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# ECCLECTIC HORSEMAN



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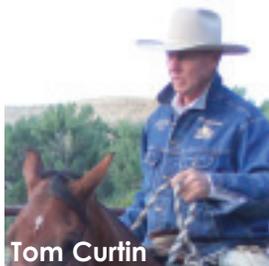
## Contributors



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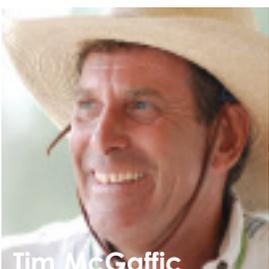
**Martin Black** is a 5th generation Idaho rancher and 4th generation rodeo competitor. He has a lifetime of experience in handling horses, cattle and roping. In his youth, there was a strong influence of the California-Spanish style of horsemanship. More at [martinblack.net](http://martinblack.net).



Tom Curtin

**Tom Curtin** grew up in the Big Sky State of Montana where his father had an outfitting and packing business. Tom was extremely fortunate to be around and work for some of the most famous ranches of the west. Along with beneficial settings for horse training, Tom also had the chance to learn from many inspirational men in the horse world. Learn more at [tomcurtin.net](http://tomcurtin.net).

**Tim McGaffic** was introduced to Ray Hunt during the 1980s while working with difficult horses on a Colorado Ranch. That experience changed his thinking about how to handle horses and set him on a journey to search out Tom and Bill Dorrance and horseman of similar philosophy. The principles that these great horsemen put forth were applicable to working with the stock and dogs on the ranches and Tim pursued his education with many of what now have become legendary horse and stockman. Low stress stockmanship and horsemanship went hand in hand and as a ranch manager made sense for the bottom line and the welfare of the horses, people and stock. In 2004 Tim took a job managing a ranch in Hawaii and spent many years applying these principles to a unique situation. Tim recently returned from Hawaii to manage a small ranch in Colorado and to establish an educational program for the betterment of horses.



Tim McGaffic

**Tom Moates** is a leading equestrian author and journalist. His latest book, *"Six Colts, Two Weeks - Part 1 Week 1,"* is available. More info at [tommoates.com](http://tommoates.com).

**On the Cover:** Janine Moran Roy and Jewel. Photo by Patti Martin.



Hi Emily,

Robert from Australia here. What a great article about hackamores in the September/October edition it came at just the right time for me. I don't call myself a hackamore man but I will probably use one a bit more now that I know how to get one shaped up right (I really like my snaffle bit). And what about that article of Wendy's which talked about the thoracic sling. I always knew there was something going on in there but I didn't really know what it was. Now I do.

It brings so many things together. A better understanding of lateral flexing and what Buck talks about in that area. Thank you guys for putting together such a great magazine you are really doing a great job. And to those people who cancel their subscription it's their loss.

Thanks again, Robert (Dooley) Mooney Australia

PS: I'm going to a Tom Curtin clinic next week. If it weren't for this magazine I probably would not have known anything about him so thanks again.

Emily,

Thank you for a superb educational publication. Pay no attention to shallow notes and chirping expressing either pleasure or dissatisfaction with particular authors. These notes only address form. The articles present concepts and ideas; therefore, are always useful irrespective of one's agreement, or not with the material. This focus on substance ensures continuing excellence.

Keep up the good work.

Tom Snyder, via email

## CORRECTION

In the article "Bogus Ideas in Horsemanship No. 2: Bigger is Better" the photo for Figure 2 is: Rider – Deborah Dougherty, Horse – Beckridge Patrex. Beckridge Patrex was a purebred, registered Morgan Gelding. He was 15.1 with shoes and long feet and did weigh around 1000-1100 lbs. The story of our journey through our lives together is very dear to my heart. "Pattie" went from a scared, little, scruffy, misunderstood, barely broke 7-year-old to a well-loved ambassador for the Morgan horse as we worked together to achieve the level of Grand Prix, earning the USDF Gold Medal (first time for a rider on a Morgan Horse), as well as many USDF All Breeds championships, AMHA Open Competition Championships and even a USDF Freestyle Year End award at Intermediaire Freestyle. Beyond the awards, he was many things to many people including schoolmaster, ambassador, inspiration, and just undeniably cute (even Carol Lavell fell prey to his cuteness)! To me he was my devoted, best friend, always dependable, gentle soul who was a once-in-a-lifetime horse. Deborah Dougherty, via email

**Mission Statement** *To be the best resource to help students develop their own horsemanship.*

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# FOR VISUAL LEARNERS ~ THE HORSEMAN'S GAZETTE

by Tom Moates

*The* 34th issue of *The Horseman's Gazette* is about to be released. Wait...what is *The Horseman's Gazette*? You haven't heard? No, it's not a printed publication; it's an ongoing DVD video series focusing on the same practical, unembellished, and outstanding horsemanship, and presented by many of the same trusted horse folk, you find in *Eclectic Horseman* magazine.

From Buck Brannaman to Wendy Murdoch, Bryan Neubert to Martin Black...Ellen Eckstein, Lee Smith, Joe Wolter, Buster McLaury, and on and on—you won't find a larger more comprehensive collection of video insights and lessons from a wider range of professionals anywhere. And, this distinctive horsemanship video encyclopedia just keeps growing.

It is called the *Gazette* because it is published four times a year and annual subscriptions can be purchased so they arrive regularly in your mailbox just like copies of your favorite periodical. Individual issues also can be ordered from the backlist.

This year marks the ninth that the *Gazette* has been produced by *Eclectic Horseman* magazine. The idea for this unique video spin-off from the magazine was the idea of *Eclectic Horseman* owner and editor, Emily Kitching.

"We had finished a video for Martin Black," Emily says. "We had been hired to edit it—it was filmed by a professional videographer. When I sat down to look at the footage I was disappointed in how much the so-called expert had missed because he was an expert in videography but not in horses."

Emily edited and re-worked that first video project to get it right, but it left her thinking that she might be better suited to take on both the editing and the video work in the field.

"I know horses and I've shot photos of them for years, so I understand timing and position," Emily explains. "So, we started filming and editing horsemanship DVDs for other people. Once I had experience doing that, I really started to realize the awesome power of video and how well it compliments what we're trying to do with the print publication—which is, educate people's eye as well as give them things to do with their horses."

Emily describes *The Horseman's Gazette* as "a quarterly educational DVD series." Whenever she discusses the magazine or the *Gazette*, Emily is quick to point out how central education is to both. It is Emily's own compulsive quest to get better with horses, especially her horse Belich, that has overflowed into her livelihood. The result is a career based on sharing the best horsemanship guidance available with other horse lovers full-time.

Another way Emily describes the *Gazette* to folks is to say, "Imagine the pages of the magazine come to life on video."

Each DVD runs between two and two and a half hours and includes multiple segments with a variety of horse folk. The segments provide a range of approaches to topics. In some, a guest horseman will work a horse and discuss the process with the viewer as it unfolds, sharing what he or she sees taking place, what he or she is doing, what challenges are presented by the horse, and how things turn out. In others, a presenter works with a student and a horse so the viewer essentially gets to sit in on a lesson. Others are interviews with capable horse people who speak on a range of topics from wrecks to their own approaches to some aspect of horse work.

"It might take a long time to get some nice changes in a horse," Emily admits of videoing the horse work in the field. "I edit sparingly on the *Gazette* pieces because I want people to see in real time the time that it takes for these things to transpire. So, I don't cut out the middle part where a horse is having to work at something because the people who are interested in the *Gazette* often are the kind of people who are interested in seeing the process."

As mentioned above, the *Gazette* was designed to be a growing base of educational knowledge, and with 30 volumes now available and many upcoming segments already "in the can," Emily's special project is enjoying both longevity and increasing interest.

"It's a large body of work, and we still have all of the back issues except the first two available," she says. "Once they go

out of stock, we're not reprinting them at this point."

For Emily, the chance to load up the truck with her equipment (and often her daughter, Sydney, as well) and travel to learn from so many great horse people who generously allow her to come and visit and put them in front of the camera is a unique circumstance that she is eager to share.

"The opportunity to see people teach outside of a clinic format is really interesting," Emily says. "A lot of times these men or women are riding their own horses at their own facilities and it's on their own time. So, they're not bound by any time constraints and they're working at their own pace to demonstrate something, or expose a horse to something, or to accomplish a task, so there's not any pressure on anybody."

One recent contributor to *The Horseman's Gazette* is Chris Sobenes. Chris is based in Oak View, California, and she trains horses and teaches horsemanship. ([www.chrissobenes.com](http://www.chrissobenes.com)) Chris has a segment in Issue No. 28 of the *Gazette* that shows how to start a novice adult rider with good horsemanship concepts in a safe and fun way.

"I just love how *The Horseman's Gazette* dovetails with the *Eclectic Horseman* magazine!" Chris says. "If you have read an article in the magazine you will likely be able to find a corresponding video to reinforce your learning experience. No other magazine does this and I think it is an invaluable tool to invest in both mediums. I think of this video series as a tool of the trade. Participating in the making of *The Horseman's Gazette* has helped me hone my skills as a teacher and helped me to have a greater understanding of how to explain some of the concepts of horsemanship using visual and written forms."

Emily believes that providing an opportunity to see a great variety of horse people share their knowledge in the video series is a great way to stir up ideas and to inspire people to improve their horsemanship.

"Tom Dorrance encouraged people to go watch anyone that they possibly could because you can learn something from everybody by watching what they do," Emily says. "How the information is conveyed in these videos is dependant upon the source that's providing it. So, like Windy Murdoch, when she does a piece, she is typically teaching another student. So you're getting to watch someone's lesson and see her help that rider make changes and you can see the change in the horse and the rider. If it's somebody like Martin Black or Peter Campbell or Buster McLaury, they're with their horses and they're demonstrating.

