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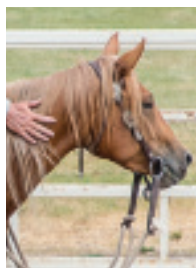
ISSUE NO. 100

# HORSEMAN



THE HERD-BOUND EXERCISE: MAKING TRACKS AND FINDING PEACE 4 • THE FIRST WEEK, REVISITED! 14 • DAVE AND GWYNN WEAVER CLINICS 16

CARE OF VAQUERO GEAR 19 • BEST HORSE PRACTICES 2018 22 • BOGUS IDEAS IN HORSEMANSHIP NO.3. "THOU SHALT NOT QUILT" 23



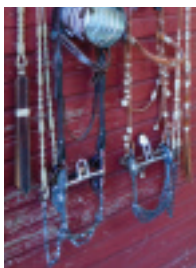
**4** The Herd-Bound Exercise: Making Tracks, Finding Peace  
by Diane Longanecker

Understanding why a horse becomes herd-bound is essential to addressing the issue. Buck Brannaman demonstrates how to help a horse feel secure with the human.



**14** The First Week, Revisited!  
by Tom Moates

Bryan Neubert and Joe Wolter visit about the filming and production of *The First Week* colt starting DVD series.



**19** Care of Vaquero Gear  
by Steve Harris

Steve instructs the reader on proper cleaning and storage of all types of vaquero gear from bridles to saddles.

**16** Dave Weaver and Gwynn Turnbull Weaver: Ranch Roping/Branding Clinics  
by Heather Smith Thomas

**22** Best Horse Practices 2018  
by Maddy Butcher

**23** Bogus Ideas In Horsemanship No.3: "Thou Shalt Not Quilt"  
by Deb Bennett, Ph.D.

**Inside Every Issue**

- 3 From the Editor
- 27 Community Listings
- 28 Mercantile
- 30 Directory



Deb Bennett

**Contributors**

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**On the Cover:** Annie Elzinga and her mare, Robin, take a break while riding a springtime circle in the Pahsimeroi Valley of Idaho. Photo by Melanie Elzinga.



Hi All!

Wow, 100 issues! Seventeen years ago I remember working on our premiere issue, wanting to make a good first impression and balance the content between philosophical, instructional and experiential essays. As I send this 100th issue off to print, I find I'm performing the same balancing act, though so much has changed in the intervening years.

With the proliferation of the Internet, the rise of social media, and the ease with which we share information via videos, articles and opinions, there are some who might suggest that magazines will be a thing of the past. In fact, with constantly rising print and postal costs many publications that were in print when we started, or that started in the intervening years, have ceased to exist. Most of them were founded on a traditional advertising model; their survival depended upon delivering an audience to advertisers. *Eclectic Horseman*, however, was founded on and is sustained by a mission of delivering education and inspiration to our readers.

The notes and testimonials I receive from you, our readers, let me know that you are finding value in the information in our pages and encouragement and inspiration from the community of like-minded readers and contributors. I love to receive notes that start with "My friend and I were discussing the article on...." This process of becoming a better horseman is a living process, changing and reforming with every new perspective or approach. New voices and ideas help shape the understanding of where we are going, new paths to the same destination. With every clinic, every visit with a reader, every issue, every lightbulb that goes off for my horsemanship, I am re-dedicated to the words I wrote seventeen years ago about the mission of *Eclectic Horseman Magazine*:

"All horses need to be gentle. They need to be able to encounter new environments and situations in a relaxed manner. They must be able to move in any direction at any speed in a way that is calm and controllable. They must be comfortable with their tack and what is being asked of them; they must not be troubled either by pain or lack of understanding. They must feel respected as the thinking, feeling, decision-making creature that they are.

"All humans need to feel safe and relaxed when they are handling or riding their horses. They need to understand how their body moves and how their horse's body moves so that they can be effective and reasonable when they ride. They need to know how to care for their horses so that they stay fit and healthy for many years. Helping horse owners to understand when and how to use what tack, and to become knowledgeable in selecting quality equipment, will lead to safety for both horse and rider.

"Currently there is *no other* mainstream media voice for the horse. The horse is a thinking, feeling, decision-making animal, and yet he is at the mercy of the human for all of his life. No one acts in a way that they know is wrong just to be wrong. Inappropriate or harmful behavior is committed by humans to horses because they do not know another way. If they knew a harmonious way to achieve their goals with their horses, they would follow that way. By presenting this deeper nature of the horse, *Eclectic Horseman* can change the way that people think about their horses and, more importantly, change the way they interact with them."

Take care,

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

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# The Herd-Bound Exercise: *Making Tracks, Finding Peace*



This young mare, one of Buck Brannaman's own horses, is in a rush to get back to her herd mates on the other side of the arena. Buck had hauled her from home to start in a colt class he was teaching. Knowing the situation would bring to light a herd-bound issue, he used the opportunity to demonstrate how to "work things out" using his herd-bound exercise.

by Diane Longanecker

*When a horse objects to leaving the herd, we say he's herd bound. If a horse becomes agitated upon being separated from a particular equine friend, we say he's married up. And should a horse resist being ridden away from the barn, or becomes overly eager when heading back toward it, we say he's barn sour.*

While we view such behaviors as annoying and potentially dangerous (which they definitely are), the horse sees his efforts as vital to finding security, comfort, and peace. It's something he's willing to work at because it's how he is wired. The herd, a buddy, the barn—or even your horse trailer, if you've hauled somewhere, say for a trail ride—each offer the security of the familiar against the unknown.

As part of a clinic he was teaching in Dayton, Washington, Buck Brannaman demonstrated how, by building upon an equine's innate inclinations, he allows the horse to discover a new source of security: the supportive human.

In general situations, he refers to the process as "the herd-bound exercise." If a pair of buddied-up horses are involved, Buck calls the procedure a "divorce ceremony." At this clinic, he helped one of his own young, just-started horses overcome her attachment both to a buddy from home and to the rest of the small herd she was traveling with.

## *First Ride Out*

For the past three mornings as 15 students with their colts watched, Buck had begun the colt class by working on starting one of his own young mares in the roundpen. Following prepa-

ratory groundwork, he would then mount from the fence and put in a ride on the young horse.

But on this third morning, the work area expanded. This time, after now mounting from the ground and putting in a short ride, Buck opened the roundpen gate from horseback and directed the young mare forward. She cautiously stepped through the opening. It was her first time out in the large rodeo arena with a rider on her back. “She’s got a lot to look at out here,” said Buck. “She says, ‘When I’ve got someone on my back, it’s totally different than if I was just loose.’”

For the first few minutes, Buck provided structure and directed her mind by keeping the mare busy moving her front quarters and then her hind. “I just give her a little something to do out here,” he said, “so that she didn’t kind of get obsessed at worrying about something she wasn’t familiar with.” When first riding outside of the roundpen, Buck pointed out that it’s easy for a rider to lose a colt mentally “and that’s where, a lot of times, you’ll get in trouble on a colt. They get to thinking about other stuff, looking at other things, and you don’t realize that you lost track of them. And then they get surprised. So, I just try to get her handy where I can move one end or the other. There you go, that had a little quality. Now, I’ll move her out.”

## Seeking the Herd

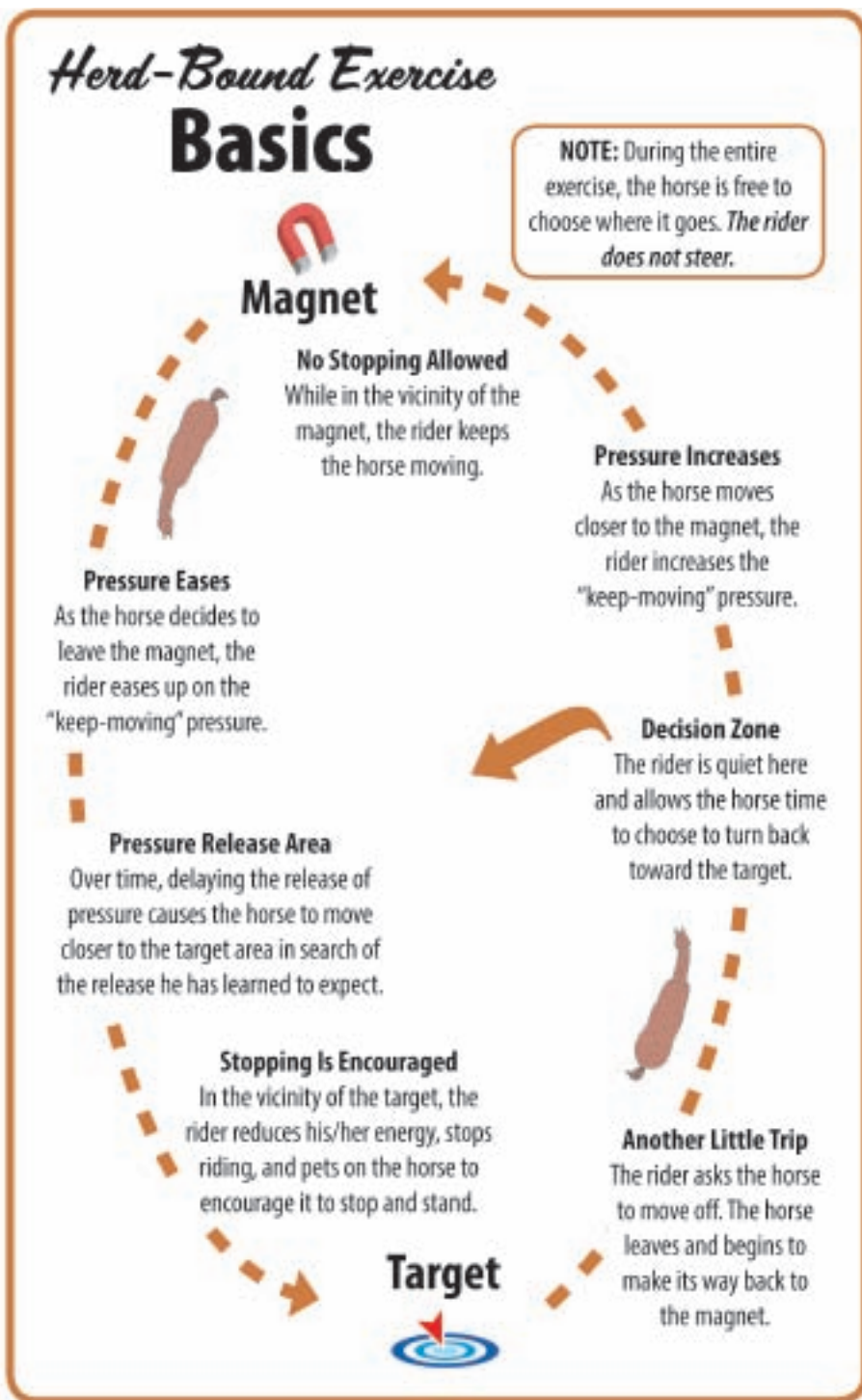
Keeping a hand near his night latch, Buck urged the horse into a brisk trot around the outside of the roundpen. Given her unease, however, the mare soon focused on getting back to Buck’s other horses for comfort, security, and support. This “herd,” which she had left home with, was located in stock pens along one side of the rodeo arena. The herd-bound issue, Buck would address shortly. But first, he made use of the situation: When coming around the roundpen and heading toward the herd, he took hold of his night latch and encouraged the young mare to move on out. “That’s a likely place to get her to lope,” he said as the horse broke into that gait. “And I’ll just go with her. I want her to move out. So, I just let her free up and go.”

As the young mare neared the herd, she broke to a trot. “I wouldn’t try to accelerate through here,” said Buck. “It wouldn’t be a likely place for her to be successful. I just want to get her through here.”

Since the next portion of her lap headed her away from the herd, the mare was not moving freely forward; she was meandering along instead. Buck pointed out that this made it necessary for him to work at keeping her inside his rectangle. Then he stopped her with a one-rein stop. “Don’t forget that I can bend you,” he said. “Good, all right let’s go again.” And they

were once more off at a trot. Upon approaching the gap between the roundpen and the arena fence, which was made smaller by some of the students gathered there with their horses, the young mare hesitated. “She says, ‘I’m kind of worried about going there,’” explained Buck, putting the horse’s concerns into words. “Well, good. That’s why I’m riding there. We’ve got to get through that spot kind of clean.”

He then made a few laps to work on the issue. When she came to the narrow gap, he let her accelerate through it. “I just grab ahold of my night latch and party on,” said Buck. “I want her to move out.” When she neared the herd of horses, Buck cornered her and made a one-rein stop “for some practice, with a little speed up.”



## IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS



Buck then went the other way and moved her out. "I know I'm safest when she's moving out," he said. "So, I just let her kind of free up and go. There, that's what I want. I can easily ride that fast. Now, there will be a place where she'll kind of let down and get between my reins and legs, and I'll leave her be."

### *Confronting an Issue*

Because she now realized that it was the path back to the small herd she knew from home, the mare started taking over and rushing through the gap on her own. In response, Buck regained control by asking her to pick up speed—on his terms—which was just a little sooner than where she had wanted to accelerate on her own. As a result, she began putting

less effort into hurrying through.

Next, in an attempt to get close to one of Buck's horses in a nearby pen, the mare tried going through her shoulder. Buck cornered her with a one-rein stop and shared his reasoning: "I'm saying, 'Don't lose your hindquarters and have you going off sideways on me. That horse over there isn't going to help you.'"

After allowing her to settle, Buck asked the mare to move out, which he observed she now did "with a little more commitment." He again accelerated through the tight spot. As they headed back toward the pens, he put her on a corner and stopped her with one rein just before they arrived. "I want her to move out," said Buck, "so that she can figure out that I can shut her down."



**Photo 1:** Although she is not allowed to stop there, the mare chooses to stay near the pen of her friend Midge—the "magnet." Buck, like a pesky horse fly, uses just enough little taps (with the tail of his lariat) on the top of her rump to keep her moving.



