses are very comfortable with the process we use."

Trained in this manner, the Varian-raised horses aren't given any experiences that make them wary or frightened. They stay open-minded and eager about learning. When they

go to their next owner, they carry this mindset. "Our horses have great trust in us because we take the time to teach them. They believe in people because we've given them no reason not to," she says. "Horses like a leader, and that's what we give them: comfortable leadership."

WORK ETHIC FOR THE LONG HAUL

Varian is no stranger to hard work, and her work ethic is a large part of her success in horses and in life.

"As a young girl, I learned to take care of the whole horse," shares Varian. "I had the opportunity, and I gladly took it, to learn how to ride horses out in rough country and to train them in a progressive manner so we became partners—not just for the show ring." Varian was interested in all disciplines and also did all her own hoof trimming and breeding, both because she had to but also because she wanted to. "It gave me a very well-rounded education in horses."

Varian's mother became interested in Arabian bloodlines inside and out, and the two believed that their first stallion, Bay Abi++, would be a successful breeding stallion. They were right, but even so, "It took me years to get a clientele of people who appreciated my horses," says Varian. However, she believed in what they were doing and remained committed for the long term.

"I think if you know what you're about, you're breeding for quality, you're willing to stick with it, make a real effort to do a good job, and you're willing to go hungry, you will succeed," offers Varian. "It just depends on how long you're willing to go hungry and how hard you want to work."

TREATING PEOPLE RIGHT

Over the years, Varian has been supported by a loyal team. Angela Alvarez, breeding manager, and Bob Nafzinger, fix-it specialist, have worked alongside Varian for 19 years. Maintenance foreman Mere Ruiz has been on the ranch 18 years, while head trainer Jamie Hernandez has logged 12 years and head groom Mike Perez a solid decade.

WHY SUCH LONGEVITY?

"I'm not sure I've always been an exceptional boss, but



Varian is not after a quick sale but rather a lifetime of mutual enjoyment between horse and human. "I love the horses," says Varian. "I want the horse content, so I don't sell a horse to people that the horse is not right for. I know that if I fit the right horse with the right person, that person will keep that horse for the rest of its life."

these are exceptional people," explains Varian. "Like me, they love the horses and the way we handle them. They also like this ranch because it's a comfortable place to work. And we never take advantage of anybody."

Photographer Zita Strother recalls one of the first encounters she had with Varian Arabians. "We were pretty new to breeding and to Arabians, and our mare went into heat unexpectedly. I made a frantic call to the ranch and blubbered something like 'I need semen now!'"

Varian herself answered the phone and said they'd certainly try to help. "Sheila got right back to me and said there'd be no problem—they'd ship the semen that evening. She treated me, a newcomer with a single request, just like she treated her clients who did many breedings each year."

Varian is a stickler for good work, in her horses and her staff. Always the teacher, she glows when a student—horse or human—steps up and excels at whatever interests them. "I encourage people to grow and aspire to as much as they want to achieve."

SECURING SUCCESS FOR THE FUTURE

Although fads in the Arabian horse industry have come and gone, Varian has weathered the storms and succeeded by sticking to a single principle: doing right by the horses and the humans in her life. This commitment has resulted in loyal, repeat clients who clamor for her horses, but more importantly, in horses bred and raised in such a way to become treasured equine partners for the rest of their lives.

MAKING OF A SUCCESSFUL HORSE

According to Varian, there are many horses that can be very successful in one discipline. "The disappointing situation is when an owner insists the horse must be successful in a different discipline that he or she thinks is going to be more important financially," she says. "But if the horse isn't comfortable or truly capable in that discipline, one of two things happen to the horse. He breaks down because he's forced into an activity he isn't capable of doing well, or he objects with resistance because there's no form of comfort for him in it."



What Humans Can't Teach:

The Importance of Herd Socialization for the Performance Horse

by Allison Nicole Schultz

For most performance horses, the bulk of life is spent indoors to avoid risking accidents and mishaps that would postpone a show career. As a precautionary effort, life in a stall with daily turnout in a run or paddock alone is enough to give prized show horses a safe place for mental and physical release from the rigors of workouts. Turnout for stall-bound horses lets them be running, rolling and grazing horses the way nature intended. However, turnout as a lone horse denies a horse important herd dynamics and the lessons that can be taught by socializing with other horses. Although this may not always be possible or ideal with older, experienced and highly valued show stock, allowing a future performance horse to be raised in a herd structure proves beneficial to his development as a herd-savvy horse for the lessons and experiences that the herd can impart for all future encounters in and out of the pasture.

At the Diamond Double T Ranch in Longmont, Colorado, a ranch devoted to breeding and raising solid performance horses, 50 plus horses of all ages live on the 80 acres of pastureland in herd situations. Owner Janiejill Tointon feels lucky to have the privilege of witnessing the herd dynamics in her own pastures between the foals, mares, geldings and her stallion, Blue. Most of all, she realizes that “what the herd teaches, we can’t always teach as humans.”

For Tointon, this idea hit home as she was watching horses work in the warm-up arena at a past horse event. Here, she saw some very talented show horses acting up in the presence of the mass of working horses in the warm-up pen, horses that were nervous and afraid of other horses and some that were reacting dangerously by bolting. She feels, “The lack of the herd experience creates not only the problems caused by stall-bound horses not allowed to ‘be horses’—cribbing, weaving, insecurity and overaggressiveness—but it also creates performance horses who can’t perform. So what I want to do here is take that performance horse and raise it in the herd from day one.”

Raising horses that are “OK” in the world is important to Janiejill. “People who come to the ranch say that these are some of the happiest and friendliest horses they have ever seen.” She compares the horses she raises to those that weren’t brought up on the ranch. Her show mare, Marilyn, has a tendency to be cranky and kick her stall to the point of hurting herself, but is much better when let out. Another horse, Dapper, has been primarily a stall horse his entire life, but



when given the chance to get out with the herd of other show horses, he lets his social side show as he goes around to groom the other horses. Janiejill, believes “The non-desired behaviors of some show horses wouldn’t happen if these horses were socialized. Without herd socialization they are more apt to get hurt and harm others.”