"We've done quite a few segments with Bryan Neubert. He's got lots of young horses to work with. When he is home in the winter or early spring, we'll go to his place and film for a day or two and he'll work all the horses that he would be working if he were there without us. He'll bring the yearlings in and introduce them to being led. Or, we did one where it was the first time a colt was away from its mom. We did some segments on what he would expect with a really young horse with a few rides introducing a stop and a turnaround versus a horse with two or three years of riding working again on the stop or the turnaround so that you can see the progression and what he would expect at different moments from a horse with that similar experience level. It's really a wide variety of content.

"I'm trying to give people the tools and the information that they need to develop their own horsemanship—not to be

like anybody else, or to do what somebody else is doing, but for them, themselves, to put in the work to develop what it means for their own development."

Emily stays on the lookout for new contributors. The process of deciding if a new teacher or trainer is a good fit for the series requires time, effort, and consideration.

"If it's new people I haven't worked with before, I like to go watch them teach for a few days," Emily says. "Like last summer, I'd never seen Tom Curtain teach and I'd had people tell me quite often that I needed to go check him out for the magazine and for the *Gazette*. So, I went and watched him do a colt starting clinic and watched him teach for a couple of days. I really liked what I saw, and one afternoon we shot several segments there at the ranch where he was teaching the clinic."

Feedback from subscribers to both the magazine and the *Gazette* is appreciated. Like people suggesting possibilities for new horsemen to include, Emily considers all the opinions that come in.

"Some of the feedback that I get," she says, "is that people who live in areas where they don't have clinicians coming to them, and they don't have somebody local that they ride with—they maybe get to one clinic a year—the *Gazette* is their lifeline for improvement and for having something to strive for or challenge them, or to keep them from getting bored or stuck. It's not just that they have a problem that they need solved, except for the problem of not having a clear path where they want to go or what they want to do."

Perhaps the best way to wrap up an introduction to *The Gazette* is simply to share a quote from a longtime subscriber.

"I am so grateful that *Eclectic Horseman* magazine and the *Gazette* video series are available," says Lisa Capaldini. "I find that they both express a very specific philosophy of horsemanship that is pretty hard to find elsewhere, namely that riders have a responsibility to be good partners to their horses. Because horses are so connected to their emotions, good riding and horse work means ALWAYS taking the horse's state of mind/heart in mind. Some 'experts' reduce this to minimizing reactivity/ensuring obedience but I think it's way more complicated than that, and, requires the rider to be emotionally tuned in to themselves. Since I started riding 12 years ago I have been happily obsessed with horses and trying to improve my horsemanship (being with horses) and trying to improve the technical parts of my riding. The *Eclectic Horsemanship* approach keeps those two linked.

"Another feature I really appreciate is how humble the EH experts are—there's a saying about doctors (I'm one!) that over time, every doctor becomes either cynical or humble (hopefully the latter) and I find myself remembering how humble your teachers are when I'm having a horse problem. And your experts also teach "beginner's mind," an approach that encourages patience and openness rather than quick solutions.

"A final thought—the more I ride and hang around horses the MORE I'm getting out of the EH articles and videos—there's always more to learn, methods to refine, strategies to discard or modify—this journey with horses has a lot to do with learning and respect and your magazine and video models them both superbly!"

*Watch short excerpts of all previous issues of The Horseman's Gazette or subscribe online at [eclectic-horseman.com](http://eclectic-horseman.com).*



# Evaluating Young Horses

by Tom Moates

**C**learly horses are born with certain inherent traits and tendencies. Equally obvious is the fact that horses' experiences and environments shape their behavior over time, as well. And then there are the physical aspects of young horses, the conformational things that will affect their performance and health over the course of their lives.

With so many factors involved in how horses turn out when it is time to get them trained, get on, and go for a ride, what can one discern in youngsters when thinking about their future potentials? Our roundtable discussion for this issue runs that topic past a few experienced horse folks to see what insights they have on looking at youngsters with their futures in mind.

## MELANIE SMITH TAYLOR

Melanie Smith Taylor is a horsemanship clinician and a celebrated show jumper who won an Olympic Gold Medal representing the United States in 1984. She also is the author of the recently released book *Riding with Life: Lessons from the Horse*. For more on Melanie visit: [www.taylormadehorsemanship.com](http://www.taylormadehorsemanship.com)

"I guess different people have different things that are important to them," Melanie says up front about assessing young horses. "For me, I think everybody wants a good balanced horse that's athletic and has a good mind. For jumping horses, there are a few things people look for. Dr. Danny Marks, who was the veterinary for the U.S. equestrian team for years, did an interesting study. He took pictures over the years, starting in 1968 at the Mexico Olympic Games, of all the great jumpers in the world until now to study common conformation qualities in the great horses.

"I remember talking to him recently. He said it was a fascinating study because the great horses, most of them are all kind of freaks of nature. There's not a real commonality except there were two things that he noted. He said the majority of the great horses had a good prominent wither and wide hip bones that sat very high on the body. I thought that was really interesting, especially the wide hip bones because that was the most common trait of the great jumpers, and then the prominent wither was second."

Melanie has bred and raised Thoroughbreds for many years.

"Just watching the foals in the pasture you can sort of pick out the ones that are athletic, the ones that are brave, the leaders, the followers, and that's fun to do," Melanie says. "When I look at a horse, the first thing that I see is the eye. The eye is what gives the horse expression and I want a big, soft, and intelligent eye. You watch their way...you look for one that has a calmness versus being flighty. You just try to read them as you work with them; you can tell a lot about their minds. In the end, the mind is the most important thing.

"We did have a lot of foals to play with and work with and



Melanie Smith Taylor out with some of her young horses at Wildwood Farms in Germantown, Tenn.

I think right away you can sort of tell the ones that are bright—the ones that are smart and think and have a good mind. They respond to you rather than react to a situation. They are looking to get along. But I don't think that always tells the whole story. When they're that young, there's so much...I mean, the really nice colts with poor training can just go south. A lot of horses are going to make it anyway—everybody calls them the 'naturals.' The naturals are going to make it anyway despite training. But it's the ones that need help, that need confidence, those are the ones that are going to get into a bad situation there.

"We really enjoyed working with the young ones but I don't think we put a lot of stock in 'this one's going to be fabulous,' or 'that one's going to be fabulous,' just by looking at them. We would think because his mother was this or that, that he's going to be this or that. It was more about the breeding and then we just sort of let them grow up. We never made judgments at the time."



Young horses at Wildwood Farms in Germantown, Tenn.

While Melanie may not have judged what a young horse's performance potential would be, she puts a great deal of stock on the influence of the mother horse on a foal.

"I think the mother, the mare, has a lot to do with it," Melanie says. "For instance, we had a broodmare who had an injury and lost an eye so she always kept her foal on the side of her good eye, and that foal was really one-sided. It was very difficult in the beginning to train him. We had to work very hard to balance him up. He didn't want you on one side because his mother had always been on one side. And the mother has a lot to do with the way they react to things so I think the mother definitely has influence on the foal. All those things can be changed with good training, but definitely in the beginning when you halterbreak, you can usually tell which ones are out of which mares—they have certain traits that definitely show true for us."

Melanie admits that sometimes she simply has a sense of how a foal is going to turn out, but not from any obvious traits.

"Those things to me are just kind of a feeling you have," she says. "It's hard to describe what makes a horse great or really talented. I think it's just a feeling you have when you work with it. But yes, we've had a lot that were just really light. I think it's the natural balance of the horse that makes all the difference because when a horse is balanced naturally he's just so much easier to work with because everything is easy for him—you don't have to adjust this to move that. The balance is so key because it just gives your horse the athletic ability, and when he has athletic ability it makes him easier to adjust, easier to ride and train. When he's balanced he's also going to be more sound and that gives him durability and longevity in the job. Balance is really the key because it allows the horse to be a good athlete and to stay sound."

When asked about her general advice on this subject, Melanie says:

"For a less experienced person, you definitely want to look for the disposition and the mind first. A top rider can handle a little bit of a disposition problem if the athleticism is there, but in the end the big issue is how he's going to come back to haunt you. You know, the perfect horse is a great athlete with a great mind. In lieu of that, I think I'd take mind over anything else. That's what gives a horse heart and gives a horse try.

"There are so many things you can't discover until you work with one. You can look at one, but you can't really know his mind and his heart and his try until you've spent some time with him. That doesn't show on the outside, that comes from the inside. I think all you can do from the outside is try to find the horse that's balanced and his legs are put on straight."

## DWIGHT HILL

*Dwight Hill has cowboied and raised and trained horses for over 30 years. He breeds horses, has taught horsemanship clinics across the United States and Canada, and has won such notable roping titles as the Early Californios Skills of the Rancho two-rein stock horse class. Dwight is based near Rexburg, Idaho. For more info visit: [www.dwight-hillversatilehorses.com](http://www.dwight-hillversatilehorses.com).*

"When I'm picking horses for myself, they've got to have a presence about them," Dwight says. "I mean, they've got to carry themselves with pride and they've got to have a really sharp eye. I want a horse with a lot of eye. If you've got a bunch of colts in a corral, I'm going to pick the colt that will keep his eye on you—one that's willing to watch you, stand, and look at you. If he's even standing there blowing snot but he's looking at you, that's the horse I want. I don't want the colt that's standing in the corner with his head down looking away from you trying to avoid you."