**Photo 3:** Experiencing peace away from the "magnet" gives the mare a comparison: Life near the magnet equals trouble; life away from it means peace. Buck rubs her where he's been tapping.



**Photo 2:** In search of support, the mare attempts to gain it by being with some of the student horses. Buck, however, just keeps her moving.



**Photo 4:** A benefit of this exercise said Buck "is all the ground-covering trotting on a loose rein" that gets done. Moving out on a loose rein is something he insists his horsemanship students practice so their horses learn to travel "on course and in good rhythm."



**Photo 5:** Halfway through the exercise, the mare makes a desperate last attempt to be with her friends. This was the start of a turning point. It also set the stage for the breakthrough to come.



**Photo 6:** The mare makes some “new tracks” up to the far end of the arena. Buck pets on her as she studies the large heavy-equipment tires, which are some 25 yards away.



**Photo 7:** As Buck had predicted, the magnet has lost its power. Next, with the “ebb and flow of the learning wave” going solidly in his favor, he gives the mare the ultimate reward: He dismounts and she is put away.

While stopped near the pens, Buck pointed out that the mare was especially focused on hurrying back to one particular horse in the herd: her friend. “Since she wants to be back by that other mare,” said Buck, “I’ll just work this out. Now, I won’t steer her.” He then added an announcement: “So, you guys were asking about how to deal with one that’s herd bound. Well, this will be her first lesson at that exercise.”

## INITIAL TRACKS: SETTING THINGS IN MOTION

Buck made his reins long, placed the coil in his left hand, and took a firm hold of his night latch. With his right hand, he gave a sharp tug to the free end of his lariat and created a two-and-a-half-foot-long tail; it would be used as needed to tap the top of the mare’s rump to keep her moving. For the next 45 minutes, Buck never picked up on the reins; he did not steer.

### *How the Exercise Works*

The herd-bound exercise uses a simple setup to change the comfort-seeking behavior of a herd-bound horse. It revolves around two elements: a “magnet” (the source of trouble) and a “target” (which offers peace). Success rests upon allowing the horse the freedom to choose between the two. To encourage the peaceful choice, movement is added. Since the pace of such movement can become hurried at times, “I like some really, really dependable footing,” noted Buck.

The layout of the arena being used at this clinic is shown in Diagram A. It includes the general routes or tracks the mare traveled between magnet and target in her quest to find peace. These routes have been organized into three basic phases—Initial Tracks, Intermediate Tracks, and Final Tracks. References to a sampling of photos taken during the exercise are noted on the tracks. Diagram B offers an overview of the fundamental concepts around which the herd-bound exercise is organized.

Accompanying this piece are two photo stories: “The Breakthrough,” captures an incident which results in a major shift in how the exercise proceeds; “Final Tracks: Working in Circles” shows the type of circles the horse was soon making following the breakthrough. As Buck works through the herd-bound exercise, the narrative below chronicles the highlights.

### *Midge the Magnet*

“You can be here if you want,” said Buck, “but you can’t stand, you’ve got to keep moving. You’ve got to find your way away from this. I don’t want you marrying up to another horse. She’ll have to find somewhere else to be. Can’t stop here (Photo 1).”

Adding to the mare’s urgent need to be near Buck’s horses was the fact that one of them was her special friend.

“At home, all the older mares are not too impressed with the two young ones,” he explained. “So she and Midge are really best friends at home. I know I’d have to deal with this—with both of them. The other one is probably going to experience a divorce ceremony, too, at some point in the next couple weeks. I don’t mind them being friends, but I also want them to understand when [they are with me] it’s business. So it will be like a magnet here for a little while—pretty soon, that magnet will lose its power.”



## Free to Choose

At first, the mare chose to stay near her friend. But she was not allowed to stop there. To keep her moving at a trot (and occasionally at a lope), Buck used his legs and energy in his body. When needed, taps on top of her rump from the tail of the lariat were added.

"I don't care where she goes," said Buck. "I'll pet on her out there—when she starts exploring and going somewhere else. I don't make her leave, because that wouldn't do me any good. It's got to be her idea to go, because it's not just about being herd bound. It's about, can you get that horse feeling of you? Feeling what you're thinking without you imposing yourself on the horse? You allow that horse to feel back to you."

In her search, the mare decided to see what happened when she moved away from Midge; her rider relaxed and the taps ceased. When asked to move again, the mare then searched for comfort where the students with their horses stood (Photo 2). Buck instructed the students to gently shoo her away, "using just enough energy to let her know she was not welcome." As she searched, Buck kept her trotting; he would not allow her to slow down. "She's looking for a place in here to be comfortable," he said. "That's why she's going through you guys, checking it out. She's like, 'Well, they are all standing relaxed. I want me some of that.'"

When she decided to leave the roundpen area and investigate a new part of the arena, Buck encouraged her choice by relaxing his body and petting on her. She slowed to a walk and then stopped.

"Now, we'll go again," said Buck. "So, you find somewhere to go. I have an idea, but the only way you're going to know my idea is to feel back to me." Since Buck did not announce the "target" he had in mind, all of us watching had to figure the target out right along with the horse.

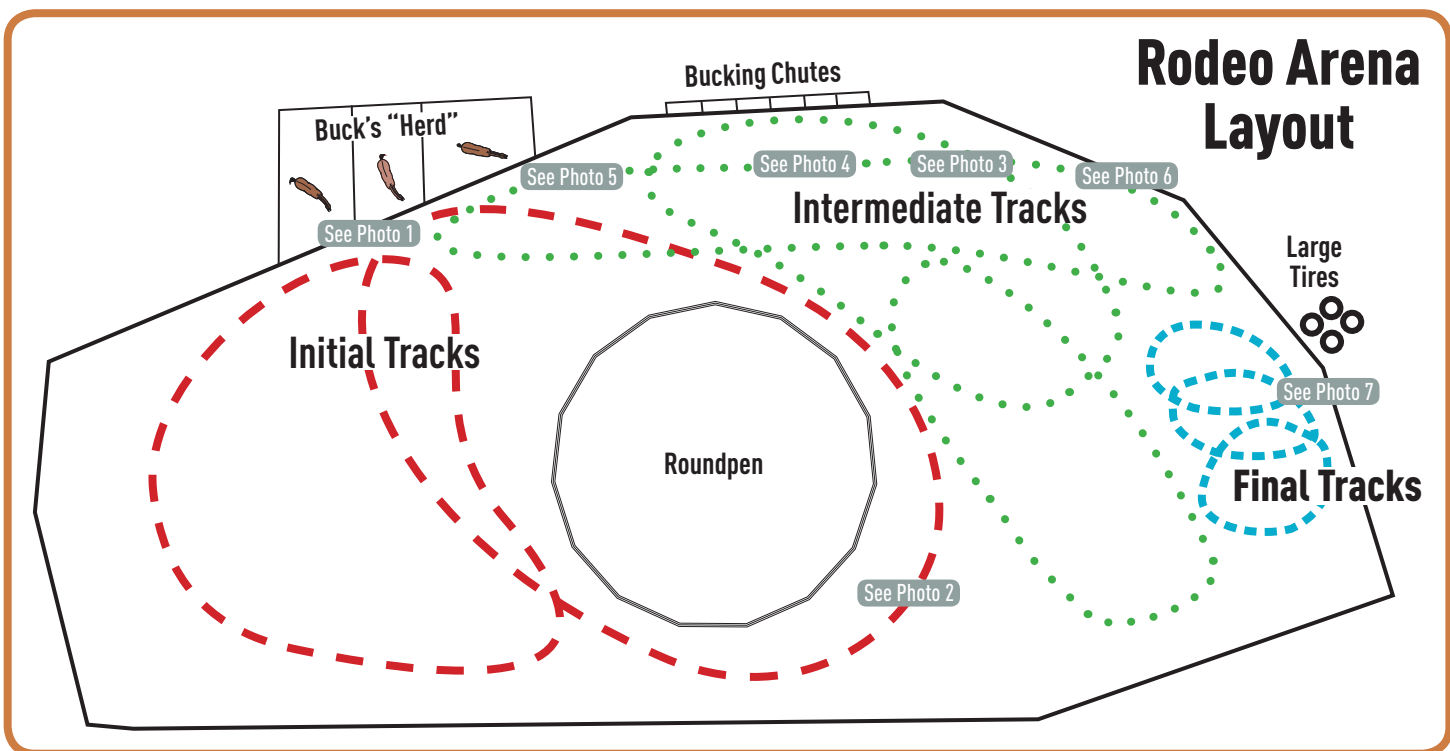
## INTERMEDIATE TRACKS: OPPORTUNITIES TO COMPARE

After the mare spent a few minutes working at finding peace in the general area of the Initial Tracks, we got our first clue about the location of the target. A subtle change in Buck's energy seemed to register with the mare. She decided to try someplace new. Her choice soon paid off.

## Discovering Differences

"She's investigating some other areas now," said Buck, "and I'd rub on her and I'd say, 'Yeah, see how peaceful it is up here?' And I'd let her stand and I'd pet her back there [on top of her rump] where I've been tapping her (Photo 3). The sooner I can work through these kinds of things, the sooner she just tunes the other horse out. I let her enjoy the prosperity and compare when she's alone with me, things are pretty hunky-dory. And when she's obsessing about another horse, it's just kind of trouble." As the mare stood and Buck continued to pet on her, she took an interest in looking around.

"Now, we'll go again," said Buck. "She'll probably want to check back in with Midge and find out if I'm for real." She started off at a walk, turned, and then proceeded in Midge's direc-





tion. Buck waited. He gave her a chance to change her mind and return instead to the area where she had been getting petted on while standing.

But the pull of the magnet was strong. She was about to leave the decision zone (Diagram B). “And so,” said Buck, “if she drifts much closer, I step on the gas peddle. Like now.” Buck’s energy increased, the occasional taps to the top of her rump resumed, and the mare picked up a brisk trot straight back to her friend.

When she arrived, Buck kept her moving. Given that Midge failed to bring about comfort, the mare soon decided to make a different choice. She turned in the direction of where she had newly experienced comfort and broke smoothly into a lope.

“That was nice,” said Buck acknowledging the quality transition she had made. “It would have been real hard to get her to lope up this way until mentally, she felt like she wanted to be here. When I get up here where there are no other horses influencing her, then I pet her to tell her, ‘You can stop anywhere in here.’” The mare broke to a trot, down to a walk, and then stopped and stood. “She’ll kind of remember,” he said, “how good that felt to her to find that.”

## *Don't Take the “Think” Away*

Buck asked her to move off again and noted that it was starting to take “less and less to get her to go.” As she got closer to her friends (since Midge hadn’t helped her, the mare was now checking in with Buck’s other horses instead), Buck increased the discomfort. “But it is not unbearable,” he said, “I’m just keeping her on a roll, just so she doesn’t slow down. There, I added a little bit.”

He then offered a piece of advice about a mistake that’s often made: “A lot of times, people get too aggressive with this—like down here [by the magnet]—and they will just over and under them and really make it horrible for the horse. Then you are taking the “think” away. Then you’re making the horse react and go to the other end and they really didn’t learn much. I just keep her working at it. I like to trot, so I’m into this.”

By preserving the “think” in the horse, Buck pointed out how “once she moves beyond being so preoccupied with her being with the other horses,” she would start to explore the entire arena. In the meantime, he said, “I’ll just allow her to work at this.”

The pair ended up doing lots of trotting, with some loping sprinkled in. When the mare returned to an area away from the other horses, Buck would relax and pet on her to let her know that she could stop. “And she’s like fascinated with it,” said Buck. “She’s like, ‘I can’t believe that this feels so good up here.’”

## *Delaying Comfort’s Delivery*

That fascination soon had the mare locked into a routine, complete with lots of trotting, as she made her round trips between her friends and the newly discovered area of comfort. “But look at all the nice trotting out on a loose rein I’ve gotten in,” said Buck. “And as far as being on course and in good rhythm, heck you guys in the horsemanship class could only hope to trot like this on a loose rein.” (Photo 4)

In addition, something else was going on. By building upon her fascination with the comfort area, Buck was slowly shifting her toward the target he had in mind, which we now realized was the group of large

## *A Ten-Day Challenge*

During the herd-bound exercise, Buck wanted those watching to realize that the task centers on forging a connection with the horse “because it’s not just about being herd bound,” he stressed. “It’s about, can you get that horse feeling of you, feeling what you are thinking?”

Consequently, rather than imposing himself on the horse, Buck explained that he creates a relationship in which the horse is feeling back to him for direction instead. To illustrate how any horse/rider relationship—whether dealing with a herd-bound issue or not—can benefit from this exercise, Buck shared information about a casual version he does for fun.

“When I’m kind of messing around with this in winter at home,” he said, “I’ll lay a glove on the ground. And I’ll just keep riding the horse until he finds where I’m thinking. It might be to stand with his left hind foot on the glove. You’d be surprised—with no steering, just let your body change when they go nearer to what you’d like, and let your body change when they go away from where you’d like to be. Pretty soon, they’re feeling back to you like you can’t imagine.”

Buck wrapped up his herd-bound demonstration by tossing out a challenge to all those serious about taking their horsemanship to a deeper level.

“Imagine if you just played with this for ten days,” said Buck. “And each day you pick a different target. You move the horse off, but you don’t steer at all. You just spend ten days on it, just saying, ‘Well, today you figure out what I’m thinking. Go search.’ And every time you get near the target, the horse would feel you change in your body and get more relaxed. Every time you moved away from the target, the horse would feel your energy increase. Soon your horse would be like, ‘I’m on it!’ You wouldn’t believe how dialed in that horse would get to you—if you’re willing to put in the time and work at it that hard.”



## IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

heavy-equipment tires outside the fence on up the arena.