Interestingly, a horse’s behaviors within the herd dynamic and herd relationships can also give insight to a horse’s peculiar personality issues. Oftentimes these are issues that we work on in the saddle, that also become apparent while the horse interacts within the herd. Tointon can recall one horse especially who benefited from being put in the herd. She once took in a Shire sport horse named David who was not only a big boy, but also spoiled and dangerous. After working with him for a while, she eventually just put him out in the herd and let the herd teach him some manners. She remembers that David was so insecure in himself that he was overly aggressive not only toward people but to the other horses as well. He raced out in the pasture and knocked down her husband’s cow horse, among other belligerent displays which allowed

Tointon to see his internal problems brought out in the herd. David's insecurity showed in his need to bully the other horses for confidence. It took no time for the other horses to crack down on David's behavior, and give him a good whoopin'. Eventually, David learned the "rules" of the social structure of the herd. Along with his herd lessons, his human lessons came along as well. And within a couple of years, David was a very solid, brilliantly talented riding horse.

Herd lessons manifest within herd dynamics, and herd dynamics depend on the social structure and "order" of the herd hierarchy. Such dynamics are as numerous as the possible combinations of horses in any given herd due to relationships among the individual horses and their ranking in the pecking order. This is seen in most turnout situations, in which there is one dominant horse, one horse that always gets picked on, and the spectrum of horse-powers in-between.

One difference at the Diamond Double T Ranch is that the ranch's stallion, Blue, is turned out with the herd to breed the mares naturally. This natural breeding program allows Tointon to witness a set of herd dynamics that is not often seen in most pasture-board situations. In this situation one can see an intricate web of herd dynamics between Blue, the mares, and the foals.

During the breeding season, Blue stays in the field with the mares and new foals. In the early spring, when the mares start coming into heat, Blue exhibits the protective poise and tenacity with his band of mares. As commander in chief of his brood, he will snake through the mares that are grazing and round them up into a group while he will graze nearby and maintain that all the mares stay where he put them. Although it would seem to be every man's dream to have an entire herd of mares all to himself, Blue doesn't let it go too much to his head. The lessons of respect and manners go both ways as the mares keep him in his place and demand that he be a gentlemanly and considerate lover.

Through the spring and summer months many lessons and manners are handed down to the foals from the mares, but also from Blue. Blue plays with the foals throughout the day, either with the entire group or with a just a couple of foals at once. He will often "play" with the colts as males tend to "play" with each other without getting overly aggressive so as to let the little guys play in the motions of their instinctual herd behaviors.

There is much to be said about the bond between mare and foal, but also much to be said for the village that raises the foals. As the new foals enter the pasture in the spring by their mother's side, they encounter other foals next to their mothers and open mares in the pasture to be bred. As soon as the mares with new foals become comfortable with the other mares, it is not strange to see an open mare acting as an "auntie"

or another mother "babysitting" a group of foals.

This past spring, the Tointon's mare Faith had colicked after giving birth and had undergone colic surgery with her foal at her side. After brief stall recovery, Faith and Peyton reentered the herd. Faith was one of the mares that often let other foals nurse from her. Not long after being outside, Faith coliced again, and this time with no recourse. Faith was put down and buried in the pasture, with Peyton and the rest of the herd nearby. The Tointons worried about Peyton's well-being, but had faith that one of the mares would take him on as her own. Within a couple of days, their palomino mare Cowgirl had let Peyton nurse from her, and now the mare has two foals by her side.

Janiejill feels strongly that this is a testament to the strength of herd relationships. "If Peyton had not been being raised in a herd situation, we would have had to have found a surrogate mare," she says. "In this case, nature just intervened and took the stress out of what could have been a very stressful situation." Familiarity with the herd also takes the stress out of weaning. Blue stays with the weanlings, while the mares are put in a pasture with other mares and yearlings. The babies stay relatively relaxed through the process.

As athletes, horses need room to grow and develop. The opportunity of growing up on ample pasture within a herd structure offers many striking benefits for future performance horses. Foals learn early on about balance over terrain and "obstacles" such as streams, fallen logs, holes and rocks. This course in balance subsequently builds good bone, strong feet, athletic ability and a brave character. Horses growing outside get their grazing instincts met and are constantly allowed to move about, perhaps contributing to fewer instances of colic. Being in a herd allows them to build relationships and learn how to be secure, horse-savvy horses. All of this lends itself not only to better athletes, but also to happier horses.





Improving Your Weight Aids

by Wendy Murdoch

Many riders struggle to apply their weight aids correctly. While your dressage instructor may clearly tell you where to have your weight for a variety of movements including canter departs, shoulder-in, haunches-in and half-pass, your attempts may not yield the results that you are looking for. The answer to this problem may be caused by several factors:

1. You are not sitting straight to begin with.
2. The timing of your weight aids is out of sync with the horse.
3. You are overdoing the application of your weight aids causing adverse effects.
4. You are not putting your weight where it is actually going.
5. You have no idea how to apply a weight aid in the first place.

While I could go into a long discussion about the whys and wherefores, I would rather give you one exercise you can do to help you apply weight aids more correctly. This exercise, commonly referred to as the "Pelvic Clock," is an adaptation of a Feldenkrais Method® Awareness Through Movement® Lesson. In its basic form this lesson gives you more mobility in your pelvis. Greater mobility in all directions allows you to find a balanced central position. From here you will be able to make small, accurate movements in your pelvis in order to apply accurate weight aids.

As a teaching tool, the Pelvic Clock can be used to help the rider find a more balanced seat once she has done this lesson off the horse. If the rider is sitting too much to one side while she is

riding, I can help her sit balanced in the saddle by asking her to move her pelvis toward a particular hour on the clock that will counter this position, resulting in a more level, balanced seat. In this way I can coach the rider into a central position and from there toward subtle weight shifts so that her aids are more effective.