Also, if Dwight moves a bunch of young horses around, he's looking for a colt who is trying to work his way up to the head of the bunch.

"I don't want a colt that's a follower," he explains. "I want a colt that's got enough confidence and pride even as a baby that he wants to be one of the leaders. I don't care if he's standing in the middle of the herd, but if he's looking out of that bunch at me and is aware of my presence, that's the colt I'm going to want. They're going to carry that confidence—as long as we handle them right and fair—they'll always have that presence and that confidence their whole lives.

"For me, I want the superstar. I want the overachiever. I do



Dwight Hill raises horses in Rexburg, Idaho.



## ROUNDTABLE

a lot of branding, and these colts will be around a lot of people and there will be a lot of action and what that transitions into is a horse. Once you get their confidence, if you ask them they'll go right through a fire if you want them to. If you point them at a crowd of people standing at the mouth of a branding trap, they might be just as apprehensive as any other colt, but if you ask them they'll have enough confidence in you that they'll go ahead and go through it and do it."

Dwight does not find the more confident colts more difficult to train if you are a capable horse trainer. The more confident horse, however, may take over with a less capable horse person, he warns.

"But, if you're wanting a performance horse," Dwight says, "they've got to have the courage that when you ask them to do something they're going to do it and they're going to give you their all. They're more apt to give you 100 percent when you ask them than the horse that's passive and hiding his head in the corner. And I pick my cow dogs the same way—I want that dog to, if I step into a litter of puppies—I don't care what color they are or how they look—the pup that comes up to me; he's the one I'm going to take. I run Border Collies and Kelpies.

"It's the same deal because the colt that's got the curiosity to look at you, even though he's probably as scared as the rest, he's going to be the one that's going to come through and be the superstar. The same with that dog—that dog that's willing to walk up to you and he doesn't even know you, that courage is going to translate over to stepping up to a cow and challenging them with his eye, and a lot of times they don't even have to bite them, they'll just step up to the cow with the presence of their eye and turn the cows."

Dwight's colts run loose with their mothers all summer. Then he gathers and weans them in the fall, which is the first time he takes a serious look at how they move.

"These colts haven't really been exposed to man yet," he says. "That's when I judge their presence and how they carry themselves. Then, I go to handling them. But, I always will pick a horse with a lot of eye appeal and a lot of presence and carry themselves proud. That carries over to energy, too, because if they've got the energy to do that, they've got the energy to pack you all day. You don't have to kick on them revving them up to get their feet moving; all you've got to do is ask them."

Dwight puts a lot of stock in the breeding to determine how a young horse will mature.

"The genetics and imprinting," he says, "I honestly feel that 70 percent of your colt comes from the mare. If the mare is bred to cow and the mare is a good mare herself, the colt will be. And, if that mare's got a good attitude, that colt will have that attitude. You watch a cranky mare in the herd, her little colt, whether it's a filly or a horse colt, he's doing the same thing—he's penning his ears, he's grouching around there. I just eliminate those mares from my herd. I don't need a mare with

a bad attitude. I've got my horse program down now to where I can tell you how a colt's going to ride when he's a yearling. I can tell you how he'll start, how long you're going to be in the round pen before you're on him, how he's going to react, how big he's going to be...most of my colts I've raised them three generations back top and bottom."

Dwight also likes a pretty horse.

"First thing is they catch my eye with their looks," he says, "and then I just start going through them and making sure they're straight legged and everything, but I want that presence. I want them to catch my eye and I want to ride as pretty a horse as I can throw my leg over.

"If the colt catches your eye, that's the one to go with. I don't always worry about what everybody else thinks, but I make sure I like the horse I'm riding and then that horse gets the fairest chance of being a good horse there is. If you like the horse you're riding, you're always going to give him a break. But if you don't like the horse you're riding, you're always going to be picking on him. If you don't like the horse, let somebody else ride him. If you don't look forward to getting on the horse, that horse is probably not going to get a fair chance."

## BRYAN NEUBERT

*Bryan Neubert travels the country part of each year conducting horsemanship, colt starting, and cow working clinics, and works with problem horses and starts colts when at home from the road. Several videos showcasing his teaching are available including, Wild Horse Handling and The First Week (with clinician Joe Wolter, and his son Jim Neubert). For more visit: [www.bryanneubert.com](http://www.bryanneubert.com).*

"If you happen to be around where baby colts are being born out in a pasture situation you may notice that before long they are going to want to run and play together. As time rolls on



you may notice a variation in the boldness level of different individuals. Some may want to play with the group but if they get about so far away from their mother they are going to have to quit and get back close to her. The other extreme is one that may lead the group far enough that they could get clear out of sight of the mares. This security or lack of it I've noticed may also be apparent later at weaning.

"At weaning time there will be those that are more curious and the first to start eating hay out of my hand and then grain out of a handheld bucket. I like these because the others will use them for security to start doing the same thing. Then sometimes there may be one that is walking the fence the whole time you are around fretting about your presence. I have been separating them from the group before they entice some of the other timid ones to start following them doing the same thing. I might let them get a little hungry to encourage them to gradually eat from my hand and eventually get my hands on them some. I may be the only friend they have for a while until they look forward to me showing up to help them come out of their shell.

"In a group you soon see the more dominant ones show themselves especially around feeding time. That's normal but occasionally a bully will arise. They are annoying and can keep the others stirred up and they can increase the risk of injury to the group. My family might refer to them as "sharks." Usually putting them in with colts a year or two older solves that deal. It won't take them long to turn a shark into a guppy. The bully becomes the underdog. It's fun to see the ex-bully approaching a manger full of older colts one step at a time, almost asking permission to get a bite of hay.

"The year I turned 16, Bill Dorrance helped me see more of what I was looking at. His brother Tom ran a ranch nearby and they had brought about 30 colts down from Nevada to sell. Bill had already picked three for himself and we went over to see if I could find one for myself. I was hoping Bill would just pick one for me but it was plain he wasn't going to do my thinking for me and let me make up my own mind. They had them in a lot where we could move them around us and look them over and compare. First thing we watched was their backs as they trotted together. Some were more bouncy and hit the ground harder where some were a lot smoother and just glided when they trotted. He mentioned that the rougher ones have steeper shoulders and shorter and steeper pasterns where the more sloping shoulders and longer pasterns would make a lot smoother ride.

"Next we looked at their backs. He mentioned those with a shorter back could come off steep country easier and could stop and turn easier when it came to close-in cow work. We looked at wither difference and of course those with more prominent withers could hold your saddle on better when it came to roping. He mentioned how some traveled with their noses sort of naturally poked out and how the neck of some horses sits on their shoulders and their heads on their necks so they would probably bridle up a lot prettier. He mentioned he preferred a



Bryan Neubert in Alturas, California.

long, tapered neck over a short, thick neck type.

"I remember years ago I took a job starting colts on a sizeable family ranch in Nevada. They had sent a plane out the day before to find where most of the colts could be located in the mountain country. Willis Packer was the owner and in his mid-70s and a character like you would never forget. I remember as we rode out to find them he mentioned 'They say I have over 600 head of horses out here. Some people would say that's too many and maybe it is, but I just like horses.'

"Anyway as the mountains got steeper he said he was going on up alone and see if he could get a good-sized bunch to head down this ridge where we could get them out in the open and could head them for home. There was a cutoff where they could maybe rim around and foil our day so he had me wait there and make sure they would follow the ridge on down. I waited there for quite awhile getting kind of bored when I began to hear like a faint rumble sound. As I listened it was getting louder and louder so I trotted out where I could see if horses were coming and the whole hillside above me was just matted with a big bunch of horses. They were coming at a dead run but the thing that just made my jaw drop was to see a grey colt take the lead and just streak off the mountain right when it was getting even steeper and did it so easy. We spent the next four days gathering and sorting horses just to get me 6-8 to start and when it was done that same grey was in the bunch for me. He wasn't the funnest to start but it ended up I traded starting some colts for him. I remember later he could just fold up and stop and turn with a cow like nothing I had ever ridden. It felt at times like the stirrups just cleared the ground. He was one of the more naturally talented, good movers I have ever ridden.

"In my life I have had occasion to start many groups of colts. I cannot tell you how many times I have decided which were the best ones before we did anything with them at all only to totally change my mind in a few days of riding them. I'd rather ride a good-minded common looker over a pretty one that lacks mental flexibility any day. I believe genetics can play a big part in that but everybody knows full brothers can be as different as night and day, just like people.

"It's hard to get everything you want in one horse but a fellow sure knows he's been blessed when he finds one."

# Common Ground Through Common Language

by Tim McGaffic

**A**s we study the work of the great masters we can see many were highly educated and wrote eloquently on the training of the horse while others used colloquial sayings and a philosophical approach to teach their concepts to students. Certainly, Tom and Ray fit into the category of philosophers with their approach to teaching horsemanship. Their sayings have become legendary in many circles and adhere to what we call the science of learning.

Trainers, teachers, parents, virtually anyone that is trying to teach a sentient being anything is using some aspect of the science of learning. Having said that, there are many aspects of the science of learning and new ones are evolving as our understanding of how brains work increases daily. It may help to digress for a moment and point out that before we had what we call science today, we had Natural philosophy. The answer was in nature. The word philosophy meant the love of wisdom (from the Greek Philo- love of and Sophia-wisdom); the wisdom came from nature. As our knowledge of the world increased from our ability to observe, test events and phenomena, we came to what we now call science.