"Because I want her to get a little closer to that," said Buck, with a nod toward the tires, "and a little farther from where we were, I'm petting her a little later in here. And I'll let her think about that. She'll look at it and she'll think, 'Oh, it's not moving. Maybe it's not going to hurt me.' But she can find out that she can be pretty content with me on her back. This is me supporting her, allowing her to be a winner."

When asked to go again, the mare started off at a walk and headed back to her friends. So, Buck used the opportunity to "start to work on a little longer walk." As she got closer to the pens, however, Buck added some energy and she picked up a trot. When she was back with her friends, he encouraged her to find someplace else to be by keeping her trotting.

"Now, maybe I'll lope her," he said. "I haven't loped her for a while. Oh, that was nice." The mare had made a smooth transition and loped back into the comfort area. By slightly delaying when he pet on her, Buck was able to encourage her to stop and stand a bit closer to the target, which remained some distance away.

### *Choosing to Investigate*

This time, when Buck asked her to go again, she made a little different choice. Rather than following the pattern of moving right off on a round trip back to her friends, she took an interest in other things around the arena.

"That's what I've been looking for," said Buck. "She said, 'I'll investigate something else.' She didn't just immediately think of going back to those other horses. She's kind of broke off from them." Instead, the mare had moved forward (in the direction of the target), stopped, and looked around as she stood studying the tires, which were still several yards ahead.

Buck asked her to step forward again. She took a step or two and stopped. "I barely did anything with my legs to get her to move there," he explained. "I'll pet her. There's a lot of things to look at. Those tires look a little funny to her. She's kind of looking at them. But she can investigate them on her terms."

"Now, I'll ask her to go again," said Buck. The mare moved off, but not in a big rush. Then she turned and started off at a walk down toward the other end of the arena. Buck commented on how she might need to check back in again with her friends. "But it's decision time here," he added. "You can always change your mind and go back to where it was more comfortable."

The mare moved along down the fence. When she got to the bucking chutes, however, she stopped and looked at them up close. Buck petted on her and explained "I pet her there because she's investigating all these other things you kind of need her to see that could make her afraid." The mare then moved on and checked back in with her pals. Of course, since Buck kept her moving, her stay was short. She soon headed back the way she had come.

When they were once again near the bucking chutes, Buck gave voice to the mare's thinking: "She says, 'Where was that nice place?' That place is kind of up in this vicinity here." He pet on her and she slowed to a walk near the middle of the group of chutes.

As the mare investigated this new section, Buck shared a bit of insight on how the horse views the situation. "Those bucking chutes," he noted, "a lot of times look a little funny to them. Horses are supposed to be suspicious of things. That's how the species has survived for thousands of years. It's to kind of look at things in a real skeptical way, just thinking, 'Is this something I should flee from?' Because really, being able to flee is the horse's only real means of surviving. So, they should look at things and think it's kind of strange to them."

Since she went there on her own terms, the mare was able to approach the chutes in a good frame of mind. "If I had picked up my reins," explained Buck, "and tried to make her go there earlier, it would have been a big fight because I would have been forcing my idea onto the horse. It was her idea to check it out, once she decided they were all right. And now she is investigating some new territory again. I let that happen. Pretty soon, she'd investigate the whole arena and realize there's nothing to worry about." When the mare chose to stop next to the chutes, she was allowed to stand and spend time checking them out.

### *How Will the Horse Know?*

"Now, we'll go again," said Buck. "So, you find somewhere to go. I have an idea, but the only way you are going to know my idea is to feel back to me. When I relax and offer for you to have a little less life and I pet you, that's how you'll know what I'm thinking. But you don't have to do what I'm thinking. It's got to be your idea."

The mare slipped back into her old pattern and headed off to the other horses. Buck kept her moving, however, and she was soon on her way back up past the bucking chutes in search of that place offering comfort that she had recently become fascinated with. "She's getting more and more alive for me," said Buck as he tipped her up into a lope. "But of course, the life is easier to bring up in a horse that's going to a place it wants to be. But that's where people have trouble getting a horse alive is they are trying to take him where he doesn't want to be. And they'd say, 'He's dull.' And if the horse could talk he'd say, 'No, I'm not dull. I just don't want to go there.'"

### *A Break in the Pattern*

Rather than always heading directly back to her friends whenever the mare was asked to move off after standing, Buck was waiting for her to make a different return-trip choice, one that enabled her to explore new areas of the arena instead of always heading directly back to the herd.

"I'm kind of looking for a break in the pattern," said Buck,

# The Breakthrough

“for her to go left in this area. Then I’m getting to where I really want to be. Ah, that’s a good sign. She thought about it there.”

Although she had not made the left turn Buck was looking for, she did shift away from her direct route back to the other horses. Instead, she went through some of the students and their horses standing near the edge of the area where Buck was hoping she would go. He kept her trotting. “She’s really searching,” he said. “I love that! Now, keep working at it. You are real close to being successful. And, to me, it’s not about me being successful. It’s about her being successful. You’re just trying to make a winner out of your horse.”

As she kept trotting and continued her search, Buck told those watching that, “In the future, I’ll be reminding some of you about this day. I’ll say, ‘That was the day that set her on course for the rest of her life.’ This is a lifetime event for her today.” After some near attempts and a few false starts, the mare finally made the move Buck was wanting. “There’s our left turn I’ve been waiting on,” announced Buck. “So, there’s only this area left to investigate and then we will have covered the whole arena.”

## Learning’s Ebb & Flow

Investigating this new area, however, was not going to happen—at least not quite yet. Instead, the mare headed back to her friends and displayed a renewed insistence about remaining with them. “Got to keep going,” said Buck as she spent time trotting up and down along the row of pens. “She says, ‘Man, I’d sure like to stop.’ Well, I’d like you to, but just not here.”

But the mare did stop. When Buck firmed up a bit to keep her going, she kicked up in reply (Photo 5). “That’s a little bit of desperation there on her part,” he noted, “We’re not too far from a breakthrough now.”

As he kept her trotting, Buck shared insight on what was unfolding. “She had to check back in here, just to make sure. And that’s that ebb and flow that you’ve heard me talk about, where they’ll gain real good for a while, and then they’ll kind of lose ground. And then they will have a little breakthrough and gain again. It’s like a wave. She’s got to check this out to be sure. I’m glad you’re checking it out, because I’m just as sure as when I started.”



*With a newly focused commitment, she trotted back to stand within 10 yards of the tires. This breakthrough transitioned the exercise on into its final phase.*

*Well into the herd-bound exercise, an important change in the established pattern occurred. During a routine trip back to her friends, the mare stopped and refused to move. Buck firmed up; the mare kicked up. She then turned and made some new tracks.*



## Some New Tracks

The mare trotted back to an area of the arena near where she had last found peace; she was in search of a place where she could stop. By delaying when he stopped riding, Buck stretched her search further along the fence and a little closer to the target. “Now, I’ll pet you up here,” he said as he quit riding and the mare slowed to a stop in response. “There’s some new tracks we just made. And that’s really going to mean a lot to her there. She had to really work hard there—that little session—to ever get to a place to be still.”

The mare was stopped along the fence at the end of the arena and looked intently on up the fence line (Photo 6). The four large heavy-equipment tires, some 25 yards ahead, were grouped just outside the arena fence. “Now, we’ll go again and see where she’d like to go,” said Buck, but they did not go far. “Now, I might stop riding right here.” The mare, having taken just a couple steps forward in the direction of the tires,



## IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

responded; she stopped and stood. After a few more slow-paced repetitions of starts, steps forward, and stops, Buck noted “that’s as close as she’s gotten to this fence here [at this end].”

Buck asked the mare to go again and noted “it’s not taking much to get her to go.” After stepping in the direction of the tires, however, she made an arc away from the fence and slowly headed in the opposite direction. “She might have to go back down there [to her friends] and check in,” commented Buck, as he stopped riding. “I’ll give her a chance to change her mind here though.” The mare, in spite of being headed in the direction of her friends, responded by stopping. He let her stand.

### *Not Back Down There!*

Buck asked the mare to walk off. She hesitated. “Come on,” he said as he increased his energy. In response, the mare moved off. But then, as if startled to realize where she was actually heading, she promptly turned and headed back up the fence. “She says, ‘I’m pretty sure I don’t want to be back down there with my friends anymore,’” commented Buck as they made their way up the fence in the direction of the tires. “I’m looking to get some new tracks here. There, we advanced.” They were now several yards closer to the target.

While the mare stood, Buck explained that she was learning how to become better at starting off, slowing down, and stopping. “She starts to feel back to me more,” he said. “Rather than take over and think she’s got all the answers, she’s starting to ask if I would maybe happen to have a couple.”

Buck had her take a few steps toward the tires and then stop. He went on to point out that the whole time he is working with her on starting off, slowing down, and stopping, “she gets to reconfirm that none of this kind of scary stuff here is going to hurt her. But it’s her choice to check it out. It’s a lot to go through mentally for her to realize that this is so much better than what she thought was such a good deal down there [with Midge and the other horses].”

### *The Breakthrough*

Buck asked her to go again. The mare turned around and headed back down the fence—toward her friends and away from the tires. As she was traveling along, Buck waited to see what she would do. “If you make a bad decision,” he said, “then you’ll have to go back to work.”

When the mare was almost back to the bucking chutes, she stopped—and refused to go. “You get a little spanking for that,” said Buck as he firmed up with the tail of his lariat. “You have to move.” In response, the mare kicked up behind. She then turned and—picking up a nice, ground-covering trot—headed back toward the tires (see photo story, “The Breakthrough”).

By the time Buck quit riding and the mare got herself stopped, they had advanced to within 10 yards of the tires. “Now, we’re getting there,” said Buck. “But that little brace back

there where she said, ‘Well, I think I can kinda of refuse to go,’ that would be a good thing for you to check out and find out that you really can’t do that.” Buck went on to caution that, when a horse kicks up, people must not react by putting the horse away. That only rewards the behavior, thus emboldening the horse to resist even more—and kick up even higher—the next time he or she is ridden.

## FINAL TRACKS: WORKING IN CIRCLES

Aware that the tires might just have something to do with her comfort, the mare gives up her long trips down the arena to visit her friends. Instead, her investigating now takes place in the general area on Diagram A labeled “Final Tracks.” With the mare’s mind in a new place, Buck adjusts his approach: He works at a slower, more subtle pace with a greater focus on details.

For example, Buck began by having the mare take a single step at a time. He would ask her to move. As she took a step toward the tires, he would relax, and she would stop and stand. “Instead of a game of yards and yards and yards,” he said, “it’s now become a game of inches.”

Next, he began asking the mare for “a little bit more.” She would slowly step toward the tires—first one step, then another step, and another step. “That’s good,” said Buck as he relaxed. In response, the mare would stop and stand. The process was then repeated. “So,” he explained, “I’m already working on what I’m talking to you guys in the Horsemanship Class about: seeing how slow I can walk her.”

### *Circling Back*

Since the mare was now as close to the tires as she currently felt comfortable about, when directed to go again she turned to her right and started walking away. “If she starts kind of checking out of this area,” said Buck, “then we’re going to get a little bit more active.” She kept moving away. He became more active. The mare made a half circle to her left, back toward the tires. Buck had her stop and stand.

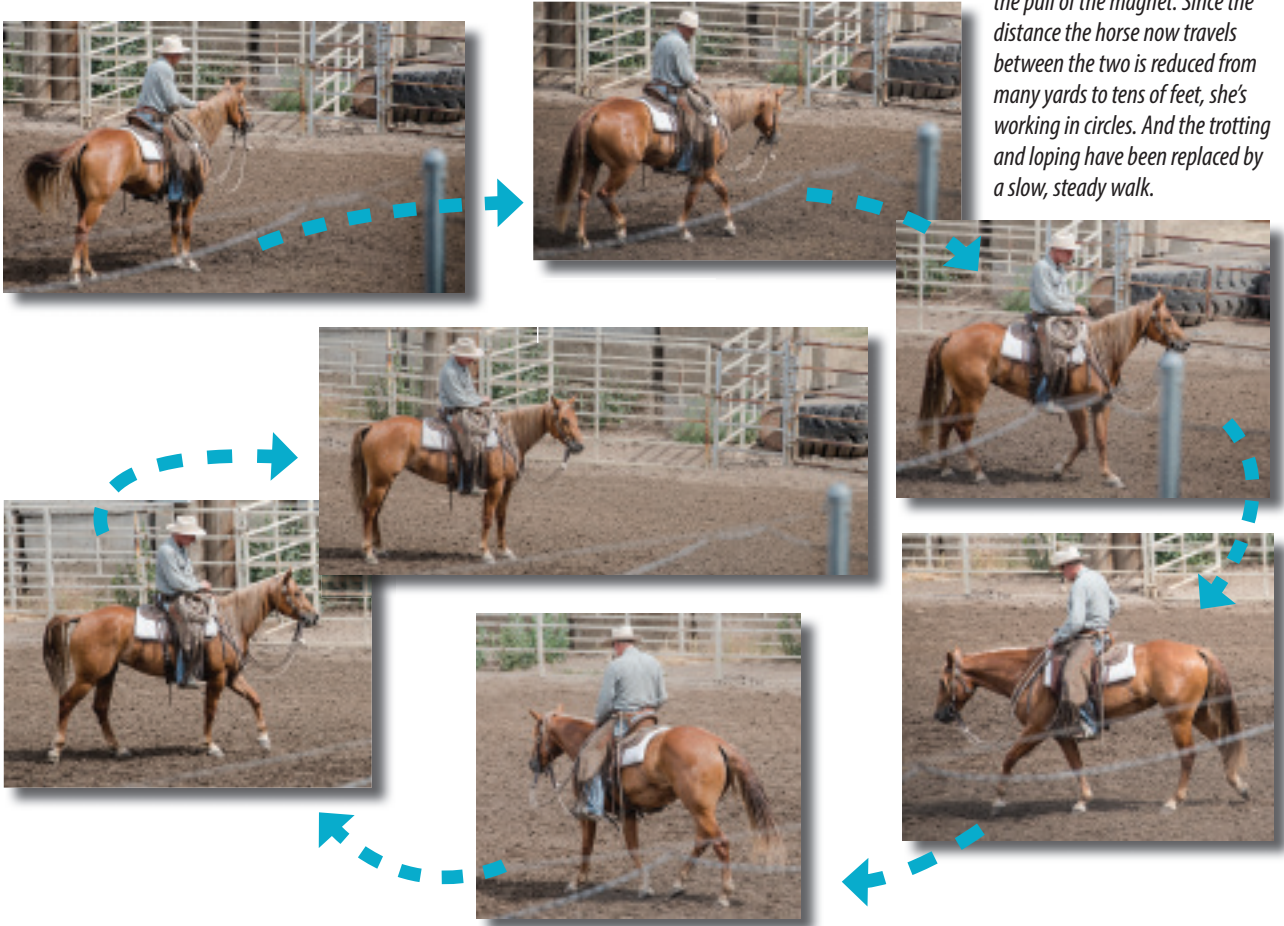
When asked to go again, this time she turned to her right and began slowly walking away. Buck became “a little more active” the further she got from the tires. When she decided to come on around and head back toward them, he became less active. Upon completing the circle, Buck allowed her to stand.