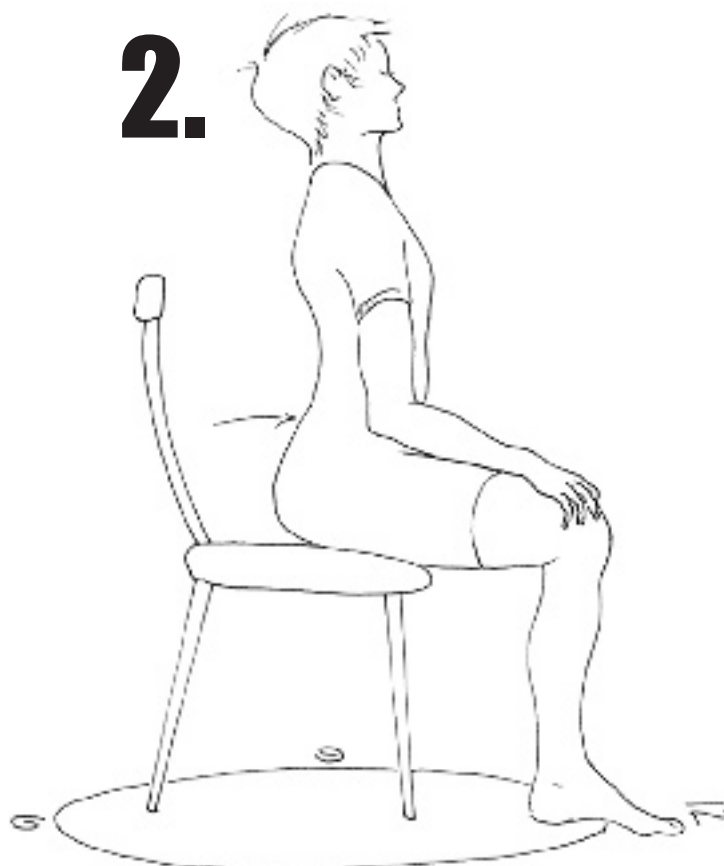
What you will need to do this lesson

For this lesson you will want to sit on a flat, level surface. The best height is such that you have a 90-degree angle between your knee and thigh. If you are sitting on a standard chair, you will need to come to the front edge of the

1.



2.



chair. Your feet need to be flat on the floor. If you can, take your shoes off. For the rest periods it would be good if you could lean against the back of the chair or a wall if you are sitting on a bench. Alternatively, you could lie on the floor during the rest periods.

Pelvic Clock

To begin, come to a sitting position at the front of your chair with your feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes and feel your seat bones in contact with the chair. Notice if your two seat bones are making equal contact or if one is heavier than the other. Also notice if you are sitting on the same part of each seat bone.

Now imagine that you are sitting on the face of a clock (Illustration 1). The clock is on the surface you are sitting upon or on the floor below you. The hour of six o'clock is behind you and 12 is in front of you. 3 o'clock is to

your right and 9 o'clock is to your left. (Digital clocks won't work here!)

Slowly begin to move your pelvis so that you advance the top of your pelvis toward 12 o'clock (Illustration 2). This means that you would hollow your back slightly as you move the top of your pelvis forward. Do this small movement many times. Notice what happens to your weight on your seat bones as you do this. Notice what happens to your breathing, your hip joints and your spine. Rest.

Come to sitting again. This time move the top of your pelvis back toward 6 o'clock (Illustration 3). That means your back will round slightly. Notice what other parts of you move as you take your pelvis towards 6. Do your feet tend to want to leave the floor? Do this movement many times to feel what happens with your chest, head and feet. Rest.

Feldenkrais Method®

The Feldenkrais Method is named after its originator, Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, D.Sc. (1904-1984), a Russian born physicist, judo expert, mechanical engineer and educator. The Feldenkrais Method is based on principles of physics, biomechanics and an empirical understanding of learning and human development. By expanding the self-image through movement sequences that bring attention to the parts of the self that are out of awareness, the Method enables you to include more of yourself in your functioning movements. Students become more aware of their habitual neuromuscular patterns and rigidities and expand options for new ways of moving. By increasing sensitivity, the Feldenkrais Method assists you to live your life more fully, efficiently and comfortably.

There are an increasing number of Feldenkrais Practitioners that work with dressage riders. To learn more about the Feldenkrais Method or to find a Feldenkrais Practitioner in your area, go to www.Feldenkrais.com.





Come to sitting again. Tip your pelvis toward 3 o'clock (to the right) either by lifting the left seat bone or pushing down slightly with the right seat bone. Repeat this movement several times. Do your heels want to lift off the floor? Go slowly. How do you move your pelvis toward 3? Which leg/foot helps you move toward 3? What does your back do as you go toward 3 o'clock? Do you tilt, lean or collapse your rib cage as you move over toward 3? Rest.

Repeat only now go toward 9 o'clock (Illustration 5). Do you go toward 9 differently than 3? Which direction is easier? Rest.

Come to sitting again. Move your pelvis toward 12 o'clock. Then continue around the outside of the clock toward 1 o'clock. Continue on to 2 then 3, back to 2, 1 and 12. Repeat this quarter of the clock several times. Notice which hours are easy and which hours are not so easy. What is the quality of the arc like as you go from 12 to 3 and back? Is it

jerky, smooth, flat or curved? Rest for a moment. Then continue moving from 12 through 3 to 6 o'clock. After you have done this half of the clock many times slowly and easily, sit again in the middle. Notice the difference between the two sides of your pelvis. Rest.

Come to sitting again and repeat moving around the clock, this time going from 12 through 9 to 6. In other words, you are doing the other half of the clock moving counterclockwise, then from 6 clockwise back to 12. Repeat this many times, slowly and easily. Notice which hours are difficult to find and which ones are easy. Feel the difference in the two sides of your pelvis. How much of you is involved with this movement? Rest.

Come to sitting and move hour by hour around the outside of the clock in a clockwise direction. (Illustration 6). How smooth can you make the circle? What happens in your hip joints, rib cage and head? Then go counterclock-

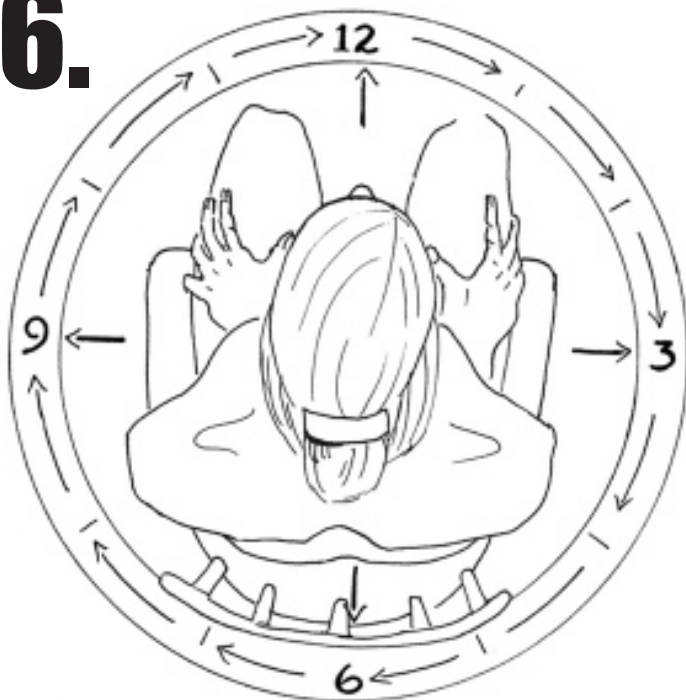
wise around the clock. How is this different? Rest.