Much if not all that increase in knowledge has come from scientific theory, a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world, based on a body of facts that have been repeatedly confirmed through observation and experiment. Such fact-based theories are not guesses but reliable accounts of the real world. Given the increase in behavioral knowledge through the scientific process, a better understanding of the science of learning can lead to better choices of how we apply that knowledge. After all, punishment is a component of the science of learning; it is a way to learn, but through a deeper understanding, we may not choose to use it in our training. To understand how to apply all the components of that science one must become a part-time philosopher. Part of philosophy is to think more rationally, to think better, to think more systematically. Simply put, Ray Hunt wrote in his book *Think Harmony with Horses* in very large letters THINK. To think more rationally about any subject, one must have some basic understanding of the principles and in this case, the principles of learning found in nature. Tom may have said, “observe, remember, and compare,” the marks of a good scientist.

However, as we delve into the science of learning and try to show how great horsemen used it, and created sayings to guide their students, we run into a problem with language; that is, what was meant by the guiding maxims that refer to some basic

principle that is covered in the science. Most trainers have their own version or interpretation of what is happening with the horse. In doing so they often use their own version of what that is with their own selected language. This can be, and often is very confusing for students, especially if they are learning from different trainers or encounter different philosophies along their educational equestrian journey.

Tom and Ray often had sound scientific behavioral advice in their maxims that have been passed down to their students who share their philosophy. Let's examine some of those sayings and how they may be translated into a common language, the language of science. The point in all of it would be to know what all trainers are saying when they either give advice or analyze a particular behavior and determine if it is sound in terms of known science.

Many of the sayings involve the process known as shaping. That is taking small increments of a behavior that when executed are being rewarded and become consistent as learning occurs. In science this is known as successive approximations that build toward the final desired behavior. The desired behavior is achieved by incrementally asking for more complexity but is rewarded in increments, successive approximations, as the horse understands and then executes. Tom and Ray may have said: “Reward the slightest change and the smallest try.” Nuno Oliveira may have said: “Ask often; be content with little, reward largely.” All of these involve the process of shaping a behavior to the desired end.

Being a good shaper is the key to successful training. Essentially that means that you are rewarding many small steps along the way and not asking for too much all at once. Tom may have said: “first one, then two, then three or four then four or more”. In which case he may have been talking about steps or some other incremental movement towards the behavior he was teaching. Nuno said: “Never demand more of a horse than that which he is ready to give”.

Good shaping involves understanding the movements to

be taught so that the trainer/shaper will understand what little bit to reinforce (reward being the more common term). When that is achieved consistently the trainer can move on to the next level of difficulty. These levels are called criteria in science. The criteria necessary in the trainer's/shaper's plan that he is going to reward. Upping the criteria means that the trainee, the horse (in this case) must try a little harder to get rewarded. This may mean more steps, bigger steps, faster steps, or something that is more complex than the original reward-based behavior. This is increasing the criteria, steps in this case, with a fixed schedule, rewarding every time the horse reaches the new criteria. This produces a reward within the brain of the trainee/horse. That reward is dopamine. And as Tom and Ray would have said, if you have the mind, the body will follow. This feel good experience that dopamine produces will get your horse to try that behavior again, the one that was reinforced. Ray's advice to "reward the smallest change and the slightest try" will produce more dopamine, which not only feels good but enhances learning.

At this you are probably saying Dah, who doesn't do that? Well, many don't, and in fact most people ask for too much too soon and since the horse, Tom again, "only knows self-preservation" he may start to try to protect himself because what little he may have tried didn't work, which then often produces conflict. Conflict resolution, in the horse, can result in some version of the flight response or perhaps the opposition response (usually comes first), neither of which is a desirable outcome. In all the cases we are talking about, the removal of pressure is the reinforcer. The release of pressure is the reinforcer that is often termed a reward. The pressure itself is a motivator (at least meant to be) to the horse to move in some way to produce a way out through trial-and-error learning and to produce a release of pressure, a reinforcer/reward for his behavior. I return to comfort for moving his feet/body in a certain incremental manner toward the desired complete behavior. This application of pressure is known as negative reinforcement, meaning that the pressure/aversive is removed (thus the word negative) when the desired behavior is attained.

A good shaper/trainer is always trying to create something he can reinforce/reward, something that will get him to let go, which will establish in the trainee/horse cause and effect. The horse's behavior can produce rewards; he can and does have some control over his environment. This overall concept is Operant Conditioning.

My point here is there is a universal language that if used, could take out the trainer-specific versions of how the horse learns. In cases as I have just pointed out, the great horsemen

were, and are, solidly based in science. Through understanding, effective communication can be developed which will benefit both the horse and the student of horsemanship. Making these associations to build a solid and universal language that can be used no matter what barn you walk into. And eventually, through a deeper understanding of the science of learning evaluate trainers or horsemen based on known principles.

Let's look at some others just for fun! Tom Dorrance said: "It's the approach; it means so much to the horse". Again, you may be saying well dah! Who doesn't know that? Although when asked, many people if not most would agree that how you approach a horse is important. Not enough of them give it enough thought before they actually do it. We may have a certain "intention" in our minds as we are moving to the horse—what we want him to do, and what we think we are doing.

However, the horse can't read our mind – all he can do is see and respond to what our body is doing. So, unless we are very "intentional" about exactly how we move our body, making sure that our body movement is in line with what our mind intends, we run the risk of communicating something very different to the horse than what we intend.

On the horse's side of the equation, he is watching you very closely for any indication of what you intend. An example of this would be the case of Clever Hans. If you are unfamiliar with Clever Hans, please check out his story. In short, horses are very good at watching you! Watching you in painful detail so much so you should be glad you are not trying to get a date with this horse. What does that mean? It means that your intentions are a dead giveaway to the horse.

That is why it means so much, and when, as once again our man Tom points out, "The horse only knows self-preservation, and he is so full of it," your intentions as you approach better be to his liking. So, the approach you use to get to your horse, to catch your horse, to send or ask for something of your horse is very important. The approaches, as viewed as Intentional moves, then take on a whole new meaning for the trainer, in that they are not just when you are walking up to the horse for the first time. There is intention in and approaches for everything you do with him including when you ride.

The takeaway here is that there is a common language with accepted definitions that sync with the great horsemen of the world's maxims and advice to their students. If we take the time to learn it, we will all be on the same page and be able to analyze behaviors, create solutions and move toward our goals without confusion of language. The masters we have mentioned here seem to qualify as Behavioral Scientists in addition to being great horsemen.

*"My point here is there is a universal language that if used, could take out the trainer-specific versions of how the horse learns. In cases as I have just pointed out, the great horsemen were, and are, solidly based in science."*



# Feeling What a Horse Needs

## Part 5 - Addressing a Brace on the Lead Rope

with Tom Curtin    Photos by Emily Kitching

*Editor's Note: In an effort to help us develop our eye and understand what is taking place in a particular moment, we visited with Tom Curtin about a series of photos taken at his clinic last summer in Buffalo, Wyoming. It is a unique opportunity to learn what Tom is seeing and feeling from moment to moment and what these changes mean to him and the colt.*

**In** this installment we are addressing the horse getting heavy on the lead rope when we change directions. Some folks have heard of the term "Popping the horse's tail," but I wouldn't want them to see this as me completing a maneuver. If you tried to wait until his feet were right you'd never fix this. Popping the tail is a term people use, which is just right, but if you are trying to time up with their feet what you've done is turn that into a maneuver. I'm not saying it's not important to know where the feet are, but your timing of when you do this is irrelevant to where the feet are. It's not about the maneuver; it's about how this horse feels about it. It's about understanding what he needs. If he's at a trot it doesn't matter which diagonal he's on when you catch him. What you have to do is make sure he doesn't have any tension on that lead rope. Then it's irrelevant where his feet are. When he goes to leave there should not be any tension on that lead rope. If you are just worrying about the footfall you'll never get past what you need to get done with your horse. You'll be hung up on the footfalls, where those feet are at. And then that turns everything into a mystery, and there is nothing about this stuff that is a mystery. I'm not saying you shouldn't know where the feet are, but when you get hung up on the footfall and put the feet in a certain place, you've lost sight of what this is all about.

Ray Hunt worked at it so hard with his students on footfalls. He wanted you to be aware of where the feet were, but he didn't want you to get hung up on the footfall, because then you are working on a maneuver, which is what you want. But you're not working on what that horse needs. Just work on what the horse needs and it will all come together... then the maneuver will be there. It's the preparation Ray talked about, "Know what happens before what happens happens so when it happens you'll know what happened." Then you "prepare to position for the transition." If you get the transition part, the footfalls will take care of themselves. What I see is so many people are working on "where is that foot?" And he's got to be here, before I can do this. Then they are always too late or always too early, so then they always blame themselves. They never blame the horse, which is good, but then they say "my timing is no good." Forget timing, go on, get past that. Ray never hung up on a little

old deal like that. Just get the horse to break over in the hind quarters; you'll be all right. All the other stuff will start coming into line and then you'll get to where the feet are and it will come to you. But if you get hung up on where the feet are at the beginning, you'll be stuck there for the rest of your life and you won't get much done. I see it over and over, every weekend.

When discussing different approaches, what intrigues me about it is a lot of folks will say, "It's the same thing, you're just changing the words." No... words do have meaning. I might use a word and have a similar concept, but it means something totally different. Changing a word makes you think about it totally differently.

Knowing that this magazine goes out to readers with various amounts of experience and differing goals, the question is how do you bring everyone along? I believe it is by making them more aware of being aware. I came across the pamphlet from Ray Hunt's memorial service and it said on the front "I cannot teach this I can only make you more aware." And that's all anyone can do. You can only help them become more aware. That's a personal journey that a student has to figure out what he or she is after.