“Good decision,” confirmed Buck. “All I’m asking her to understand is, if you move for me, I will move you toward peace. If you don’t move for me, it won’t be peaceful. So, the incentive for her, all of her life, will just be peace. She’ll start going where I say because I’ve confirmed to her enough times, there’s always peace just on the other side of this.”

They started off again. The mare turned away from the tires. “It just has to do with where her mind is aimed,” said Buck. “So, a little more active here, and here, and here—a little less active

# Final Tracks: *Working in Circles*

*By the final phase of the herd-bound exercise, the allure of the target has far greater power than the pull of the magnet. Since the distance the horse now travels between the two is reduced from many yards to tens of feet, she's working in circles. And the trotting and loping have been replaced by a slow, steady walk.*



here as she turns and heads back to them. She says, "Something about me looking at those [tires] makes it better for me."

Over the next several minutes, as the mare explored the area in the vicinity of the tires, the circles continued (see photo story, "Final Tracks: Working in Circles"). "Each time I go around," said Buck, "I'm getting in an area that I haven't been before with her." He also noted how she was getting better at feeling back to him and beginning to seek the guidance his level of energy provided.

## *Building in a Laser*

"Now, we might see if she'll investigate," said Buck, as he asked the mare to move off. Although her mind was not initially pointed in the correct direction, she made the adjustment and stepped toward the tires. Buck quit riding and she stopped.

"So, it's like building a laser into her," he said. "When that mind is pointed where I want it, that's when I give the reward." While standing, the mare looked away. "Now, I'll get active and see where she looks. I want her to be drawn back to that." A little energy from Buck is all it took for the mare's attention to return to the tires. He reached down and pet her.

## *Deciding When to End*

"So, the ebb and flow changed," said Buck, "and now it's kinda going my way. I choose where I quit based on that wave. I always quit a horse when I'm on the gain, never when I'm on

the losing end. And you saw her backslide there a while ago, but that's usually what will precede a pretty big breakthrough. Now, she's getting pretty content over here. I'll take her once around and see what she does."

When Buck asked her to move, the mare was standing next to the tires. She chose to pick up a slow walk and circle back around to once again stop and stand by the tires.

"Something she thought was impossible for her to get any comfort from," said Buck, "is giving her more comfort than anything else in the arena (Photo 7)."

He was, of course, talking about the big tires. Yet, because of the understanding he had shown the horse, Buck himself had also become a source of comfort. Although he had kept her moving, his respectful way of giving her the time and mental space to search and find peace had supported her through the process. "Remember, you have to allow them to work at it," he stated.

To reinforce the mare's tire choice, Buck dismounted. He then instructed one of his assistants to lead the mare directly out of the arena, unsaddle her, and put her away.

But when the assistant took hold of the mecate lead and began to slowly move off, the mare hesitated. She didn't want to move from the spot (or person) where she had found comfort (and peace). The very thing Buck predicted would happen had indeed come to pass: The magnet had lost its power.



## RESOURCES YOU CAN USE

# The First Week

R E V I S I T E D

by Tom Moates

***The First Week*** is one of the most ambitious and unique horsemanship video projects ever undertaken. The four-DVD set provides more than seven hours of on-the-fence-perspective highlights as three celebrated horsemen, Bryan Neubert, Joe Wolter, and Jim Neubert, put the first week's work on 20 head of previously unhandled Quarter Horse colts at one of America's most iconic ranches, the Four-Sixes Ranch (6666) in Guthrie, Texas.

Even though the video was filmed a decade and a half ago, it has enjoyed lasting interest among many students of horsemanship and has proven to be a cornerstone of the general horsemanship video library available today. Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting with Bryan, Joe, and Jim about making *The First Week*, what makes it so special, and why it has had such staying power amid a genre now flooded with video titles.

"Joe Wolter was working for the Sixes [the Four-Sixes Ranch]," Bryan says about how the video project came to be—the year was 2003. "I got a call from him and he had some horses to start there. I met Joe in about 1973. I had been working for Ray Hunt, and Ray needed another guy to work on a ranch, so I got Joe a job and that's where I got to know him pretty good. Through the years we've worked together quite a little bit at different ranches and wherever we could. He was also a friend of Bill Dorrance's and Tom Dorrance's, so we had quite a bit in common. Our original intent was just to get together. He asked me if I'd want to help him start those horses with Jim."

Jim is Bryan's son. While being the youngster of the trio, Jim started his first horse at age seven and had been working professionally as a contract colt starter for many years by the time *The First Week* was filmed.

"I think I might have been 22 when we filmed it," Jim says. "Joe worked for the Sixes and I worked for the Sixes starting horses, so it was going to be our job anyway."

Bryan thought it was a great idea to grab the opportunity and travel to Texas and join Joe and Jim since they had not been together for awhile.

"It is kinda fun to get with those fellas and share things," Bryan says. "So, that was the original intention. And then, people wanted to come when we did it. I told them that I was a guest and I had to check with Joe."

It turned out that having people pile into the ranch to watch Bryan, Joe, and Jim start a bunch of colts for a week wasn't going to work out for a variety of reasons. It was Bryan who came up with the idea to film the entire week, thus making the experience available to a wide audience. They were able to get a film crew to come to the ranch and record the entire week's work.

In the video, the enjoyment, camaraderie, and visiting between the three horsemen about the process of starting colts unfolds unscripted. The authentic nature of what transpires is no doubt partly responsible for the video's lasting popularity.

"One of the things that makes it different," Bryan says, "you know, you can see a bunch of colt starting videos and they just chop them all up in the editing and it makes the guy look like he walks on water. We had 20 head of horses and we just cut out little projects that we thought the viewer might be more interested in. We wanted to show the process.

"The guy that edited it for us, he wanted to just put in the parts where it was success and no struggle—maybe the dust flying, but no working through those places. We told him, 'No, it's not just an entertainment thing. We want it to be educational.' So, we had to edit the whole thing ourselves. That was a project in itself to show the start and the outcome of so many little projects."

Joe agrees.

"Bryan asked me if we were going to do it over again if we would change anything, and I don't think so," Joe says. "I think it was unique, and there are certain things that we did that at the time I thought, 'This will be good—this is something I know that I struggled with.' For instance, straightness, or figuring out how a horse thinks, or how to get a horse to change his thoughts. Those were things that were so important to me. And when the light started to come on more that way, I got excited. The video is just chock-full of that stuff.

"It wasn't a how-to. We wanted to document what three guys did at a certain place with a certain bunch of horses and that's just kinda what we did. It doesn't mean that is the way to do something, and that's a real important point to make. I've found in learning about these horses, and life in general, that there's more than one way to do something."

Jim maintains similar thoughts about the project.

"You get to see the highlights of 20 head," Jim says. "If you were just working with one or two, then a lot of that stuff might not have come up. If you're looking for kind of a how-to deal, it's probably not going to be the best one for you. But, if you want to really watch it and dive into it, there's a lot of good stuff in it.

"One thing I've heard from people who have watched it, somebody will say, 'You know, I've watched that thing so many times and I still get good stuff out of it.' You've got to kind of watch it because we're not telling, 'This is exactly what I do here.' It was like if you were sitting there on the fence watching."

Clearly "straightness" is one major aspect of horsemanship

depicted in the video that has even these experienced cowboys eager to talk.

"I would say that the biggest thing we hope to get across is some of the things that we aren't able to get across in the clinics, and the biggest one I can think of is straightness," Bryan says. "Once they're not trying to buck you off, I can't think of anything more important than getting one straight."

"In the video, we were able to demonstrate more than just trying to get it through to somebody with words. Straightness, I would say, is probably the biggest theme in the whole video. Right from the start we get mounted up, get forward motion around each other, and we get out in amongst the other horses, up and down the alleyways there, and the horses going every which way and tempting those horses not to be with us."

"And then on the third ride I said, 'You know what we oughta do?' We had 20 of them—I said, 'We ought just open the gate on them and let 'em go! And, go out and re-gather them.' And it was a little wild for the first five or 10 minutes, they wanted to run pretty good. All three of us can ride horses that run. We made it okay, but what I wanted to illustrate with straightness was to get the horse with you."

"There are so many examples of that in the video. Driving horses on our colts—we did that on the third ride, and then go straight away from them. There's a lot of horses people call 'broke' that couldn't do that. So I think that was the main theme of it. It's not like a how-to deal because you wouldn't expect the average viewer to do what we did right off, but we wanted to show them how we did it and give people an idea of something to work towards."

"And what I try to stress in the clinics, and I hope what came across in that video, is if somebody else can do something that you can't do, don't just assume they're something special. Like, a lot of these things that we did there in the video, we got a whole lifetime of experience to get where we were. So, I tell people, if it doesn't work for you right away, don't be discouraged. It didn't work for me right away either—or us right away. Just keep pecking away; just keep working at it. Don't just think because it didn't work for you in the first five minutes that something's wrong with you."

"The straightness part, that was something we really focused on a lot. Some of that stuff I've never seen on a video in my life, the straightness aspect that we tried to get across to the viewer. I've never seen that anywhere. Tom Dorrance helped me quite a bit with that. I am a student of horsemanship, I've been to clinics, I've got books, I've got videos—anyway that I

can progress, I'll do it. But I've never seen a hint of some of the things that we did there. It's quite unique, that way."

"Like this straightness thing," Joe agrees, "Tom Dorrance spoke about it. I heard him speak about it. And then, I was working for Bryan in Nevada one fall and we started a bunch of horses and Bryan got onto it and what we'd do is we'd start these horses and then we'd ride them in amongst the loose horses in a big lot. We'd practice riding through them seeing how straight we could get them. And Bryan got onto it first, and then he helped me with it and I got it working for me. We were so excited—it was the coolest thing. I'd never felt horses feel that good before, and this was with just three or four rides on them. I had broke horses that never felt that good. I remember, Bryan called Tom and we visited about it and Tom laughed. He said, 'That's good! That's good.'"

"That's the number one thing [straightness]—if you've got that, you've got everything, because then they're nowhere else except where you are. They're straight. You know if they're straight they'll turn. If they're straight they'll stop. If they're

straight they'll go. Straight is the horse taking you where you want to go."

Summing things up, Joe explains that Bryan, Jim, and he were three experienced horsemen with slightly different approaches, but they each ended up in the same spot with their colts—they all were looking for the same thing in those young horses.

"In the opening of the video," he says, "we're all three riding stud horses gathering those horses. The three studs are the three studs we started the week before. They've all got a pretty good look on their faces moving loose horses. So, filming the opening of the video, that's the last thing we did. Gathering loose horses, people have trouble with a broke horse and we did it on the horses we'd just started."

*The First Week* captures a special moment when three of America's best known and capable horsemen got together, had some fun starting some fine Quarter Horses, and had a film crew record it for others to enjoy and learn from. In the distinctive setting of the famous Four-Sixes Ranch, these cowboys work on, as stated in the video's blurb, "catching, leading, gentling, saddling, riding, roping, riding out, hobbling, handling feet, trailer loading, cow working, gate opening, trailing loose horses, and a whole lot of little things in between that can make a big difference." There's plenty of great fence-sitting moments for any serious horse person to soak in the more than seven hours of highlights in this now classic DVD.



*The 6666's Ranch in 2003*

Bryan Neubert, Joe Wolter and Luke Neubert.



# DAVE WEAVER & GWYNN TURNBULL WEAVER: RANCH ROPING/BRANDING CLINICS

by Heather Smith Thomas



Well known for The Californios Ranch Roping competitions they produced in earlier years (2000-2012), Dave and Gwynn Weaver now do ranch roping and branding clinics around the West. Their base of operation is in the foothills west of Orland, California, where they raise a few horses and host some home clinics between tours.

Gwynn Turnbull grew up in California with horses. “I worked for cutters and reined cow horse guys in my youth. In my 20’s I became a student of Tom Dorrance and Ray Hunt’s methods and their philosophy of horsemanship,” she says.

“I was traveling a lot, then came back to California and worked in the motion picture business as a stunt woman for 6 years, specializing in horse work. I rodeoed for 3 years and rode saddle broncs in the PRCA. I wasn’t very good at it, but it taught me a lot about myself, my limits and how to control and adjust my mental state,” she says.

“I was always involved with ranching and went to big loop roping competitions but didn’t feel that style fit me. It didn’t seem like those events were recognizing all the quality/skill of some of the hands who were roping there. I started my own roping event—The Californios Ranch Roping and Stock Horse Contest—in 2000,” says Gwynn.

This was a unique, one-of-a-kind competition held annually in Red Bluff, California, from 2000 to 2009, then moved to the Reno-Sparks Livestock Event Center in Reno, Nevada, where it was held in 2010 through 2012.