Come to sitting and now instead of going around the clock begin to go across the clock. Start with moving from 6 to 12. Notice if this is easier now. Next move between 3 and 9. This will also be familiar as you have already done this diameter of the clock. Then beginning with 1 o'clock go through the hours diagonally (Illustration 7) 1 to 7, 2 to 8, 3 to 9, 4 to 10, 5 to 11 and 6 to 12. Which diagonals were easy? Which diagonals are hard? Rest.

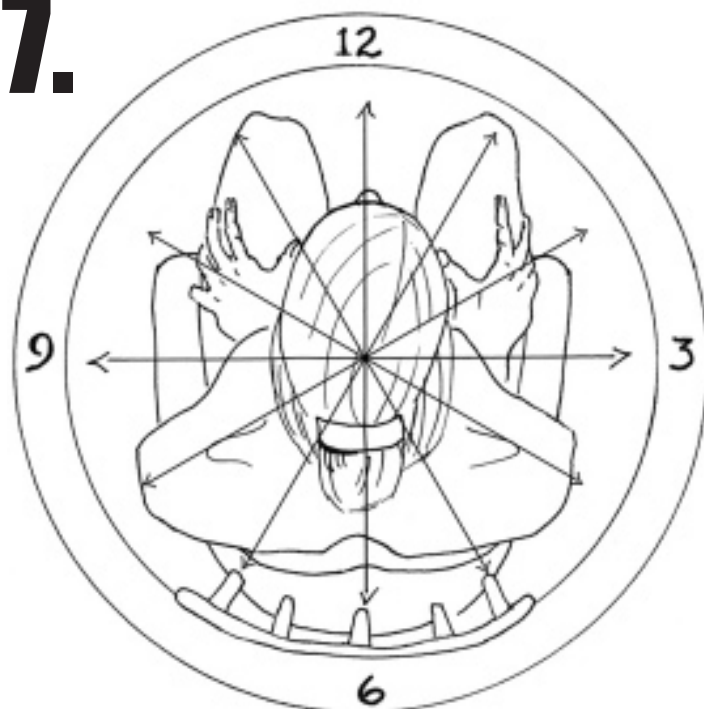
Finally come to sitting again. This time go around the clock and then across the clock. As you do this, see if you can determine the exact middle of the clock, where the hands would attach at the center. This would be a balanced central position on the saddle. Notice if what you now consider the middle is in a different place on your seat bones than when you started.

If you adhered to the basic guide-

6.



7.



lines for the lesson, you may have noticed that it got easier as you went along. You may also have discovered why in your riding, you have only been able to do something in one direction but not the other. If there were hours that were really easy, you might find that you get trapped there when riding preventing you from sitting evenly. If there were hours on the clock that were elusive or nonexistent, you may not have been able to shift your weight effectively in certain directions. Once you have

learned how to do the Pelvic Clock on a chair, you can take this experience to the saddle and repeat the lesson. Make the clock much smaller when in the saddle (at the walk on a quiet horse) and notice what happens to your horse's balance when you move toward the different hours. At first you may find that you have similar difficulties with a particular area on the clock. Or you might find that in the saddle the "sticky" spots have shifted to a different hour. See if you can determine when the clock is even and

level in the saddle. Then when you want to make a weight shift, think of making a barely perceptible movement toward the hour you need for the desired placement of your weight.

Remember that good eiding requires accurate riding. Grossly overemphasized weight aids will only cause the horse to tense and stiffen in order to counterbalance underneath you. The more aware you are of where the middle is, the more accurate your weight aids will be.

Basic guidelines for doing Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement lessons

The purpose of this or any Feldenkrais Method lesson is to help you develop awareness through movement. In other words, it is about bringing your conscious attention to how you move and what is happening in your entire self as you do the lessons. Therefore, in doing this lesson it is very important to observe the following guidelines.

- If it hurts, do less. If you experience any pain while attempting to do the suggested movements, make your movements smaller. Forcing will only show you your limitations rather than your potential. If you think you are already making small movements, see if you can make them half that size. Challenge yourself to do just the hint of the movement. Dressage requires minute adjustments to position within the movement of the horse. If your movements are abrupt, rough and harsh, it could interrupt the horse rather than harmonize with him. Making small movements requires the fine motor control necessary to be a good dressage rider.

- If you get tired during the lesson, stop and rest. There are many pauses in the lesson. The idea is to give your nervous system a chance to process the information you are discovering. If you don't stop and rest when you are tired and/or at the prescribed rest stops, you will not allow your brain to integrate new information. Unlike a computer, our brain learns when it is resting or thinking about other things. This goes along with the concept of "sleeping on it" to figure something out. The rests are momentary pauses to give your nervous system a chance to process the information.

- While you may find some of the movements similar, Feldenkrais lessons are unlike aerobics, yoga or any other type of physical exercise. The lessons are designed to help you understand how to organize yourself easily and efficiently. Hopefully you will discover areas of yourself that have been inactivate or tight, preventing you from moving in a certain way. You would then be able to apply this new awareness to your riding or any other activities you do such as yoga or

Pilates. In other words, the Feldenkrais lessons will allow you to access a greater potential for movement in all that you do.

- Do not force the movements. Often we are told "no pain, no gain." With Feldenkrais Method lessons the opposite is true. Forcing, trying hard, making big fast movements will only inhibit the learning you will gain from the lesson. This in itself can be hard for many people to grasp. If you find yourself struggling at your maximum range of motion, then consider doing 10% of what you think you can do.

- Visualize the movements instead of actually doing them. If you find that even the smallest movements are painful, or that you are unable to do certain movements, simply visualize them. Why does visualization work? You cannot think a thought without a movement. Therefore, by visualizing you will be making imperceptible movements. When you return to doing the movement, you might be surprised to find that is much easier it is.