If he is after maneuvers and all the gear and all about what he wants, that's his journey. That's what he's after. If she wants to get deeper into it and better understand these horses, get better and have a better relationship, well then that is that person's journey. If the next person wants to go out and play games with them, that's her journey. It doesn't make any of them right or wrong. It's basically your personal endeavour. And that's where Ray would get so short with folks a lot of the time, Ray wasn't big on excuses. Do something, even if it's wrong; do something and then learn and educate yourself from that. Don't make an excuse that "Well, I can't do this or my timing isn't good. It's all my fault." Used to be it was the horse's fault. Now we're in an era it's the people's fault. "Oh, my timing, oh my this that and the other." To hell with that. Let's get better. What I'm trying to talk about or teach is not impossible. It's not a mystery it's not something that only I can do. It is something that can be had. It's not a mystery and it's not about the maneuvers I can promise you that.



**1** What I'm feeling of this horse is I'm asking him to look to his left. I'm presenting a feel of him going to his left, and he's just kind of hung there. He doesn't understand what I'm asking. His feet are kind of stuck. This is something I see a lot of. People just keep waiting and waiting when they are here; well then all that horse learned to do was hang on them. The person doesn't get that feel to come through to that horse's feet. If you don't do something to fix that; if he is heavy on your hand right there on the ground, he's going to be heavy on your hands when you get on. Now one horse might be quite a bit different from another as far as their personality and temperament, of course, but in general, if you don't fix this right away it will build into something that you might not find useful. And this is the part that really builds into understanding the needs of these horses.



**2** He's kind of moving off and his feet are starting to come alive. I'm kind of waiting on him and you can see if you look at his head, he's looking off to his left and what he's doing is moving his head out of the way, but it hasn't come through to his feet yet. He hasn't put that together yet.



**3** He just kinda walks off and figures out how to get around there a little bit. I'm just offering him a little bit of a place to go; my right hand is out and I'm just going to walk with him a little bit.



**4** Now we get back into changing directions again. If you look at my hand it's pretty stiff and that lead rope is real tight. That horse is building on learning how to hang on my hand. If you notice, my right hand is getting ready. I'm not spinning my lead rope... I'm maybe going to spin it once, twice, and then I'm going to get his feet to move. But that rope is right there ready and he's just kind of hung there. I'll give him a minute to sort of think this through. I don't like to just push a horse through that turn. I like him to think his way through there. That's what he needs; he needs to be able to think. But it still has to come out in his feet. This picture is a real good example of when Tom and Ray would talk about controlling the life in the horse's body through his legs to his feet and to his mind. See this horse is thinking right, but there isn't anything happening. He isn't going right. If you can get his mind thinking about going right and his feet don't come through, you still don't have anything going on there.



**5.** He kind of comes on through there a little bit. He's starting to come through in his feet. He's still kind of hanging right there. You can see in that picture now I'm starting to swing that rope. I'm starting to get some life going and you can see how I'm stepping out to the left. I'm asking him to go on that way. I'm preparing to get ready and I'm going to come on around and in that next picture his feet are going to move.



**6.** See how his head is up? There is a little bit more of a float in his lead. He's kind of come up off that pressure because I got him up off of it. I got to his feet. Now his mind isn't right, but at least I got his feet to go. I got his feet to come alive in there. What's going on is that he just doesn't quite understand how to get on around there. I just keep offering that feel to him, and I'll give him the opportunity to feel back to me.



**7.** He's going on here. I just stay consistent and smooth. I'm not getting after him; I'm offering him a place to go. I'm giving him a chance to get on around there. His head is still up and his feet are moving. As time goes on and his feet get smoother you'll notice his head will be in a totally different position. The only way a horse can get smooth on his head is if he gets smooth on his feet. The only way he can get smooth on his feet is if I stay smooth and consistent on his head. That comes out really well in this series of pictures.



**8.** Here we go again. He's hanging on me here. He's a little unsure. I'm going to start my lead rope around here again, but he's kind of stuck in his feet. This is where people can get to working the hindquarters a lot; and then you run into this situation where the front end doesn't move as well. You should work the front quarters as much as the hindquarters. This horse actually liked moving his front end better than his hind end, but right here he's just a little stuck and just a little unsure about that feel. See how his head is up? But I just stay smooth there. I'm not going to jerk on him or bump. I'm just going to let him kind of hang on there and I'm going to use my leading hand (right), and my left hand is my supporting hand, just like your leading rein and your supporting rein. Here I'm leading him to his left and I'm going to support him on his right.



**9** Now he stepped out of here and he's kind of getting heavy and hanging on that lead rope. I don't ever like a horse to learn this. And right here he's in the process of learning this... so I will go to fixing it.



**10** He's getting heavier and hanging on the lead rope. Now he's going to learn to pull me around a little bit, which is something I would try to not do. See how my feet are moving? I just keeping tension on the rope and I'm going with him. I'm not going to try to stop him because the thing about it is physics won't work right here. He's got the angle on me. This is how a horse learns to pull away from you. So many people get in trouble right in this spot when they are halterbreaking their babies. They rear up and flop over backward, and they take that lead rope away from you. This is the cause of that, So I just keep my feet moving.



**11** I'm just hanging in there, going along with him. And I'm just going to kind of get him through that, not add any pressure while he's leaving.



**12** There he came off of that feel. If you notice, my feet got stopped when he came off that pressure. Now I'm going to set this horse up to get off of the lead rope. I can't get his front end to come through; I can't get to his feet because he's not thinking about staying. He's thinking about leaving, so I need to help him with that.



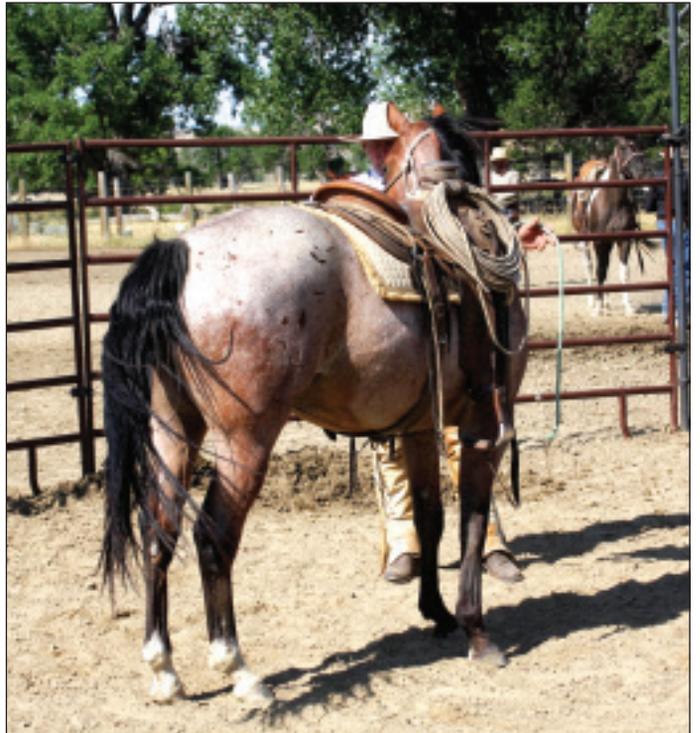
**13.** I'm going to get him to go again.



**14.** If you'll notice he's looking a little bit more out of his left eye than his right eye. And you'll see I have a little feel on that lead rope, but I don't have a tight grip on it. I'm letting that rope slide and he's trying to leave it.



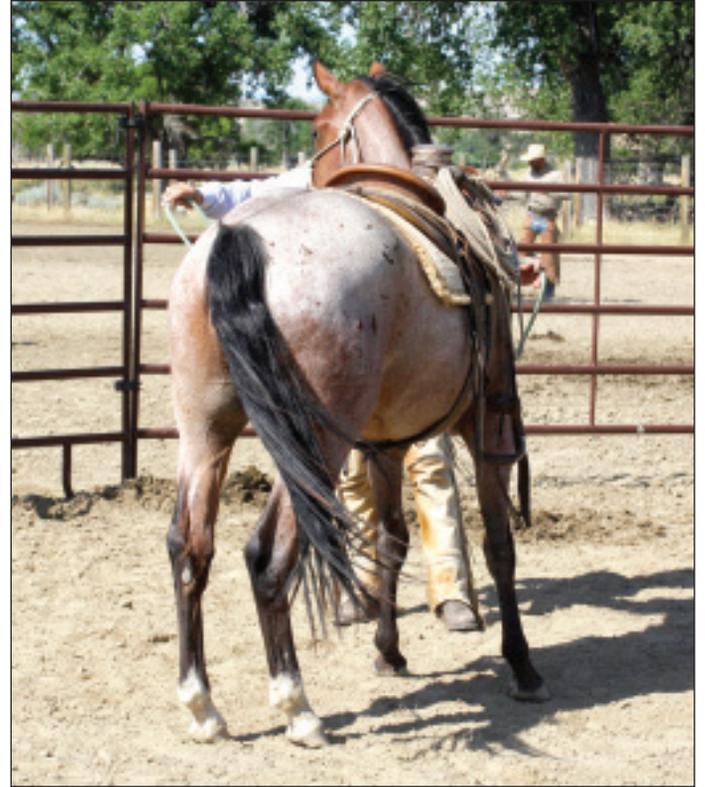
**15.** He makes it through there. And I'm just quiet right here. I just stay smooth.



**16.** I'm asking him to change directions again. He's trying to look across there to his left. I always like a horse to look where they are going before their feet come alive. I don't just want him to shove his feet over there. I want him to look in the direction he's going to go. I ask him to go and I bring that life up in the lead rope on that supporting side. You can see in his feet, his back feet might come alive first... but here his back feet aren't making any plans of moving.