The competitions mimicked real-life working situations of the buckaroo, judged on skill. This was not a ranch rodeo; the events were not timed. They were judged by a panel of highly qualified and respected judges who studied and scored each team on size of the loop, distance thrown, handling of the slack, control of the dally, horsemanship, handling of the cattle, sportsmanship and style. Cattle were roped out of the herd. Teams of two or three cowboys expertly roped and laid cattle down for doctoring or branding. These events showcased the stock handling techniques of Old California and the Great Basin buckaroo, and all horses were ridden in traditional gear.

“I first met Dave, my husband, when I handed him a flier at the Red Lion Casino in Elko for the first Californios event I was putting on. He was working at the PX and that ranch had some country that practically neighbored my place in California. His crew came out to California that spring and invited me over to

brand and we got to know each other. We were just good friends for quite a while, then started dating and were married three years later,” says Gwynn.

“We were working hard, putting on the Californios competitions. It was growing, but struggling financially because it was very expensive to put on. Out of necessity we started doing ranch roping clinics in 2002 to help fund it, and did those for several years.”

Putting on the Californios took a great deal of hard work and dedication. She and Dave both felt that the world needed the information they were providing. They felt this was the next step in the horsemanship revolution that the Dorrances started. “People woke up to the idea that we should be good to our horses and approach them in a way that took their psychology into account. I thought this awareness should be expanded to the





other livestock involved, and to life in general,” says Gwynn. There was a lot of pressure on rodeos and other competitive events using livestock, challenging some of the handling practices. She knew there was a way to preserve western ranching and horsemanship heritage and still be ethical handling livestock. The Californios was her attempt to make a contribution on that front and help educate people.

“We did the Californios competitions for 13 seasons. These were very successful events, but we finally had to quit doing them. I was spending too much time as an event coordinator and not enough time riding my horses or helping my aging parents,” says Gwynn. “Dave and I decided to stop the Californios while it was still strong and popular, ending on a high note.” They’ve been doing roping clinics for 16 years, expanding into a whole program. “We do horsemanship, cattle working, regular ranch roping, advanced ranch roping, and now the branding clinics which is the pinnacle of it all, in terms of ability. We have a good idea now of how to help people become successful doing this,” she explains.

**BRANDING CLINICS** – They do several ranch branding clinics each year, in Montana and California. “Students can’t come to a branding clinic until they have gone through at least one of our regular ranch roping clinics and we have approved them to go on to a branding clinic. We do this for safety reasons (to make sure a person has enough skill) and also to prepare them for the kind of instruction we will be giving,” says Gwynn.

“We get some beginners and some people who rope really well who have been doing it their whole life. We know they are probably competent but we still require that they come to at least one regular ranch roping clinic first. This gives Dave and me the information we need about each person, their personality, and how they learn—so we can put something together at the branding clinic that will benefit them,” she says.

They take 10 students for branding clinics. “We do one clinic that’s 4 days long and one that is 5 days long. There is a day or two of prep in each one, where we work on the finer points of everything, and then brand. We rope the whole time, but the actual branding days are customized to fit the ranch.”

It’s all head and heel roping, rodear-style branding (out of a herd) and very well organized. “We don’t just have our students show up at a branding and let them wing it or slop through it. We have a very structured method that keeps the branding organized and keeps a consistent momentum that is deliberate but very efficient. We feel this is better for the horses and safer for the cattle and for the people involved,” she explains.

“If you want to be involved in the branding clinic we encourage you to get on board for the whole program and take a horsemanship clinic, a cow working clinic, or a regular ranch roping clinic—so we are all on the same page in terms of aids (the cues you give your horse) and what we expect in terms of lateral movement and bend,

and some of the points we feel will make you more productive at a branding.”

Everything done at a branding boils down to horsemanship. “If you don’t have a flexible, portable, reliable platform to throw from (a horse you are completely in tune with) you won’t be very productive. We want your horse to be better broke, quieter, and more responsive at the end of the branding than he was at the beginning. We don’t feel you have to sabotage your horse to rope and brand calves, and then spend three days putting that horse back together,” she says. Being in tune with the horse, helping him handle the work and becoming better at it is part of the goal.

“My roping ability and handiness is average, but when it comes to the branding clinic, Dave is the best. There is no one more qualified, or knows more about it or has done it longer. He buckarooed for 30 years in Nevada, Oregon, Montana and California. He didn’t moonlight as a cowboy with a job in town. Taking care of cattle was what he did. He worked on big outfits with large crews and also had camp jobs working by himself, and has a wealth of experience,” says Gwynn.

“A lot of guys doing clinics are great guys but don’t have that kind of experience. When you start putting cattle, people, horses and ropes in a learning environment it can become a mess. You want someone in charge who has been doing it long enough that they can see a problem coming; they can anticipate and be proactive to head off a wreck. Accidents can happen when working with large animals. To avoid problems as much as possible, your odds are greatly increased branding with Dave,” she says.

Dave is also very good at “reading” what each person (and their horse) can handle and what they can’t handle. “Our job is to take people to the edge of their comfort zone and enable them to grow, but we don’t want to take them too far beyond that, or we’d be setting them up for failure. We want people to learn and become a productive hand—so that if they got invited to a branding they could hold up their end,” she explains.

She and Dave make a good team. Gwynn had a lifetime of experience teaching horsemanship. She dabbled in many equine disciplines and had a lot of information on the mechanics for body control. She learned from Dorrances and Hunt, understanding how to motivate a horse to want to perform. Dave had a lifetime of experience on ranches with all classes of cattle in adverse conditions. He was very good at getting the job done, reading cattle and riding tough horses.

“We joke and say that I taught him how to teach better and he taught me how to rope better. There are some finer points of classical horsemanship that don’t necessarily go with ranching, yet at the same time these are skills we can use all the time—like hip control and flexibility, understanding the horse’s frame and leads. You can use all of this, all the time, to help your horse when working a cow, doctoring cattle, etc. It all goes more smoothly. That was a good trade between the two of us; he upped my game and I upped his game.” This is where 2 plus 2 equals 7. It’s a symbiotic and complementary relationship in which the teamwork creates much more than either party could do alone.

When they put on a clinic, the sponsoring ranch supplies the stock because they are usually in the middle of their own branding season. “We are picky about where we go. We make





sure the facilities are there that we need, to keep people safe, and that the sponsors believe in what we are doing and are excited about expanding their abilities.”

The ranch usually sets aside a pasture or two of cow-calf pairs for the branding clinic. “Then we arrive and get people ready. The ranch usually participates, with a crew member or two as representatives, along with the ranch owner. They go through the process with us, to improve the skills of their employees. To help subsidize that, we have outside students brand with us,” says Gwynn.

“A branding clinic is very difficult to do, and have it be efficient and productive. It has to be done right, because we are working with the rancher’s paycheck—his calves. You don’t want to adversely affect any of those cattle, so it must be in a controlled environment. Many of our students are in mid-life or older. When you get to that point in life, you don’t have time to learn it wrong. The people who come are serious about learning. They are not young kids out for fun. Your body isn’t as durable in mid-life as it was when you were 20. One of the things we teach—and it has become our personal catch phrase—is that we try to expand your margin for error so that you, your horse and the cattle can survive it, and it becomes a positive, productive experience,” she explains.

“Our level of focus is intense. We are trying hard to get the information presented to people in a way they can absorb it—at whatever level they are. Everyone is different, learns a different way, they are riding different horses, they have different fears, and different levels of confidence. We make it a positive learning experience for them.”

She and Dave are professionals and perfectionists. A person has a lot of tools in their toolbox when they’ve been doing something this long. It’s also their livelihood, as well as their passion. “This is what we do for a living. The only exception is that a few times a year we stop doing clinics, just to go back to work on the ranches. Dave calves heifers for a rancher in the Sierras or takes a few weeks of day work here and there, to refresh himself and keep himself relevant. You have to actually go do whatever it is that you are teaching. He’s a stickler for that. We also go brand for someone or help process and ship cattle in the fall. This is how we keep our hand in the game so we don’t know more about driving down the road than we do about what goes on at the ranch. We feel it’s important to remain relevant and continue to be prepared for the job we do.”

Other businesses send employees to training courses or continuing education. Some ranchers send employees to an AI school or some other course to help them do their job better. “But there are not many ranches that understand that there might need to be some education for their crew if they still want to work their cattle horseback. It’s hard to find clinics that teach ranch skills,” Gwynn says.

Most of the competitions and events at a ranch rodeo are

not ranch skills. “Dave says ranch rodeos, though fun, have led to a decline in cowboy skills. People think this is what a cowboy does, but timed events are just the opposite. When he goes to a branding or to doctor cattle, he often feels the crew is treating this experience like it’s a practice session for their ranch rodeo events and competitions—and it’s hard on the animals.”

One of the things she was most proud of about The Californios Ranch Roping and Stock Horse contests was that out of 13 years of competitions and thousands of cattle roped, with hours of competition, there was never an animal injured. “We never injured any cattle, horses, or cowboys at that event. That’s a tremendous record. People often ask if we are proud of how handy the people were or how great they roped, or all the neat equipment and silver bridles, etc. that were so picturesque. But a cowboy’s job is to take care of cattle, first and foremost. So the thing we were the most proud of was putting on 13 years of competitions without injuring anything. We like to think that our safety record was mainly because we designed the show around the idea that you could get your horses broke, rope and brand your cattle and have it be something that’s not detrimental to the cattle,” she says.

Many ranchers today just work their cattle with 4-wheelers and don’t use horses. “When I look at the pool of people in their area who would be available to help brand calves, the riding people are in the timed-event world. They are not bad people, but they don’t have the kind of cowboy skills required to be able to accomplish the branding tasks without bouncing their cattle off the fence. The ranchers brand on a calf table because they can’t find any help that is qualified to do it horseback.”

They might like to do it horseback because it’s easier on the cattle to work calves out of the herd and only have them separated from their mothers a few minutes instead of a few hours, but they can’t find the right kind of help. “Rather than completely abandon the idea, a rancher could hire a couple cowboys or send them to some training sessions. A good cowboy can be 5 miles from a set of corrals, find an animal that needs treatment and be able to handle it on the spot.” This skill is very useful in range conditions; you don’t have to bring an animal to a corral or take a portable corral out there.

“With this early style of branding you don’t need corrals. You can have cowboys hold the herd or hold them in a fence corner while the calves are roped for the branding crew. It might take a little work beforehand, to teach your cows to hold up in a rodear but they can learn this very readily. Then you can brand them wherever they are, and when you are done the calves are done.” It’s a lot less stress on them.

For more information about this kind of roping, you can watch their instructional DVD “Branding: Roping and Stock Handling Techniques of the Great Basin and old California” that Gwynn produced in 2008. The DVD as well as additional information is available on their website [www.thecalifornios.com](http://www.thecalifornios.com)

# CARE of Vaquero GEAR

By Steve Harris

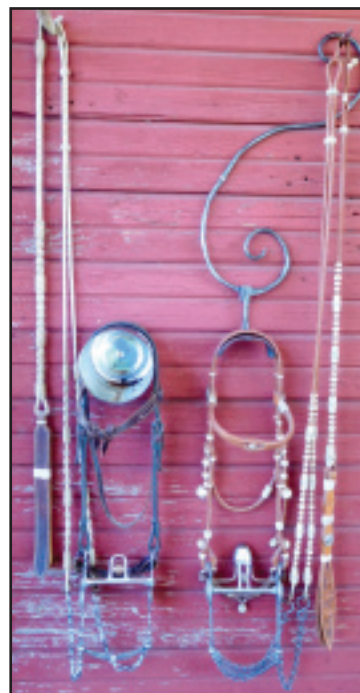
**L**ouis Ortega considered the care of horse gear to be so important that he dedicated an entire chapter of his first book *California Hackamore* to the subject.

The old *trenzador* was born into a world where horsemanship was synonymous with distinction, and to ride was to be a nobleman. Did the horse share the pride of California's Rancho Culture? He certainly appreciated the respect which accompanied clean, well-tended trappings. Some of us still earn our daily bread from the saddle, and caring for our gear is a matter of survival; all of us should respect our horses, our equipment, and the privilege of looking over the heads of the ground-bound herd.

Proper care of vaquero gear starts with understanding the materials it is made of.

## What are leather and rawhide?

Cowboy saddles are made of oak-tanned leather which has been treated to prevent putrefaction, and whose natural liquids have been replaced with oils and waxes that will not quickly decay. In this tanning process green hides are cleaned and soaked in a solution of tannin. In time the hide "tans" and is stretched, dressed with oils and waxes, and polished to become a tough leather with stiff, trainable fibers that have minute spaces between them. Oak-tanned leather is tremendously durable, even after being stamped, formed, and softened. Modern research demonstrates that it is possible to cross the North Atlantic Ocean in a boat made of oak-tanned leather.



Bridle hangers.

Uncured green rawhide is cleaned and fleshed, stretched, and allowed to dry. As the hide cures it contracts and hardens. Sometimes the hair is removed in a chemical solution. Sometimes human sweat and "elbow-grease" are the solution. Rawhide is more dense than leather. Math rath-

er than chemistry is the main factor in its feel. Eight 1/8 inch strings well-beveled and braided square make a delicate and lively bridle rein. Approximately the same volume of rawhide in four strings makes a springy *reata* with a very different feel. No one wants to hold a single, one-inch strip of rawhide; it is too stiff for any kind of horsegear until it has been stripped and braided, or softened in the South American fashion.

Leather is a natural material which changes with time and use. A quality pair of boots "breaks in"; a well-engineered saddle finds the contours of the rider's leg better after years of use than at the first saddling. Bridle reins with proper string weight are usually stiff until they have been used. Maintenance and proper care ensures that equipment will "break in" without breaking down. Maintenance protects a rider's investment in gear, and ensures its utility in reaching riding goals.