- You can't make a mistake. Dressage riders often are so concerned with "getting it right" that they will sacrifice everything to be "right." In this lesson there are no "wrong" movements. The important thing is to observe what you do so that you have a choice. Later, you can apply the lesson to finding a balanced position in the saddle. However, if you keep thinking about how this applies to riding while doing the lesson, you will miss some important information about yourself. Do not inhibit certain movements because you can't see how it might apply to your riding at the moment. Experiment with different possibilities. Afterward, you can decide which movements you choose to use while riding.

- Take the time to explore the movements. Going slowly is important so that you can observe the changes that occur. If you think you are already going slow, try going half again as slow. The small movements required for dressage require fine motor control. By going slowly in the lesson, you will discover how to make minute changes in position.



Genetics Basics: Toward an Understanding of Coat Color Inheritance

by Sue Stuska Ed.D.

Why do horses turn out as they do?

This is an age-old question which can be answered by “a combination of genetics and environment.” Both involve elements of chance. Genetics is based on possibilities and probabilities, and while it’s complicated, the principles are easy to grasp. Understanding the basic principles will allow us to understand the more complex situations we encounter with horses. Here, we’ll explore elementary coat color inheritance. This article is based on classroom lecture notes and draws heavily on Dr. Phil Sponenberger’s recent work (see the reference information, below).

Take gender. Each female is homozygous for the X chromosome; i.e., she carries two of them. (Homo = alike and zygote = the first cell of the new individual, formed by the union of the male’s and female’s gametes.) Every male is heterozygous when it comes to sex-determinants: he carries one X and one Y chromosome. (Hetero = unlike.)

We can show this graphically on what is called a Punnet square. The square shows the possibilities for a mating; in this particular case they show the possibilities for the offspring’s gender.

		sire (heterozygous)	
		X	Y
dam (homozygous)	X	XX	XY
	X	XX	XY

The offspring each inherit one chromosome from the sire and one from the dam. (Chromosomes come in pairs, but split in half during egg and sperm production so the embryo receives half of each pair from each parent.) The sire’s row shows the alleles he is able to contribute (X and Y) while the dam’s column shows the alleles she is able to contribute (two Xs).

It cannot be predicted (though modern science is working at it, so I should say it generally cannot be predicted) what sex the foal will be. The Punnet square shows us that it can be female (left offspring column) or male (right offspring column); what we want to know is: which will it be? All we can know, and this square shows it visually, is that for any one union the chances are 50% (two of four possibilities) it will be a filly and 50% it will be a colt. In order for it to be a colt, he must by chance inherit a Y chromosome from his sire. The outcome of the next breeding has nothing to do with the previous ones: a mare who’s had two colts already still has a 50-50 chance in the next pregnancy of having a colt (or a filly).

Let’s back up a bit. Each cell contains a nucleus which houses chromosomes. Our horses have 31 pairs plus the X X or X Y pair (32 pairs total). Przewalski’s horses have 33 pairs while donkeys have 31. These chromosomes contain the hereditary instructions for the new organism. Chromosomes look a bit like Xs (when viewed during cell division through an electron microscope) - they have two arms of varying length joined together at a place called the centromere.

Eggs and sperm are formed when cells in the ovaries and testes divide in half, each half housing half of the separated chromosome pairs. This puts half of each chromosome (one side of the X, if you will) in one egg/sperm and half in the other egg/sperm. While the chromosomes split consistently at the centromere, which half goes which way is by chance, and the same chance exists with each chromosome. Each egg or sperm has half the chromosomes, and any two eggs/sperm are likely to be very different from each other. So the characteristics a mare passes on to her offspring depend on which chromosomes happen to end up in the released egg, and similarly, the characteristics the stallion passes on depends on which chromosomes happen to be in the one sperm that fertilizes the mare’s egg.

Each chromosome contains numerous genes for hereditary traits. The genes occur in the form of paired alleles with one of each pair on each chromosome. For example (simplified), the allele for grey, GG, can be paired with (depending on the heredity of that individual) another GG, a G+ (non-grey) or the horse can have two G+ alleles. (Remember that the offspring

got one of the now paired alleles from its dam and the other from its sire.)

Of the alleles (in many cases and in this example), one is dominant over the other: in this case, GG (grey) is dominant over G+(non-grey). The dominant allele is the one that's expressed (seen). What we see when we look at the horse is called the phenotype (for example, grey), while what is actually in the genes is the genotype (GGGG, GGG+, or G+G+).

	grey phenotype sire who's homozygous		
	G ^G	G ^G	
grey phenotype dam who's heterozygous	G ^G	G ^G G ^G	G ^G G ^G
	G ⁺	G ⁺ G ^G	G ⁺ G ^G

This means that the two grey horses in our example will always have offspring that inherit at least one GG. The dominant GG is the allele that is responsible for the offspring's grey coat. Greys tend to change color with age: the rate of greying varies, and appears to be at least partially under genetic control, but we won't cover this here.

However, their offspring (percentage-wise, assuming they have enough) won't always be homozygous for the dominant GG. There's a 50% chance (two in four) of them having a heterozygous offspring. But the offspring in this simplified example will always look grey.

If a heterozygous GG G+ is bred to another phenotypic grey, while both parents are grey, the offspring could be G+G+. (Actually, there's a 25% chance: one out of four. See the next square.) This pair of recessive alleles will produce a non-grey offspring. So, it is possible for two grey horses to have a non-grey offspring:

	grey phenotype sire who's genetically heterozygous		
	G ^G	G ⁺	
grey phenotype dam who's genetically heterozygous	G ^G	G ^G G ^G	G ^G G ⁺
	G ⁺	G ^G G ⁺	G ⁺ G ⁺

This square shows that, with each breeding, there is a 75% chance of a grey horse and 25% chance of a non-grey horse. Additionally, the square shows that there is a 25% chance of a

homozygous dominant grey, a 50% chance of a heterozygous grey (who then could produce a non-grey) and a 25% chance of a non-grey. This is an example of the results we could see from the breeding of two heterozygous individuals. It shows how we could be surprised by a non-grey (or different-from-parents) foal—even if all the other offspring from this pair had happened to be grey (or same-as-parents). Coat color inheritance is not always as simple as this example, but these principles apply in many cases.

We don't always know a horse's genotype, though we can guess it. By breeding the horse enough times to a known genotype horse (or, in some cases, a probable genotype horse), we can determine by the offspring the genes carried by the parent. For example, if we want only grey offspring (another simplification, but bear with me), and worry that our grey stallion might be heterozygous (carries, also, the recessive allele for non-grey), we can breed him to a non-grey mare. If our stallion carries that recessive allele, eventually (probability-wise) one of his G+ alleles will pair with the mare's G+. That will result in a non-grey offspring, and we'll look for a stallion that's homozygous.