17. I'm asking him to go and I'm bringing that life up in that supporting lead rope.



18. He's not making any plans on moving, so I've stepped off to my right to kind of unbalance him a little bit.



19. I'm giving him a little time to come through here. You can tell he spread his feet out, so he made a step in there. So that's a try, and I recognize that try. From the last picture to this one, you have to recognize the smallest change and the slightest try.



20. He's got a lot of float in the lead rope. He's looking off and trying to come through with his feet.



**21.** Now his feet come alive, Right here he feels pretty good, so we're just going to give him a chance.



**22.** He's coming around to the right. Look at my right hand going to his halter. There is a float in there. His head is in a real nice position; his head set has really changed.



**23.** He goes past and I stop him. I take the slack out of the rope. There is a lot of float in the lead as he goes by and I'm sending him out of there. I'm going to let him go because he always wants to go and look out of that left eye all the time. I'm going to let him go and I'm going to let him stop when I take all the slack out of that lead rope. I know what this horse needs to fix that spot. This goes back to understanding these horse's needs. If he keeps doing what he has been doing in these other pictures, he's going to learn to hang on me every time. If I didn't address this it would build in a direction that wouldn't be productive for either one of us, not necessarily wrong but in a direction that wouldn't be productive. And the reason that I don't like to use the word wrong is that if you were leading your horse in an area that was really swampy and boggy and you got stuck and sent your horse on by you and he stiffened his neck and pulled you out of that bog, that would be pretty productive. So what he's doing isn't wrong; it's just not what I need, or what he needs. So knowing that, knowing what he needs, I address this and fix this at this moment. I'm going to let him go out there and what I'm going to do is, as he starts to leave, I'm going to make sure that he has plenty of slack to work with, but I'm going to take the slack out of that lead rope and turn him around.



**24.** The moment he starts to come off of that I'm going to put slack back in that lead rope. I know that if I hang there with him, that is not what he needs. He needs me to get off of that lead rope the moment he cracks over. If you hang there on that lead rope, this will never get any better.



**25.** I set the situation up again. I was going with him but now I'm fixing to stop. You can look at him and see he is not making any plans on slowing his feet down. His head is up and he's leaving at a trot.



**26.** He starts in to hitting the end of that lead rope. I have my feet set in the ground. I let him go out and feel the end of that, but I don't ever let that lead rope get tight until I'm ready to set him. If you look at #25 I'm going along with him, and if you look at his feet, he's in a trot. In this photo I'm going to clash with him as he's leaving. He's going one way. I'm stopping him and the slack is going out of the rope going the other way. That is what is going to take him around the corner.



**27.** This is where I'm fixing to pop his tail. He's going to set that back end and his front end is coming up off the ground. A lot of time those front feet will hit the ground and those back feet will go. I'm just set; I'm not pulling on that any more on the lead rope. I didn't pull on him. He hit the end of the rope. I'm just set.



**28.** I'm setting it up to happen again, giving him the opportunity. My feet are moving and I've got float in the lead rope. I will not let that lead rope get tight until I'm ready to set him. That's the biggest thing. Don't worry about the footfall, just worry about that lead. Don't let there be any tension in it until you take it out. I'm just going along with him. He's just trotting on out again. He has no intentions of feeling where the end of that rope is.



**29.** Now, right here I'm starting to get ready to set him. And you can see how that rope is getting tight. His ear went from being forward to kind of being cocked back. He almost wants to get braced in there.

**30.** I set my feet in the ground. Look at his feet there. They are in a totally different position from where I set him before. So like I said, I'm aware of the footfall; I don't get worried about the footfall.



**31.** And here is where I'm popping the tail. If you don't fix this hanging on you right away, it does nothing but get worse and it slowly builds. It follows right through into their back when you go to riding. When you pick up on that rein they are just going to hang on your hand. If you'll look, there is a lot of tension in that lead rope. He's taken all the slack out of it. I'm just kind of holding there and he's coming through.



**32.** That is what this horse needed to do to get him to where he is in this picture here. This is the part I was talking about understanding his needs. He had to go through that to get here. Now you could have just ignored all that. It might have never gotten unmanageable, but he would have always been heavy in there if you didn't address that. Now this horse is really smooth on his head because he knows what to do with his feet and he's looking to me for help. Ray always said the end of the lead rope closer to the horse's head should weigh less than the end in your hand because there is nothing carrying the end with the tail on it, and he should be carrying that other end for you. Now this little horse is looking to me.

**33.** His head tipped and his body is in position. He's rounded out. He's looking toward me. Now my feet are starting to come alive and I'm going to start stepping toward his rib cage and into his hip just a little bit, just to have him go forward a little. I don't want him to step over in his hip. I want him to go on around me.



**34.** I'm giving him that chance. I'm going with him and here it comes again. He doesn't really want to hit the end of the rope, but he doesn't know what else to do. He has his ear cocked back, but if you'll see, his back feet are really coming alive. This is where doing what the horse needs is so important. I am going to go with him because in this picture believe it or not this horse is trying to make it. He doesn't know quite what to do, but if I set him there, that would discourage him from looking in the direction he's looking right now. He's looking for help but he can't quite figure it out. But he's looking for help. And if I set that horse now, he would never try what he's thinking of trying right now. What he's thinking to try right now is how to get his hip around that corner. Take a look back; in photo #28 he has no intentions of trying to come off that rope; that thought has not occurred to him yet. In photo #29 he is trying, but he doesn't have his nose tipped; he's not going to make it. In this photo, #34 he's trying. See the difference? Look at his expression. So now I know he's starting to feel his way through this. He's starting to feel for me. He doesn't know what to do yet, but he's starting to feel for me.



**35.** See, he brought his nose back to my hand. He's rounding his body out and he's trying to prepare himself to make it. Now you see how soft my upper body and my arms are and I'm walking along with him just a little bit. My left foot is stopped but I'm not going to snatch the slack out of that rope. If I did, I would discourage his thoughts of trying to get right, of trying to be productive.



**36.** He makes it. Now this horse is feeling for me. Let's back up to photo #34; he's feeling for me. Photo #35 he's feeling of me, and in this photo, #36, we're feeling together.



**37.** He's getting nice and round. The end of the lead rope with the tail is heavier than the end that his head is on, to me.



**38.** I give him a little moment to think about that.



**39.** It gets to feeling really, really good to him.



**40.** I'm getting close to setting it up to go back the other direction. See how his feet are coming alive and I'm stepping out to my right and he's looking off kind of straight ahead to his right? He can move his feet to his right. As he goes to his right, he comes around.



**41.** The end of his lead rope weighs less than the end in my hand. You can see how I'm getting my hands set up. I'm going to change directions again. I feel for him.



**42.** I feel with him. He's going to step his hindquarters over and we'll stop him right there.



**43.** And we feel together. That really felt good to him and felt good to me.

## Closing thoughts....

This was what this horse needed in the moment and the moments change so fast in a situation like this. Tom Dorrance was a master at setting a horse up to get help with what he needs and not just what the person wants. I'm not saying I have it figured out. I'm just working with it where I'm at, understanding the horse's needs. He needed to go through that to get him to where he's at now. Or he wouldn't get there... it would slowly get worse. And that might be over a period of 10 years.... But it would slowly become less productive to him and me instead of becoming more productive. So this is what he needed at those moments, not what I wanted. And then that's not what he needed anymore; now he needs something else.

We get so set on what we want that we miss what that horse needs. Then we're so focused on what we want and being a leader and the horse needs to have this, and making him do it. Making the wrong thing difficult and the right thing easy we get so set on that that we don't see what the horse needs. So when he does something that we don't want, then we don't like that.

When we don't like something, now we've already set ourselves up in a negative frame of mind. So then you do something to that horse to try and "fix" that... because what he did you didn't like. Well, when you go to fixing on something that he did when you don't like it what happens is you lose control of that situation. We go to fixing on that horse until he does what we do like, and then what happens is we miss several opportunities in there because we were looking for what we wanted. So we missed him trying and that's what he needed. We needed to feel that there instead of being so focused on what we wanted that we missed those opportunities.

In that process we quit when the human got satisfied, not when the horse made a try. And that's where Ray said you have to "recognize the smallest try and the slightest change." We miss that and we run over that horse's feelings. Then he starts doing what he does because that's what he's supposed to do. Then you have a loyal soldier and not a communicating partner. And it all turns into maneuvers. The reason he did something you didn't like was because he didn't complete some maneuver. To hell with maneuvers; how does he feel about it? When you get him right, inside, the maneuver part will just be there.



# Help Prevent Hoof Pain From Affecting Whole Body

by Jec A. Ballou with Jim Masterson

**H**oof pain can change a horse's body for the worse, a fact many owners have wrestled through when transitioning their horses to barefoot, treating abscesses or laminitis, or managing navicular symptoms. Any time changes occur to the balance or flight path of the foot, they create stresses in the musculoskeletal system. But a good combination of bodywork techniques and corrective physical exercises can prevent compensatory muscle patterns from taking root. These patterns, if not addressed, often afflict progress long after hoof ailments have resolved.

Any time a horse experiences discomfort in his feet, it is critical to minimize its impact on the rest of his body. Otherwise, his range of motion, symmetry, and occasionally his willingness to move forward suffer. Hoof discomfort can manifest in different ways throughout the rest of the body. Generally, though, a few common areas bear the brunt of referred soreness. The following exercises will help prevent pain from disrupting the sensory nerves and function of these areas.