## How are leather and rawhide shaped and formed?

New leather and rawhide are stiff and must be made pliable before they can be formed into gear. An analogy might be useful here: Breakfast Cheerios contain a lot of empty space until milk wets the cereal. For a few seconds the 'O's are still crunchy; they are wet, the spaces between the 'O's are filled with liquid, but the cereal is not saturated. Eat fast, because milk soon permeates the fiber of the 'O's and they become soggy. If the bowl is left on the counter all day, the milk might be completely absorbed; the cereal will be soft, but no liquid will be visible.

Saddle leather, and to a lesser extent rawhide, has empty space between its fibers. When a piece of leather is submerged water fills these spaces. Even when the leather is saturated its fibers remain dry for a while, like crunchy cereal. In time water permeates the fibers and they become pliable, like soggy cereal. Water between the fibers then evaporates but the damp fibers remain pliable, like left-over cereal. Talebarteros and leather workers call this "casing." Cased leather can be stamped and formed. Rawhide is said to be "tempered" with water, but the process is similar. As the formed leather or rawhide dries, its fibers stiffen and retain their shape—until they are cased again. Oiling leather coats these fibers to make them pliable and water-proof. "Stuffing" leather fills its pores with wax so water cannot penetrate the leather. Oiling and stuffing leather helps stabilize it.



## CRAFTSMANSHIP

### How shall we clean and condition leather and rawhide?

Beautiful horses sweat. Horses often drink on the job. Hooves pound dirt to powder which creeps into every crevice, permeating the pores of leather and clinging to carving. Trail and arena dust mix with sweat and become a veneer of grime that draws out the leather's oil. It rains. In humid climates mold and other organisms feast on leather. Wearing gear out is honorable, but ruining it through neglect disrespects horses, heritage, and resources.

Saddles should be cleaned with an air-compressor and a face-brush with dense, horsehair bristles. Air blasts out abrasive dust. Acidic feedlot mud should be washed off every day, but otherwise saddles seldom need scrubbed. When wash time comes remove the dust with air and wash the saddle with a rag or sponge, rinsing each piece as you wash it. A detergent-free soap like Kirk's Castile is best. Glycerin saddle soap also works well. Sometimes a saddle molds. White powdery mold can be killed using vinegar and Dawn dish soap. Aggressive molds manifesting as green, blue, or black should be attacked with dish soap and a fungus killer like "Captan" to strip away mold and the oil, grease, and sweat it feeds on. Wear gloves, or hire a saddlemaker for this task.

Allow wet leather to dry slowly in the shade and away from heat. Guide the leather so it dries in the proper shape. A stick placed through the saddle's stirrups will help train them to stay perpendicular to the horse's spine. A fan can speed up the drying process and discourage the growth of mold.

Your saddle should be reconditioned with olive oil. Apply several light coats to both sides of each piece you can reach without bending the leather. Wipe off any oil which does not soak in, and polish the saddle with a lint-free cotton rag or woolskin scrap. Pull the stirrup leathers down—but not out—and oil the leather where it bends around the bars. Polishing the saddle's top grain with glycerin gives it a nice glow. Stirrup leathers, horns, cantle binders, and fenders can be dressed with R.M. Williams, Ray Holes Saddle Butter, or another petroleum-free grease. Most of these products have tallow or neatsfoot oil which will feed mold; air circulation and dehumidifiers rob mold of needed moisture.

A thought on neatsfoot oil: My grandfather left home as a lad of 14 to work with traveling teams of men and horses harvesting crops in Iowa. Grampa trained and drove horses all his life, and he used neatsfoot oil on everything. I began to do this too, but I transitioned to olive oil when I learned to make saddles. Thick, heavy harness leather is constantly soaked with sweat and exposed to dirt. A super-penetrating and lubricating oil like neatsfoot is necessary. Work saddles receive a different kind of use than harness, and require different treatment. A little pure neatsfoot is good for a saddle, but too much makes the leather oily and attracts dirt. For most riders pure olive oil is best. My saddlemaking mentor uses olive oil only on salad.

Some old-time Idaho cowboys liked to clean a saddle and rub unsalted butter on every surface of the leather. They let the dressed saddle stand in warm sunshine, and then rubbed in more butter. After letting the leather rest for a time they polished the whole saddle. In that arid country the butter did not grow rancid, and it gave the leather a deep reddish glow. This process was only done once or twice a year on a hot day. I have fried many pancakes in unsalted butter, but no saddles.



Mecates hanging up.



Hackamores hanging up.



Saddle hanging up.



Saddle cleaning.



Oiling the cleaned saddle.



Saddle stored.

Rawhide is much denser than leather. Dirt does not easily permeate rawhide strings, and rawhide gear seldom needs washed. Grease, dirt, and hair will accumulate on the inside of the bosal, but this can be gently scraped away with a thumbnail or twig. If rawhide must be washed use soap and water, and a rag or brush. With an antler or a smooth stick rub down the edges of the plats as they dry. Reins must be allowed to hang straight. Bosals should be formed as they dry. Rub in light coats of rawhide dressing. It is difficult to permeate rawhide with any substance, so take time. Bosal hangers are made of light leather. They are soaked with sweat at every use, so grease them often. Clean the port of your bit as needed; you do not want the cricket pin to rust away. A traditional friend of mine rinses the port of his bit every time he uses it. He also washes his forks and spoons.

## How shall we store our gear?

In twenty years of saddle repair I have seen nearly as much damage caused by neglect and poor storage as hard use and accident. Saddles should be stored out of direct sunlight on a stand which supports them as they are supported on a horse. The saddle-room should be rat-proof (and pup-proof). Make sure your stirrups are perpendicular to the bars of the saddle. Hold them there with a stick if need be. Properly oriented stirrups might make the difference between an exciting ride and a serious fall. They will also preserve your friendship with your knees. When cinching up please hang your stirrup on the horn. Flopping the fender over seat will damage the leather, distort the side jockey, and strain the #2 and #3 buttons. Saddles should never be stored this way either. Pads should be aired out with the sweaty side up. Our ancestors sometimes suspended a stored saddle from a rafter with a rope which passed through the handhold and looped around the horn. The stirrups could be wrapped under the saddle and tied to the #1 strings, and the saddle covered with a canvas to keep dust off. Storing the saddle like this lifts it out of rat-reach, and is the next best thing to a good saddle stand.

I wonder if ranching is possible without coffee cans. A small can fixed to the wall makes a good bridle hanger. The rein/romal connector should hang on an antler or wooden peg about 18 inches higher than the bridle. This allows the rein chains to bend and the reins to hang straight. If your favorite blacksmith makes a bridle hanger, have your favorite saddlemaker cover the bridle arch and the rein hook with leather. Leather should not be stored touching iron.

Bosal hangers go on the horse. They are not intended to store the hackamore. Hook your nosebutton or heelknot on a wooden peg so the bosal hangs straight. A loop of string around the nosebutton is a great way to hang bosals. Some bosals should be stored with a block inside. Others do not need it. "Untie your mecate when you are done using the hackamore," Bill Black said to me years ago. "You take your boots off at night don't ya?" Removing the mecate every night allows both the rope and the bosal to dry and relax. Coil your mecate in four large, straight loops and hang it straight. This will improve its attitude and yours.

Get up sooner. Take the time it takes to brush your horse. Take the time it takes to tend your gear. Thank God that you are still alive and still riding. Act grateful by treating your horse and gear with respect. Ride in the Light.

*A special "thank you" to Vikki Mullen of Hitchin' Post Supply who long ago cured me of referring to "Buckaroo Horse Gear" as "tack."*



## Best Horse Practices Summit 2018

By Maddy Butcher

**D**ust never settles on a good idea. Since the Best Horse Practices Summit wrapped up last fall, we've been hard at work, crafting the next innovative, annual, equine conference.

Surveyed attendees were overwhelmingly positive about the inaugural gathering. See some quotes from attendees and participants below.

Dr. Temple Grandin, a pioneer in livestock handling, will give the Summit keynote address this October. Dr. Rebecca Gimenez, president of Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue (TLAER), is an early-booked presenter. And Dr. Gerd Heuschmann, one of last year's most popular BHPS presenters, will return from Germany.

Grandin teaches courses on livestock behavior and other topics at Colorado State University. She also consults on facility design, livestock handling, and animal welfare.

She has appeared on television shows such as 20/20, 48 Hours, CNN Larry King Live, PrimeTime Live, 60 Minutes, the Today Show, and many others. Grandin has authored over 400 articles in both scientific journals and livestock periodicals on animal handling, welfare, and facility design.

Grandin said of last year's Summit:

"With its ingenuous blend of academic and arena presentations, the Summit will help people understand the horses' world. It offers the horses' perspective.

"For decades, I've traveled the world helping humans understand animals and giving people tools and mandates for improving animals' lives. We raised them. They deserve our respect. The Best Horse Practices Summit has the same goal and mission," said Grandin.

Gimenez gives training in equine technical rescue handling across the U.S. and internationally. Her current scientific research interests include a national survey of trailer accident causality, a study of animal physiological responses to rescue procedures and equipment, and improvement of fire prevention standards for animal facilities.

If you've heard of the rollkur debate, you've heard of Dr. Heuschmann. The German veterinarian, rider, and author



BHPS director Maddy Butcher visits with Bryan Neubert and Clayton Price. Photo by Paul Fleming III.

fueled the fire under the International Equestrian Federation in 2007 by releasing the now best-selling book, *Tug of War: Classical versus Modern Dressage*. He tours internationally and his most recent book, *Collection or Contortion?* sold out at our trade show.

In the arena, we're developing two extended presentations on English and Western disciplines. Selected professional riders will saddle up English one day, Western the next, to help attendees understand the horse-rider dynamics underneath the traditions and gear. As they say, "good horsemanship is good horsemanship, no matter the discipline."

Other presentations under consideration include: Pasture management, Equine biomechanics, Dentistry and Rider Fitness.

Last year's sponsors, including Patagonia WorkWear, which outfitted 2017 Summit presenters and board members, are lining up again to support the conference.

New sponsors, including Knotty Girlz, a women-owned and -operated rope company based in Valleyford, Washington, have jumped on board. Knotty Girlz will provide rope for Summit lanyards and contribute to the trade show.

Behind the scenes, the board and steering committee have been working diligently to frame the Summit future and secure a strong foundation for moving forward.

Registration for the October Summit begins in April. Looking forward to seeing you there!

"Thank you for creating a space where horse people from many different worlds could come together, connect, and exchange ideas. Thank you for expanding our horizons and our comfort zones. Thank you for making us all realize that what we have in common is so much more important than the superficial differences between our styles and traditions of horse-humanity. I'm filled with new ideas. I'm also filled with gratitude." - Anonymous

**SAVE the DATE! HISTORIC DURANGO, COLORADO – October 7 thru 9**

"I thought the first Best Horse Practices Summit went very well. There was a great turnout, especially for the first year, and all the presenters were top notch. And it was really well organized. Usually the first year of an event is more of a learning experience on how to make it successful, but the Best Horse Practices Summit was successful out of the gate." - Martin Black

"It's been an intense, mind-boggling couple of days. I learned so much about horse brains, horse behavior, and horse-human connections. I met so many amazing horse people from so many different equestrian worlds. I have so many new ideas . . . And I had fun! Exciting times ahead!"  
- Katrin Silva, New Mexico



# BOGUS IDEAS IN HORSEMANSHIP NO. 3: "THOU SHALT NOT QUILT"

(SOME WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS)

by Deb Bennett, Ph.D.

**I**F I had a lick of practical common sense, I suppose I wouldn't complain about working for wealthy clients: but many times it really bothers me to have to try to teach people of means.

The reason is that switching from one clinician to another, from one horse to another, and from one philosophy and approach to another, is very easy when the person can afford to pay for a different clinician every month. Wealth gives a student lots of options, but it does not prevent them from getting seriously fuddled as they desperately try to make what the clinician "du jour" tells them jibe with whatever they heard, or think they heard, from those they employed before. Such folks are "quilters" who continually try to stitch one mismatched scrap of information onto another. My point is that no, Dorothy, you CANNOT learn something useful from anyone. I understand that you may feel that trying to do that shows a fair, generous, open-minded, and sportsmanlike attitude, but what you will actually wind up doing if you "quilt" is wasting your time, your money, and your horse's life. My greatest desire for many students is that they might, like Dorothy, find "home"—a school of horsemanship with a philosophy that puts the horse first, an approach that allows for individual differences among the animals, and a cogent set of techniques that allow both student and horse to progress toward mastery.

## TAKE TIME FOR SELF-INSPECTION

Let me acknowledge that it's possible for students who can barely make ends meet to be just as prone to go from pillar to post as for those who are wealthy; and it also sometimes happens that students of all economic levels "find home" by dedicating themselves to daily practice of the approach and progressive exercises of just one school. So "switchiness" has to do not only with having the wherewithal to shop around, but the desire and willingness to make a habit of it. I notice that students who never "settle" often try to "use" the teacher, foisting off all problem-solving onto them—as if the teacher's primary role were to "clear up" the student's horse (but not the student). I've had clients get mighty huffy and uncomfortable when they find out that I think my job is mainly about "clearing up" the person.

It's expected and normal that beginners are going to run into various types of trouble, and the good teacher is all about

being there to assist the student to learn how to not make whatever mistakes. But for the student to make strides, she must be willing to walk with the teacher to a point back in time, to discover where and how things first began to go wrong. Success can only be achieved by perfecting the rider/handler's skills and then using that to patch the gaps in understanding that riddle the horse's base.

How does the student find out what his own needs are, so as to become able to help his horse? It requires thoughtful introspection—"looking within." Without question, this is difficult or even painful because it entails the student admitting that whatever their horse is like today is the direct result of whatever they did with him yesterday and all the days before that. In short, the student who hopes to succeed must pay the whole bill, must take full responsibility for anything and everything the horse is or does, even when the student knows about "abuse" or other bad history that went down before they owned the animal. This might seem unfair until you reflect that the student admits through telling the long, sad story that they knew about this "history"—yet still agreed to purchase the horse.