But, as we said, coat color is very interesting and not quite that simple. Take two of the most basic coat colors: bay and chestnut. Besides being very prevalent, they are the basis of many of the other colors.

Bay (a reddish body with black points) is the most frequent color. "Points" are the mane, tail, lower legs and ear rims. We define/identify bays by not just the body color (which varies considerably) but by the presence of black points. White marks are inherited separately from the base color. Socks and stockings may mask the lower leg points, but they don't change the base color either as we describe it (phenotypically—bay) or genetically.

The genetic control of bay and chestnut resides not at one locus (plural = loci) like grey and non-grey, but at two loci. To back up for a minute, each gene occupies a specific site on a specific chromosome (the locus). Conveniently, genes are often symbolized according to their loci (the "G"s in GG and G+ symbolize the grey locus). Both members of the pair, regardless of their form and combination (GGGG, GGG+, or G+G+), reside on corresponding loci on corresponding chromosomes. To look at it another way, the paired chromosomes have identical loci, all lined up in the same sequence. Alleles are the different forms a gene can take; you'll find the GG allele and the G+ allele on corresponding loci on corresponding chromosomes.

The two loci where bay, black and chestnut are determined are called the Agouti and Extension loci. The Agouti locus is named for a South American rodent with brown to almost black hair. The Agouti locus determines the basic color of horses with back points: AA is the dominant allele which gives us bay (by, technically speaking, restricting black pigment to the points); Aa is the recessive allele which gives us black (by allowing black over the whole body). So bays can be AAAA or AAAa and blacks are Aa Aa. That's why blacks are rare in most horse breeds—one dominant allele for bay masks the recessive allele (for black) and gives us phenotypic bays. To look at

Please turn to page 28.



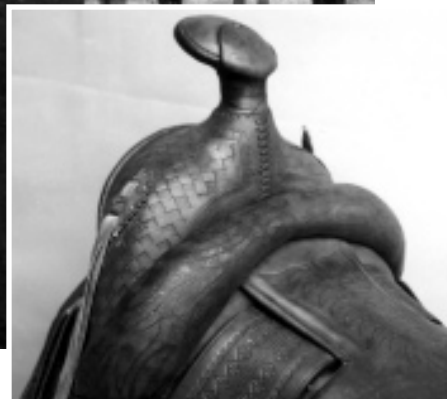
Bucking Rolls



by Cary Schwarz

Bucking rolls have increased in popularity within the last few years, which has followed the increased demand for slick fork saddles. Questions arise as to their practicality, where and how they evolved and whether or not they are here to stay. Answers to these questions are not as satisfying as we might wish, but there are some interesting things that rise to the surface when one considers whether or not to use them.

Saddle below from unknown maker. Note tubelike rolls, not removable, circa early 20th century.



Photos courtesy Griff Durham, Reno, Nevada.

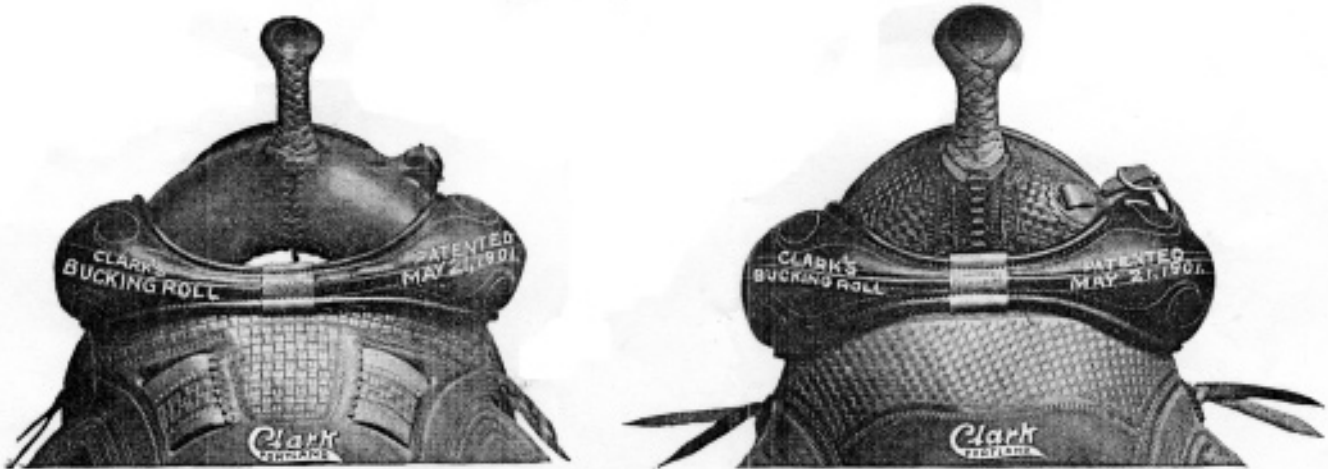
Anytime a discussion of swell fork vs. slick fork saddles with bucking rolls comes up, the question arises “Why not ride a swell fork instead of having to purchase buck rolls as an accessory to riding a slick fork?” A reasonable question to be sure. In areas of the country where swell forks are used most, cowboys seem to be more utilitarian in their equipment. It has been said that “those buckaroos out there” have buck rolls on their saddles that are nothing more than an affectation. But as traditions go, the buckaroos in the Great Basin, the Northwest and in other pockets of the country are holding on tightly to a style that began over a hundred years ago.

Today’s buckaroos of the Great Basin region derive much of their equipment ideas from the California vaquero of old. This legacy emphasizes a high degree of pride in the way things look. Silver-mounted bits and spurs, braided rawhide and fancy saddles with buck rolls in the buckaroo country are all a testament to a high view of tradition. What the vaquero/buckaroo may give up in practicality, he makes up for in taste. In some quarters, bucking rolls are placed on slick fork saddles “because they belong there.”

This buckaroo culture with its inveterate ways appears to be leading the trend toward increased use of bucking rolls. Intertwined with the vaquero/buckaroo tradition are some individuals in the current crop of clinicians. As these clinicians elevate the level of quality horsemanship among their students, their influence on the type of gear used by their students is obvious as well; they have enlarged the sphere of influence of the vaquero ethic a great deal. Bucking rolls on slick fork saddles are a small part of this heritage, but it should be noted that they are a product of

CLARK'S BUCKING ROLL.