The most common point of pain caused by foot soreness is the horse's poll. This band of short muscles behind the head tightens significantly during episodes of hoof ailments and not only spreads tension to the rest of the body but, owing to its rich supply of nerves, also interrupts proprioception and coordination.

## Wiggle Away Tension

By releasing tension from the poll, the horse experiences reflexive signals for relaxation that spread systemwide. This technique works because it is a tiny movement that the horse cannot brace against and promotes a release in a nervous system that is compromised by pain signals.

Stand at your horse's head on the near side with the fingers of your left hand resting lightly on his nose. Place two fingertips of your other hand on the neck about four inches behind and below the ear. Keep both arms and hands soft and light (see photo 1). Use your left hand to wiggle the nose about half an inch from side to side. Do four wiggles and stop; check to ensure the movement is still relaxed.

Repeat these steps a few times. If the horse finds this



**Photo 1.** Jim demonstrates how to wiggle away tension.

uncomfortable, he is likely feeling tension in the postural muscles of the spine in this area. Do not try to stop him from fussing or tossing his head. Instead, soften your hands even more and wiggle with even tinier movements. This will give him the opportunity to release the tension more comfortably. Do both sides, in small increments, every day.

## Ride Surfaces Galore

The proprioception of horses with sore feet adapts to mitigate pain, an unhelpful consequence in terms of long-term health. Exercise on varied surfaces is invaluable for stimulating the nervous system for full participation during movement. Sensory re-education paths used in physical therapy programs restore correct neuromotor messages to horses in this state. These paths place a number of different terrains in sequence close together.

Alternating six-meter segments of sand, gravel, asphalt, grass, and water require rapid function of neuroreceptors. Absent the supplies or space to build an actual sensory pathway of this sort, you can achieve similar effects by riding across the terrains in direct proximity to your barn: driveway, sand, lawn, paddock. Use whatever areas you have access to. Do this three to five minutes daily.

## Add a Ditch

While taking advantage of your immediate environment, another beneficial exercise to ward off disrupted muscle patterns is to ride back and forth through a ditch. An ideal ditch requires the horse to step down two to three feet, take a step forward, and then immediately climb up and out the other side. This action mobilizes his shoulder blades, stimulates deep postural muscles, and requires him to coordinate his hindquarters and forehand. It frequently helps loosen horses described as stiff or tight in their backs. If you do not have access to a ditch, you can ride instead down (and back up) a short steep hill no longer than six meters.

## Hind End Release

Using a simple pre-ride technique with the hind legs, you can help your horse release restriction in his pelvis and hamstrings. When he is able to drop each side of his pelvis in a completely relaxed state, he will in turn let go of tension in the sacroiliac and lower back.

Here is how to do this: begin by standing next to the horse's hip facing rearward and pick up the foot, as if you intended to clean it. Hold under the pastern to support the leg (see photo 2). Now wait for the horse to relax. Continue to support the weight of the leg as you draw the hoof rearward a couple inches and lower the foot to rest with the toe on the ground, ankle remaining bent.

Take your time with this step; do not grab or pull on the leg



**Photo 2.** Jim demonstrates a hind end release.

if the horse tries to retract it. Once you set it down fully relaxed, keep your hand on the foot to encourage the horse to rest in this position. It benefits him to stay here as long as possible.

## Random Rails

Owing to their role in altering a horse's patterned movements and for recruiting spinal postural muscles, ground pole routines appear frequently in rehab programs or to correct problems with gait mechanics. When poles are placed at random intervals, the horse's motor and sensory nerves are heightened to constantly calibrate his stride.

Scatter as many poles as you have access to all around the arena or field in no particular order. Place some close to one another, others far apart and at all kinds of angles. Now ride around the arena in a walk/jog crossing over the poles with all kinds of loops, curves, zig-zags. Cross the poles using numerous approaches—straight across, obliquely. Ride for three-minute circuits like this, constantly changing your order of approach to each pole. After each circuit, rest briefly, and then repeat.

The residual effect of compensating for foot pain can adversely alter a horse's proprioception and mechanics even after hoof health returns. This stored tension, often in the poll and hamstrings and pectorals, does not resolve on its own. By spending time with the exercises in this article, a rider can prevent those adverse signals from settling in too deeply and speed up the recovery period.



# Getting the Right Hackamore

by Martin Black

**I am** often asked the question "How do I know what hackamore to get?" There can be several different answers addressing several different concerns.

The first concern would be to have one that fits correctly. When we talk about measurements there are different lengths of bars, different diameters, lengths of the nosebands; all make a difference on how a hackamore fits and functions. The correct length of the bars can depend on where the hackamore is placed on the horse's nose. Just above the horse's nostrils and around under the chin is considerably smaller than just below the eyes and just under the jaw muscle. The horse has a bit of a cone shape to their nose.

So maybe the first question should be, "Where should the hackamore sit on the horse's nose and why?" If we look on the bridge of the horse's nose about halfway between the top of the nostril and the bottom of the eye, there will be a slight bump. Above this bump is bone; the bump itself is where the cartilage starts to overlap bone and the further below the bump you go, the thinner the bone gets and the heavier the cartilage gets.

The bone and cartilage will have a different sensation and response. To understand this if we push our finger hard between our eyes and the top of our nose you get one sensation, then push hard on the tip of our nose on the cartilage. It's not that one is any more sensitive than the other but the bone can tolerate more pressure and the cartilage will start a fight sooner. If we are operating off of feel, we can get a better response by keeping the noseband up on or above the bump, or about halfway between the bottom of the eye and the top of the nostril.

So, the hackamore should sit about halfway between the bottom of the eye and the top of the nostril.

## How loose or tight should the hackamore fit?

If it fits too tight, there isn't enough signal, if it fits too loose, the signal is delayed and sloppy. So we may want to be like our little friend Goldilocks and have one that fits in the middle.

If the heel knot is resting on the chin we should be able to raise it about halfway up the jaw and if it stops, this means the horse can open his mouth to lick his lips without being restricted like a cavesson. If the heel knot cannot raise far enough from the chin, it can be very irritating to the horse and they can get upset from that alone. If we can raise the heel knot all the way up to the jaw muscle, then the signal can't be too slow and sloppy.

If we just remember halfway up on the nose and the jaw more or less. The hackamore should sit about halfway between the bottom of the eye and the top of the nostril, and about half-

way up the jaw when it is pulled tight with the mecate tied on.

So we could take a string and circle around the nose at those two points to get the measurement that tells us how much area we need inside a hackamore, plus the room for the wraps of the mecate and from this we can know the length of the hackamore we need.

Our average riding horses will measure around 22" to 23.5", or a fraction more or less, where the hackamore should fit. So if we do the math and allow for the wraps of the mecate and rounding smaller fractions, we come up with the measurement between the inside of the noseband to the inside of the heel knot for the various diameter hackamores as standard, (allowing that the mecate is the same diameter as the hackamore, times 3 or 4 wraps).

3/4" = 11.5", hackamore

5/8" = 11", hackamore

1/2" = 10.5" hackamore

3/8" = 10" two-rein bosal

5/16" = 9.5" two-rein bosal

5/16" = 9" under bridle bosal

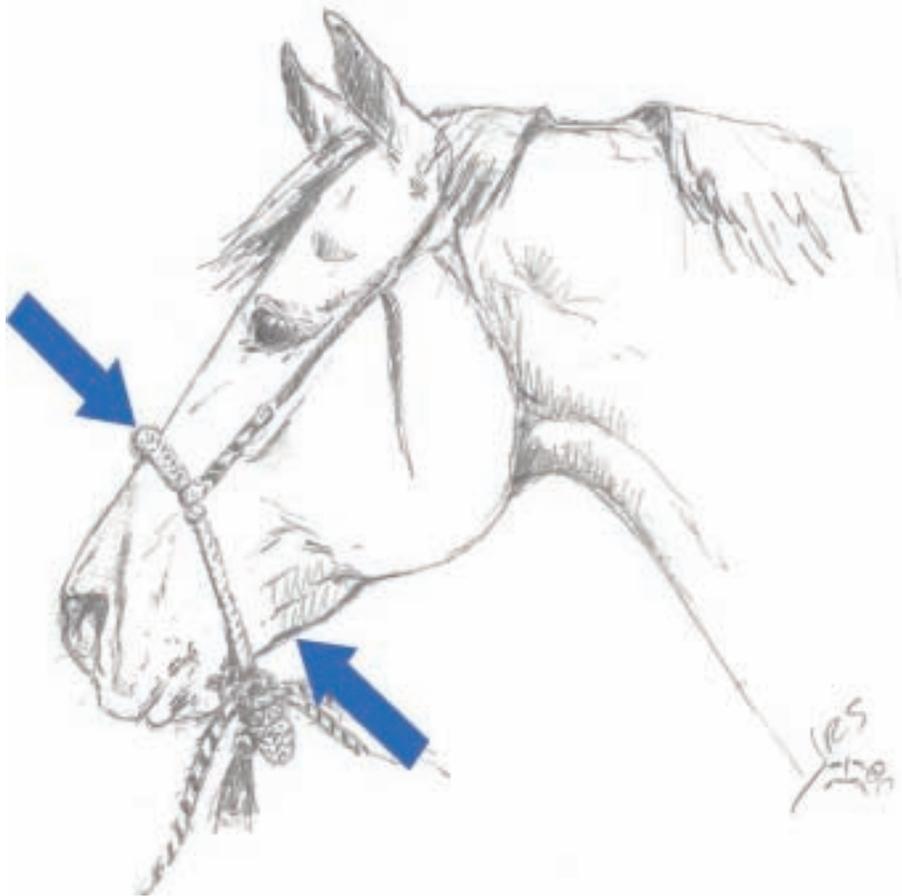
Arabs and ponies may be smaller, 21.5" or less; warmbloods and draft crosses may be larger, 24" or more, but a wide range of horses will have the same size of muzzle even though the length of their head may differ, but this quick measurement will tell you.