If you think my insistence on taking full responsibility is rather tough-minded, consider the opposite: there are plenty of riding instructors who will happily lie to a wealthy client for as long as they can get away with it—lie to them by tacitly agreeing that whatever is displeasing is the horse's fault. This brand of kissing up feels so good to the client who doesn't want to self-inspect that it often results in extended employment for the instructor. The pattern becomes especially noxious when the instructor receives commissions for selling horses to the very same clients.

Thanks to their ability to switch instructors and horses, I find that wealthy clients often become rather hardened-up and cynical; in their heart of hearts, they don't really believe that horsemanship problems can be solved in a way that results in peace and happiness for both horse and rider—and at the same time allows the horse to blossom into a dream performer. They may be gracious enough to concede that a clinician whom they particularly admire can achieve such results, but they don't believe that this would ever be possible for themselves. This opens the door for them to begin idolizing the clinician, and this is what I believe to be the point of Milly Hunt Porter's *The Horse Gods*—her book stands in part as a warning to students



## HOW HORSES WORK

that they must do their own work, and also in part as a warning to clinicians never to put on the godlike robes of splendor. For when clients believe they'll never really be able to become able to train and ride their own horse—and when this belief is subtly encouraged by a clinician-guru whose ego longs to be stroked by admiring followers—it becomes much easier for them to just keep switching horses until they find one that they can get along with “more or less.”

And I promise you—“less” is what it will be; that is to say, less and less as time goes on. It's a truism often proved that a “made” horse, one who arrives at the beginner's barn with good manners and a solid repertory of athletic moves, soon degrades noticeably. It's an old pattern within the industry: professional trainer sells horse to client, client takes horse home and has him a week or a month, horse starts doing stuff that's scary or dangerous, client calls trainer for advice, client tries to put advice to work but without success, client takes horse back to trainer, trainer works on horse for thirty days and then returns him to client. The cycle repeats until the relationship between client, horse, and trainer gets so sour that the client threatens to sue and the trainer agrees to buy the horse back. This was always frustrating not only to the purchaser but to every reasonably competent and ethical trainer of whatever school. When Monte Foreman innovated travelling clinics in the 1950's, setting the pattern for Ray Hunt who came along shortly afterwards, the idea was to compel the involvement of the client-owner-rider and not just work on the horse.

No one in the history of the world who is unwilling to self-inspect has ever become a master horseman. At nearly every clinic, Ray Hunt used to ask: “What about the last five minutes of your ride would you have wanted to change? And what would you have kept?”

### ANCIENT WISDOM-STORIES NO. 1: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “RESISTANCE”

Ray encouraged every student to self-inspect as a primary tool for self-improvement. He was by no means the first teacher to do so: so important is self-inspection that it is taught and practiced in many world religions. Along the same lines we also find that “illustrative stories,” parables, or tales with a moral ending are near-universal. Their purpose is to help move the student into an “aha moment.” In one form or another, many of these go very far back in time. A version of some can be quoted from the Bible, and that's the source that I expect most readers would be familiar with. I'm no proselytizer but I do enjoy using these tales as examples that often have a rather sharp “point” for today's horsemanship students.

The first story has to do with “resistance,” as in “my horse is resisting me.” On a certain day of my life, a day which has proved pivotal for all the days that have come after, Tom

Dorrance asked me to remove that word from my horsemanship vocabulary. Maybe he had the Old Testament story of Balaam's ass (Numbers 22:21-39) in mind. Balaam was a “professional” prophet, a somewhat shady character who would sell his services to the highest bidder—whether that person was a leader of the Israelites or of their enemies. On one occasion the king of the Moabites hired him, bidding him ride to his court under guard from an escort of armed soldiers and dignitaries. “Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with them. But this made God very angry and he sent an angel who stood in the road to oppose him. When the donkey saw the angel standing in the road with a drawn sword, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road.

“Then the angel stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again.

“Then the angel moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room at all to turn. When the donkey saw the angel blocking the road, it lay down under Balaam, which made Balaam so angry that he beat the donkey with his staff.

“Then God opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, ‘What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?’

“Balaam answered the donkey, ‘You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now!’

“The donkey said to Balaam, ‘Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing stuff like this to you?’”

“No,” said Balaam.

Then God opened Balaam's eyes. When he saw the angel standing in the road, he gasped and fell on his face. The angel asked him, ‘Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your actions are reckless. The donkey saw me and turned away. If it had not turned away, I would have killed you by now—but I would certainly have spared the donkey!’”

The moral of the story: it's important to get to where you see things more from your horse's (or your ass's) point of view. Students often come to me halfway believing that their animal spends all night plotting to make a fool of them. During the clinic or at a show in front of an audience, they feel foolish because they can't accomplish what they want, and, like Balaam, they “project” this onto their mount and then feel justified in punishing him for “resisting.” But Tom and Ray taught us that all the “resistance” that there ever was or ever could be around horses comes from the rider and handler. All horses, mules, and donkeys are smart, sensitive animals and their whole intention is to help the rider. Horses crave peace, security, certainty, and inner equanimity. They can't get these things from a cynical



"Have I been in the habit of doing bad stuff to you?"



rider whose secret conviction is that her own actions in the form of poor choices, lack of experience, clumsiness, lack of consistency, or tendency to anger have nothing to do with the problem.

## ANCIENT WISDOM-STORIES NO. 2: DISCERN AND GOVERN THE VOICES WITHIN

The literature of Zen Buddhism and Hinduism presents many stories about people who hear voices within; and the Bible is permeated through and through with reminders to heed the "still small voice" of God. Such stories almost always come prefaced with warnings, because voices that the person may hear internally are not always heavenly or good; all world religions acknowledge the possibility of evil influence. Christian and Jewish traditions sometimes personify the voice of evil as Satan, as in the story of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-6) or in the preface to the tale of Job, where Satan essentially bets God that he can break Job's faith (Job 1:8-12).

I have spoken above about students who secretly believe that they will never be able to accomplish what they want with their horse. Sometimes this takes the form of desperation or hopelessness; sometimes it's projected onto the clinician as idol-worship ("only the talented elite can really do this"); sometimes it has a more negative flavor which can morph into the ugliest and most useless of all emotions and thought-patterns—jealousy. Any reasonable person, any student who truly wants to be happy and successful, should be interested in techniques for controlling the content and direction of their "inner dialogue."

I recommend Eckhart Tolle's book "The Power of Now" as a starting point. Tolle's teachings broadly parallel concepts held in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity which indicate that there are two voices within every person—one from God, and the other from, shall we say, "somewhere other than God." Tolle teaches techniques that enable the person to pause and step back mentally in order to get perspective on exactly whose voice and advice it is that may be sounding internally. Tolle advises students not to try to stop an internal voice even if they think it is evil, but simply to let it know that it is being watched. Instantly, this causes the person to be aware of himself as something separate from, and superior to, that voice.

Evil internal "advice" can be known in three ways. First, it encourages the person to contradict natural law. A silly but memorable example that I often use in class is to remind stu-

dents that EVEN IF you dress up as Superman, if you jump out of a fifth-floor window you are not going to fly; you're going to break your neck, because the Law of Gravity is a natural law and therefore cannot be broken. The practical, everyday horsemanship example would be to notice how many students—based on my experience I would say an 80% majority—buy an animal for their first horse that is well beyond their abilities; they "overmount" themselves. In doing so, they come up against a couple more natural laws—first, the law that says horses are going to take whatever measures are necessary to survive; they are going to protect themselves from clumsy, angry, or misdirected riders and handlers. And second, the law that says that riders who put themselves into situations in which they can be bucked off, run away with, struck or kicked, shouldered and shoved, dragged or bitten by an animal that is larger and many times more powerful than they are, are almost certain to get hurt.

When your horse responds to you with scary behavior, it creates anxiety—and that's the second way to know that the voice urging you to buy too much horse is not one you want to listen to. Whatever comes from Heaven engenders peace; very practically, this means you need to monitor your heart-rate. Does it rise whenever you get around your horse? A pounding heart or a sick feeling in the stomach are signs not to be ignored! On the day you bought that horse, did you listen to the internal voice that urged you to buy him not because he was broke and kind-minded, but because you liked his color? Did you buy him because you thought you (or your child) would "grow into the horse"? Did you buy him because he seemed to be a bargain? (And please don't talk to me about "rescuing him"—because all "rescued" horses are, in fact, purchased.) Wealthy students often do not care to acknowledge that working through problems (instead of avoiding them by switching horses) is the only real way to advance their skills. But whether poor or wealthy or somewhere in-between, a beginner cannot work through problems that are altogether above their present level of skill and perceptivity.



## HOW HORSES WORK

### ANCIENT WISDOM-STORIES NO. 3: CHOOSE WHAT YOU BELIEVE

The third way to tell that the internal voice you may be hearing does not come from God is that it accuses you and seeks to bring you down. Christianity and Judaism teach that God is trying to tell you all the time that you are loved and that you are of unique value. The truth is, you were made to succeed and you already have all that you need in order to do that. But students are often uncertain of this; take the topic of “feel” for example. Students ask whether they “have it,” or do some people have it and others not. The truth is that everyone has “feel”—but almost all of us have to spend time self-inspecting in order to connect with it. On many different occasions I heard Tom Dorrance say that he felt that he didn’t have anything more or different than anyone else; but right after that, he would also say “what I have, I have had to develop FOR myself, BY myself.”

Evil internal voices insinuate that the student doesn’t have what it takes and never will. The voice of goodness can be drowned out by this din. It can sometimes take much patience to just wait and stand back mentally as Tolle suggests and “observe without judgement” any voice that tries to tell you that you can’t govern your horse and you’ll never be able to figure out a way to solve problems or teach the animal what you want him to know. With cool observation and a little patience, you’ll discover an astonishing fact—the voice that “disses” you is NOT you! And even more important: it can have no life or existence whatsoever unless you feed it by believing it!

This is the essence of what it means to have “free will.” There is—at least initially—a choice as to what you believe and what actions you take. Which internal voice will you permit to guide your choices? Let’s look at a scenario that I think occurs all the time: You see an accomplished horseman do something really neat with their horse. Not only is it impressive in terms of speed, power, and smooth athleticism, but it seems that the rider needed little or nothing in the way of pressure to get the horse to do it—almost like horse and rider are “one” both mentally and physically.

That’s when the hissing whisper is likely to start inside your head. It begins by correctly observing, “You can’t do that.” But then it tacks on a lie: “And you’ll never be able to do it. You aren’t good enough—you don’t have the feel—it would take forever to get enough experience or practice.” And on and on, eroding your confidence and inventing excuses for you not to practice the daily essentials that are the one and only route to mastery. The voice of evil wants you to believe that you’ll have to settle for very little.

This is where you really need that ability to step back, to distance yourself, to realize that though some of what the voice of evil says may be true, at root it’s a lie. And at this point you can still choose—in fact it’s crucial that you choose. If you can muster the perspective and the strength to say, “I utterly reject

what you’re suggesting,” I assure you: that seemingly small act will be a greater help to your horse and a bigger step toward achieving your fondest dreams than any number of clinics or amount instruction, reading, video-watching, practice, or experience. There is literally nothing more powerful than choosing to believe that you have been placed on this Earth in order to flourish.

Unfortunately, that’s not the path that many students seem able to take. The majority make the opposite choice—or perhaps we would be more accurate in saying that they make no choice at all; they passively go along with Satan’s suggestions. And the moment they do, Satan jumps right in there with a further idea: “Yeah. You can’t do it. But you don’t have to admit that to anybody. After all, you’re just as good as the next guy, and you have a RIGHT to train your own horse! So—if YOU can’t have it, then NOBODY ELSE can have it either.” This is what I call “the motto of Hell.” It’s the opposite of the motto of Heaven, which is: “If it is really true that there are some things I’ll never be able to accomplish, then I hope that YOU can have them.”

“If I can’t have it, then YOU can’t have it either” is the voice of envy. Anyone in the grip of this emotion and train of thought is in pain, but also wishes to infect anyone or anything else they can manage to hurt, including their horse and, oftentimes, the clinician (by trying to prove him wrong in the form of, “my horse never did that bad behavior before YOU started instructing me”). Money cannot cure envy, but self-examination can. The path back to goodness, to God, is the real “trail less traveled.”

### ANCIENT WISDOM-STORIES NO. 4: EMPTY YOUR TEACUP

Sometimes I like to update a Biblical parable because the way it appears in Scripture makes it difficult for modern people to get the point. If you still don’t understand what I mean by titling this article “thou shalt not quilt,” two short but powerful examples told by Jesus (Matthew 9:16-17, Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:33-39) ought to bring the point home. My NIV for Matthew 9:16 says, “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away, making the tear worse.” Most of us have learned at one point or another not to stitch a patch of new cloth onto an old pair of jeans, and then toss them in the dryer. What does this have to do with learning horsemanship? What if the patch were not on bluejeans, but an old quilt?

Likewise, my NIV reads in Matthew 9:17, “Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” Most of us don’t use wineskins and thus wouldn’t realize that when new wine is put into a wineskin, it continues to ferment, making the leather brittle. If new wine is poured into a “used” wineskin, the gas evolved from fermentation will burst

the brittle old container.

No matter how fair-minded it may seem, the student is ill-advised in trying to “quilt”—to stitch something they liked or thought useful from one clinician onto anything a second clinician teaches. Only when the clinicians are all teaching essentially the same thing—in other words, only when they belong to the same “school” of philosophy and approach—and only when they all adhere to the same rules of ethical conduct, is it productive to segue teachers. The main ethical rule for teachers is that they shall not promote themselves. The rule for students is to come to the teacher, as the Zen Buddhist story tells, with an empty teacup, for not even the greatest teacher can put new tea into a teacup that is already full. If there’s a voice in your head that says to the teacher, “I’m here hoping to get a few ‘pointers’ off you. I reserve the right to pick and choose, so that I don’t have to give up any of my old habits,” then your wineskin is brittle and your teacup is brimming. It is really refreshing to me whenever I meet students who are not trying to have their cake and eat it too. Those are the students who sincerely desire to be taught, and who prove it through their commitment to practice essential skills. They are the only students who will ultimately succeed in learning to ride and train.