(Patented May 21, 1901.)



Front View Showing Bucking Roll in Correct Position.

Clark's Catalog page courtesy Griff Durham.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The beginnings of modern-day bucking rolls appear to have their start in the late 19th century in the Northwest. The earliest form was a tube-like construction that extended from one side of the saddle to the other just to the rear of the fork.

Some of these were actually built into the saddle and were not removable. The John Clark Saddlery of Portland, Oregon, is credited with the first patent on a removable

buck roll that looks much like those of today. Virtually all the major saddleries of the day followed suit with their own version of the bucking roll. Clearly, there was a need to be filled, as many of the saddles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were slick forks. A case could be made that bucking rolls served as a step in the evolution of the swell fork saddle, which became popular in the early 20th century. The bucking roll survives today, the popularity of an untold variety of swell forks notwithstanding.

the buckaroo tradition and not a pure form descending from the vaquero tradition.

Whether we use a swell fork or slick fork, we tend to develop the reasons why or why not to fit our paradigm and/or regional style. In the defense of bucking rolls, however, one could make a good case for the versatility they offer. They can be designed, made and positioned on a fork to the best advantage of the rider, usually with an eye toward closing up useable leg space. Most can be removed easily, therefore making the saddle more versatile. There is little chance of changing a swell fork front as easily or as substantially. Also, from a standpoint of comfort, buck rolls are softer than the wood of a swell fork tree.

Bill Kane, legendary horseman and former cowboss on the Spanish Ranch in northern Nevada, speaks of the "hook" that bucking rolls give the rider when mounted on a tough string of horses or riding in rough terrain. Certainly the security that they offer is a feature that many have come to rely on, and has enhanced their riding skills and their safety.

Bucking rolls offer a certain amount of security; a portion of that security may well be psychological. A number

of respected horsemen and noted saddlers Dale Harwood and Chuck Stormes speak of good riding as primarily a function of proper balance. Ideally, we would "ride the horse and not the saddle" as they say. Good riding is more a result of honing our skills and less about equipment (like buck rolls) to get us where we need to be on the back of a horse. If this is the case, an overdependence on buck rolls (or swells for that matter) might be a step away from the ideal. Some accomplished riders seem to take pride in riding their saddle "slick" and speak of riding a variety of horses without the aid of bucking rolls. Better riders might be able to achieve balance riding a bare slick fork (or an English saddle for that matter), but the rest of us may struggle to find that kind of stability regardless of equipment.

There have been attempts to link the shape of the seat of the saddle (in saddlemaker's parlance, the ground seat) with the style of fork. Slick fork proponents sometimes claim that the seat in a Wade saddle is the optimal shaped seat, implying that a swell fork cannot accomplish this ideal. This argument has been used to support the bucking roll/slick fork combination over the swell fork. This is a myth that had been perpetu-



ated at all levels of expertise within our horsemanship circle. Truth is, the shape of the seat has little to do with the shape of the front of the saddle. A skilled saddlemaker can sculpt a ground seat that is nearly identical from one to the next regardless of the style of fork.

There is a wide range of theory regarding the use of bucking rolls: those that use them all the time swear by them; those that never use them say that they don't need them. The middle ground has room for both and recognizes that there is a time and place to use them. Thus the Ray Hunt adage: If you need five pounds of pressure, use five pounds. No more, no less. Buck rolls can serve a purpose for some applications, but not all. In some cases, buck rolls may be the adornment that critics charge, but they are a part of a rich tradition that isn't likely to disappear anytime soon. The use of bucking rolls, especially in some regions, is clearly a tradition with deep roots and choice that remains a highly personal one.

CONSTRUCTION NOTES

Most bucking rolls today are stuffed with wool trimmed from bark-tanned sheepskin with an occasional pair stuffed with horse hair. The shell is usually made out of chrome-tanned cowhide. This leather is what most soft leathers are: common, relatively inexpensive, but not a very rugged tannage. There are some bucking rolls available that are made of exotic leathers such as shark, elephant, stingray, ostrich and beaver tail, which offer a unique look and promise more durability.

Everyday cowboys expose bucking rolls to a lot of abuse. Nothing wears them out faster than inadvertently dallying up on one of them and/or packing the coiled rope across them. But as you notice wear on the side that the rope is carried on, removing and reversing the rolls will extend their life.

The style seen most often today is the strap-on type that is fitted into place on each side by the fork screws. A saddle string weight strip of leather then connects the rolls to one another. Some buck rolls are canvas lined, which adds a measure of durability and body.

Genetics Basics continued....

Continued from page 25.

it another way, most bays must be AAAA or we'd have more blacks. To look at it still another way, bay masks black, so if an offspring receives one AA from either parent, s/he'll be bay, not black.

In further allele shorthand, since the horse will be a bay regardless of his genotype (AAAA or AAAa), he may be indicated as AA- because the second allele doesn't matter for his color and we can't know what allele it is by looking at the horse. (It does matter when he's bred, but now we are talking about shorthand for individual horse colors.)

To review, the AA allele, and the red/tan bay pattern (or color, in a simplified way), are dominant over the Aa allele and the less red/tan (black) pattern (or color). This has nothing to do with the darkness or lightness of the color; it has to do with the power of the allele to influence the color of the horse.

So that's the Agouti locus. The Extension locus interacts with the Agouti locus to give us chestnut horses. A pair of Ee alleles results in a red coat without black points. The allele is represented this way because it is at the Extension locus (E) and is recessive (lower case e). Now comes the interaction: a pair of recessive Ee alleles at the Extension locus completely masks the Agouti genotype. The Ee Ee combination is "epistatic" to the Agouti locus. (The Agouti locus is "hypostatic"—its expression can be masked.)

Using genetic shorthand, chestnut horses can be indicated genotypically as "- , Ee Ee" (the Agouti locus is first, the Extension locus is second). This shows that no matter what is

present at the Agouti locus, it's not important in that horse's phenotype because it's masked by the Ee Ee.

The neutral option allele is E+ . The + indicates a probable wild type allele (likely what's found in wild horses). One E+ allele at the Extension locus allows the color to be determined by the Agouti locus. So bay horses will be AA -, E+ - and blacks will be AaAa, E+ - .