The length of the noseband can make a difference on how the hackamore hangs and functions. The shorter the noseband, the closer the hanger is to the horse's eye. This seems like it would be a bad thing, but the closer to the eye, the better the hackamore hangs. The hanger creates a fulcrum and the further forward the fulcrum point is, the quicker the heel knot drops when we release the reins and the better our signal can be.

The shape of the noseband makes a difference on how the hackamore fits and functions. We can have a noseband that is the same diameter through the middle as it is toward the ends. This helps to allow the hackamore to fit the contour of the horse's face better. This gives more contact and more feel between the rider and a more sensitive horse.

Most nosebands will be raised on the ends. This sometimes is referred to as nerve knots. This may sound like a training secret, but the truth is when we are constructing a hackamore, it is a foundation knot under the end of the noseband to hold it in place. Without this, it can draw shorter and not stay in place. You can touch a horse around the nose and they are not going to respond differently when you touch the area of these "nerve knots."

# Proper Placement of the Hackamore



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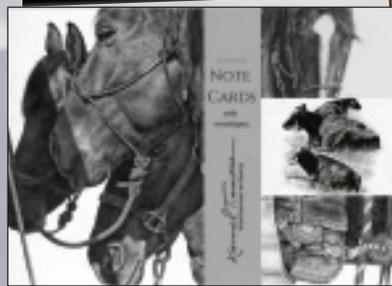
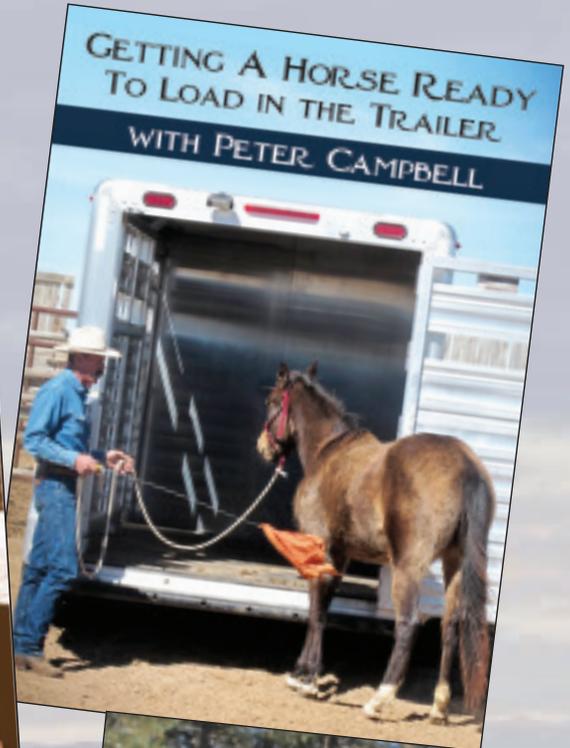
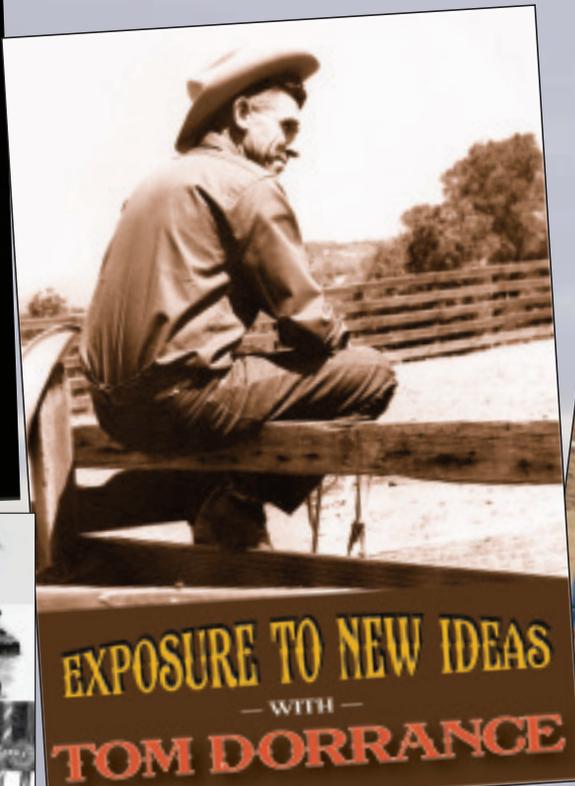
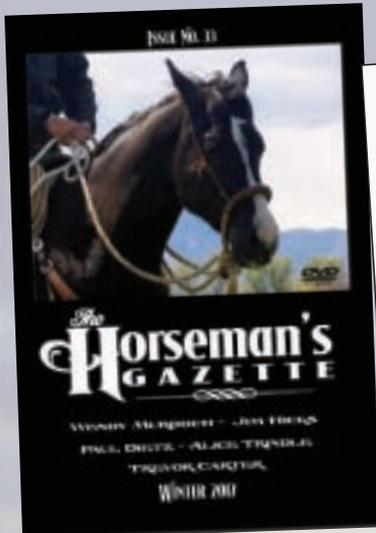
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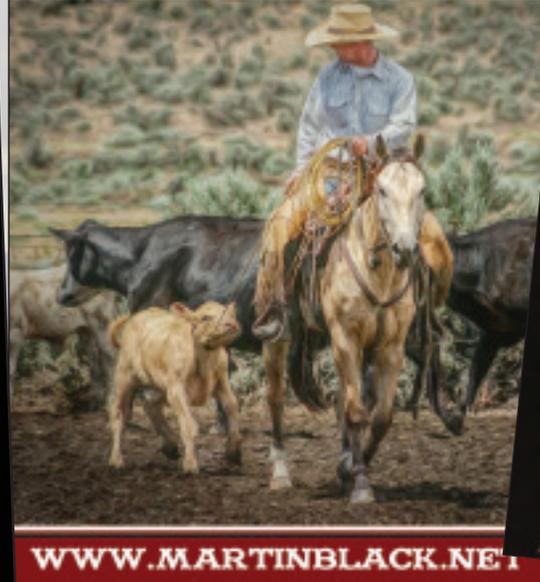
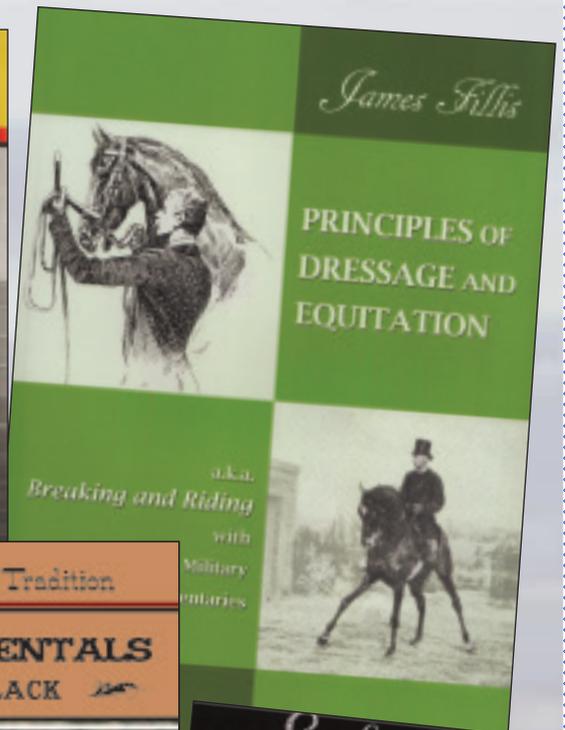
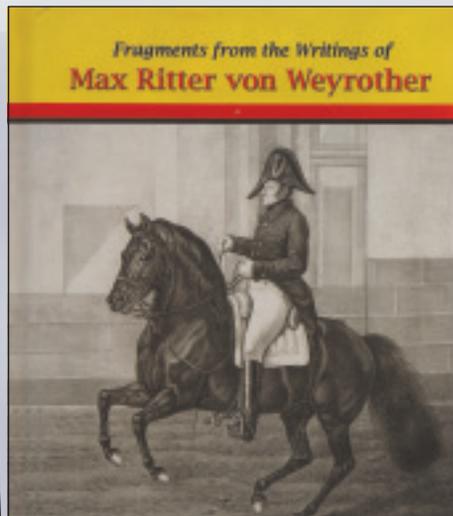
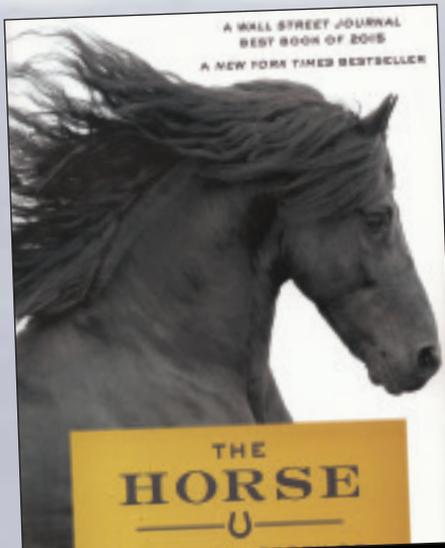
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## *What were they thinking?*

**"It** was a long day, but it was fantastic. A great day working with my young colt and dogs; it doesn't get any better than that!"

Mia Sheldon wraps up a day gathering cows out of Mickey Basin on the Alvord Ranch in Oregon.  
Photo by Kim Stone.