## ANCIENT WISDOM-STORIES NO. 5: PLEASE DON'T SETTLE FOR VERY LITTLE

Many readers will remember seeing Cecil B. DeMille’s last and most successful epic film, “The Ten Commandments” starring Yul Brynner as the Pharaoh Ramesses and Charlton Heston in the role of Moses. The film won awards for its convincing special effects such as the parting of the Red Sea—way back in the 1950’s, long before digital manipulation of on-screen imagery was possible. While the story arc does not exactly fol-

low the Biblical tale as told in the book of Exodus, its culminating moment is one that just about everybody recognizes: having spent a month in the immediate presence of the Creator of the universe, Moses descends from Mt. Sinai bearing twin stone tablets inscribed by the very finger of God. Then, looking down over the edge of the trail, to his horror Moses sees his own brother and sister leading the people of Israel in worship of a golden calf.

At this point in the story, most readers interpret Moses’ reaction as the product of rage, or righteous anger: with the wind-machine going full tilt, he lifts the brittle tablets overhead and smashes them against the ground. My own take is a little more nuanced: I think Moses’ feelings were less of rage and more along the lines of “severe disappointment.” At least for horsemanship students, I think this interpretation is more useful. Just think: Moses had a pretty good idea of the difference—the INFINITE difference—between God and a bovine made of metal. Moses really knew something about God’s creative intelligence, His love and power. And he must have been shocked that his people could not even wait one month for him to get back from his private cosmic conference so that he could share with them all that it meant. What he saw instead was one of the first recorded instances of people who were not able to imagine an excellent and glorious outcome; who couldn’t believe that total success and mastery was their true destiny; and who, as a result, were willing to settle for very little.

The Biblical story is the best one I know to bring home to people what Ray Hunt meant when he said, “I hope you people are not just trying to get by,” and again when he would encourage a student who was struggling to get something across to a horse by saying, “hang in there. The understanding will be there. Fix it up and let him find it. Just keep fixing it up. Hang in there—and don’t be afraid.”

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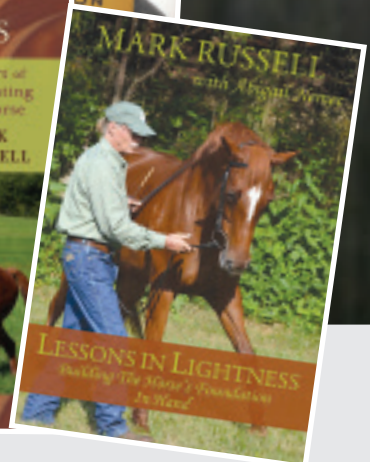
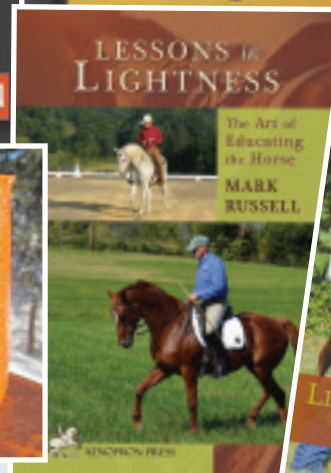
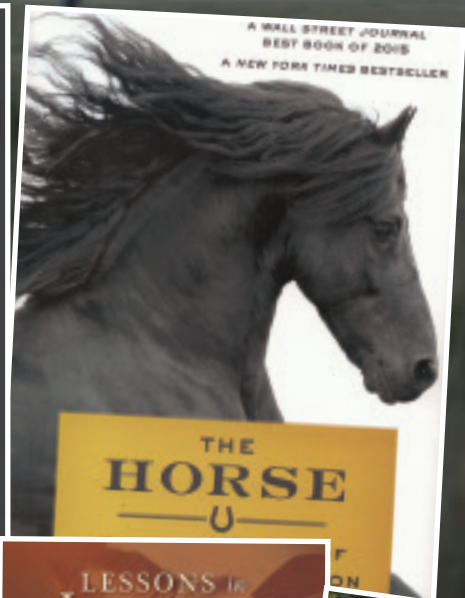
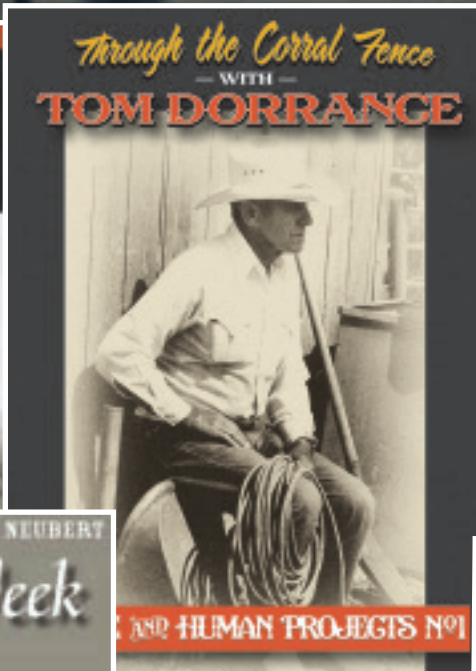
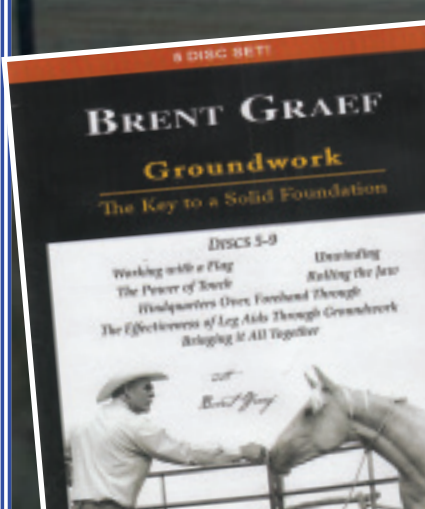
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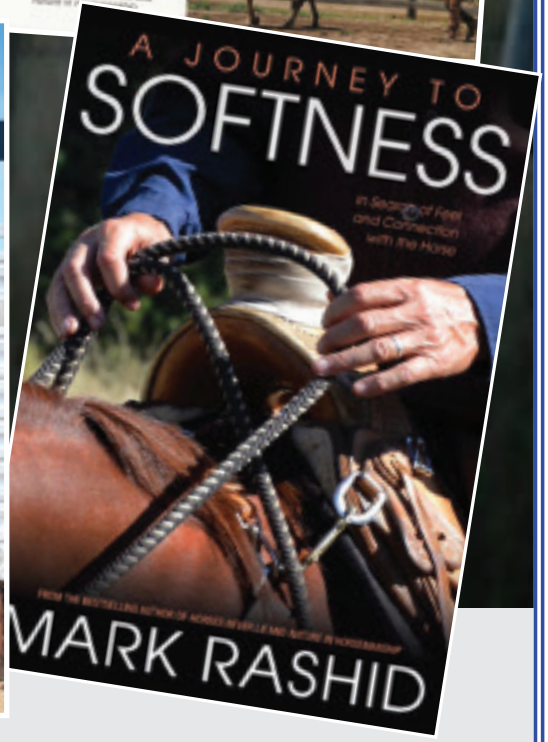
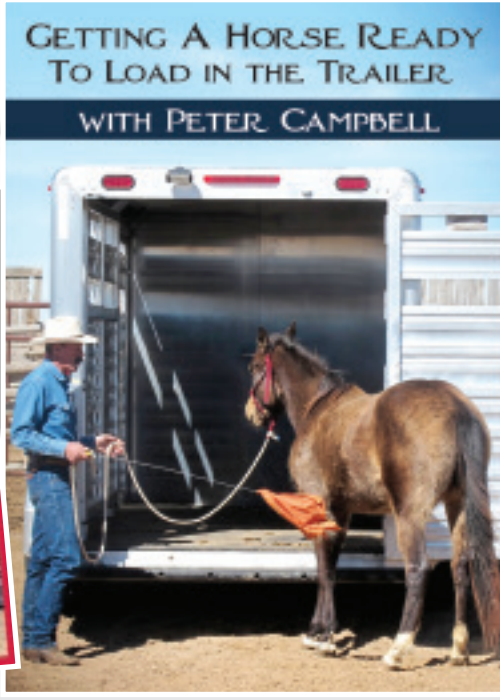
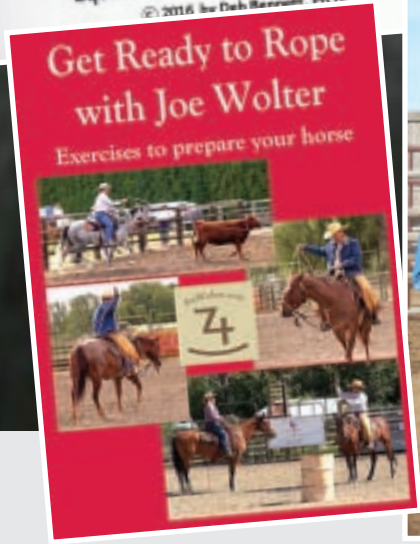
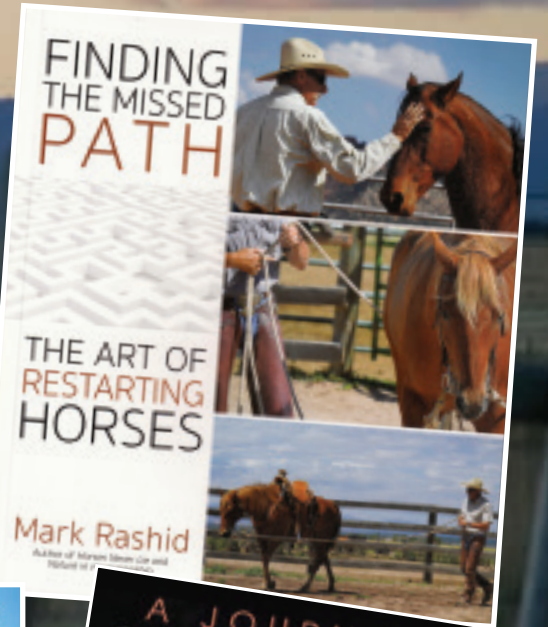
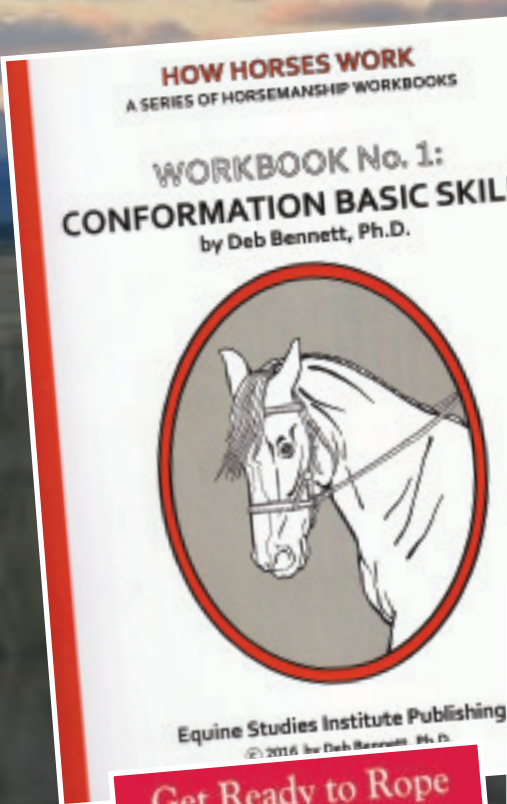
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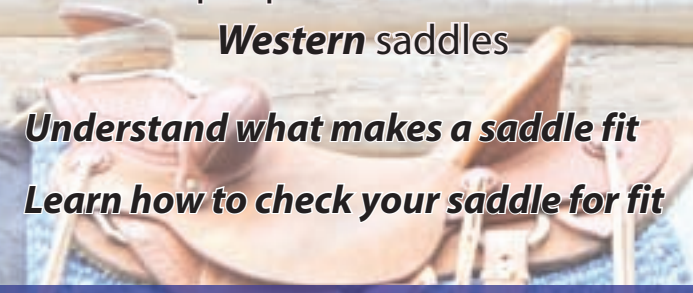
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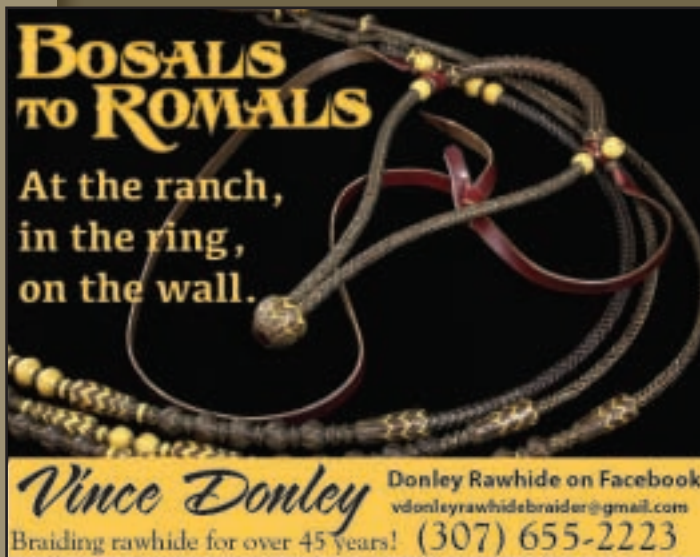
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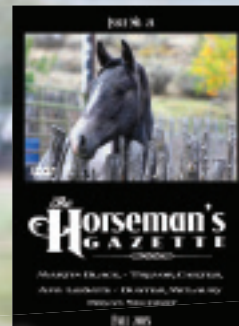
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