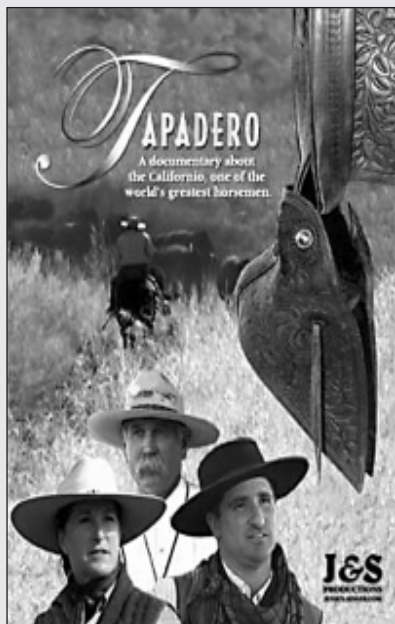
It may be easier to think of the Agouti and Extension loci as switches. The Extension locus switch works first to give "chestnut" or "not chestnut," and when horses are "not chestnut," the Agouti locus comes into play indicating "bay" or "black".

So, now we've covered some of the possibilities and probabilities of genetics. We've discussed four paired concepts: dominant & recessive, homozygous & heterozygous, genotype & phenotype, epistatic & hypostatic. Studying genetic inheritance of coat colors gives us both an understanding of genetic concepts and knowledge of the heritage of the horse colors we're so fond of.

For further information, I highly recommend my primary reference book for this article: *Equine Color Genetics*, second edition, by D. Phillip Sponenberg. Phil is professor of pathology and genetics at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine. He continues to do a tremendous job researching and then explaining the complex nuances of color genetics in horses. The majority of the factual information in this article is due to Phil, and any mistakes or over simplifications are my own.

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Tapadero—A documentary about the California Vaqueros by Susan Jensen and Paul Springer \$24.95

Tapadero is a documentary about the California vaqueros, long revered as some of the world's greatest horsemen. It includes a look at the colorful vaquero history that began 300 years ago in Mexico and traces the journey to Alta California, which would become a horseman's paradise. You get a first-hand look at the ranch life and the awe-inspiring scenery at some of California's great ranchos where they still follow vaquero traditions, including riding slick-fork saddles, use of the hackamore and spade bit, reata roping, and livestock handling. It is a tribute to those hardy souls living the vaquero tradition and carrying it forward, and features some of California's mainstays of the vaquero way. Running time is approx. 1 hr. 22 min., DVD.

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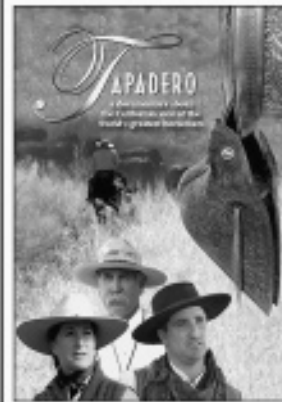
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3/17-20 Buck Brannaman ranch roping clinic, Benson, 866-771-7358
3/24-27 Buck Brannaman horsemanship and cow working clinic, Chandler, 623-742-7285

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1/20-22 Dave Weaver and Gwynn Turnbull Weaver Californios ranch roping clinic, Buellton, 805-452-1615
2/17-19 Dave Weaver and Gwynn Turnbull Weaver Californios ranch roping clinic, Laytonville, 707-354-0251
3/10-12 Dave Weaver and Gwynn Turnbull Weaver Californios ranch roping clinic, Santa Margarita, 805-801-7058
3/17-19 Dave Weaver and Gwynn Turnbull Weaver Californios ranch roping clinic, Orland, 916-645-1269

3/25-26 Richard Winters colt starting and horse handling clinic, Galt, 916-591-2481

Florida

2/25-27 Ray Hunt clinic, Madison, 850-929-2178

Hawaii

2/10-12 Buck Brannaman colt starting and horsemanship clinic, Maui, 808-579-6330 or 808-573-5515

Nebraska

2/24-27 Buck Brannaman horsemanship and ranch roping clinic Fremont, 402-456-7505

New Mexico

3/31-4/3 Buck Brannaman foundation and horsemanship clinic, Santa Fe, 505-424-7400

Oklahoma

3/3-6 Buck Brannaman horsemanship and ranch roping clinic, Vinita, 918-256-8745

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Texas

3/10-13 Buck Brannaman horsemanship 1 and 2 clinic, Belton, 325-396-2461
3/11-13 Ray Hunt clinic, Lope, 512-565-1824

Australia

2/2-4 Buck Brannaman colt starting and horsemanship clinic, Australia, contact Wayne Anderson wayneanderson59@hotmail.com

New Zealand

1/20-22 Buck Brannaman horsemanship clinic, New Zealand contact Jenny Patterson horsemanshipnz@xtra.co.nz
1/27-29 Buck Brannaman horsemanship clinic, New Zealand contact Jenny Patterson horsemanshipnz@xtra.co.nz

Clinicians, clinic sponsors and event coordinators,
please send your 2006 clinic and event schedules for our Calendar of Events.

Send to emily@eclectic-horseman.com or Fax to 303-404-2404.

What Were They Thinking?



"I sure am glad Buck can't see this. Truth."

"I was at a Buck clinic many years ago when someone asked him about ground driving horses. He said that he didn't do it because the release wasn't fast enough, and it could cause a brace. This made sense to me, and as a result, I never ground drove a single colt; and we not only breed, raise, and train Morgan stock horses, but I also start colts for the public. But I never forgot what Buck said.

"However, now I was in a position that I had to do it in order to train this colt to drive. I thought and thought about it—how can I get this done and still not create any brace? So I finally decided not to even use a snaffle, but instead to drive using a rope halter.

"I fitted the rope halter with slobber straps, hoping their weight might help with the release, and asked Dave Ferry to make me up a set of 'lines' of tree line—16 feet long. It worked! I started each session with some groundwork, paying particular attention to any exercise that helped keep this colt soft. Then I ended each session with a couple of minutes of backing circles, again paying particular attention to softness. After driving this colt up in the hills and orchards on foot for a week or so in the 100-degree heat, I decided there had to be a better way. So I started using a saddle horse. It was more fun than you can imagine. (It had its exciting moments, too. Things get real busy when the colt spooks).

"But then, thanks to Buck, and Ray, and Bryan —there isn't anything about horses that isn't fun."

Jo Johnson "saddle driving" from her Morgan horse Remi, in Sanger, California. Photo by her husband, Brent.

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