

# Thoughts From An American Horse Trainer And Clinician.

## An interview with John Moore

John Moore lives in Colorado, but he does a great deal of his horse work in Europe where he has become quite well known for teaching advanced as well as novice riders and horses to work together more harmoniously based on an understanding of the equine mind and the mechanics of the horse's movements. He makes four clinic tours per year to Europe, each lasting four to eight weeks, conducting scores of clinics and demonstrations.

John has authored a book titled *Handbook of Horsemanship Concepts and Ground School Exercises*, and has released two DVDs titled *Understanding The Function Of The Reins & Riding With An Independent Seat* and *Ground School Exercises And Manners In Preparation For Riding*. He is currently developing a comprehensive equine education course with Dr. Gary Potter of the Equine Sciences Department of Texas A&M University. You can read more about John in the October 2008 issue of *Horsemart*, magazine or visit his website at [www.johnmoore4horses.com](http://www.johnmoore4horses.com)

We recently caught up with John Moore and asked if we could send him a few questions about his approach to horse training and how he conducts his horsemanship clinics. His answers are very interesting and we think you'll enjoy these thoughts from this very accomplished trainer and teacher. We have divided this interview into two parts, so watch for the conclusion of this interview in next month's issue of *Horsemart*.

## You talk about the basic behavioral characteristics of horses. Can you explain these characteristics, and are all horses the same?

The mechanics of the way horses move and the generalities of the way their mind works is universal. All horses exhibit a set of instinctive behaviors that are predictable, which helps us to understand why horses do what they do, and also to understand the underlying reasons for problem behaviors. Yet, horses are not all the same in that they exhibit each of these instinctive behaviors to varying degrees on an individual basis. Some of these instinctive behaviors are cowardice, claustrophobia, panic, flight (running away), herd bound (a desire to be with the herd), opposition reflex (the natural instinct of a horse to resist being pushed or pressured) and a set of territorial games they play with each other.

Another set of characteristics that affect behavior and needs to be taken into account is associated with temperament. This can have an enormous effect on the suitability of a particular horse to a particular rider in as much as a mismatch or lack of understanding of this on the rider's part can lead to problems. I'm referring to the wiring of the brain that gives us different temperamental types of horses that are a balance of sensitivity vs. confidence. This is often referred to by animal behaviorists as being high fear (super sensitive) or high aggression (very confident), or low fear and low aggression. Horses possess these traits as separate entities, meaning they have different levels of each of these characteristics independently of one another. The high fear / low aggression horse is the hyper-sensitive, "scared of his shadow" type. This horse is easily impressed. The high aggression / low fear horse is not impressed by much. Things that other horses are naturally afraid of seem to come easy to this horse. He barely notices his shadow. It is important to remember that there are a wide variety of combinations of the levels of these two characteristics out there among individual horses, and also consistent combinations that typify certain breeds. You may encounter horses with temperamental (dispositional) characteristics that typify its breed, or individuals within that breed that may be atypical for that breed. You will meet horses that are low fear / low aggression, or high fear / high aggression, or a multitude of intergrade combinations. You can see the potential for combinations that make training or problem solving easier or more difficult. You can also see combinations that may make for a more desirable kid's horse, draft horse, endurance horse, cow horse, etc.

If a horse is too "high fear and low aggression", it can be difficult to get it to concentrate due to its being overly distracted by all the surrounding stimuli, and it can easily become the "spooky" horse. Yet, we need a certain amount of "fear" in a horse, since this translates to sensitivity and allows us to make an impression on the horse and make

corrections. On the other hand, if a horse is too "high aggression and low fear" it can be difficult to make an impression on the horse and also difficult to make corrections because there's often not much you can do to impress this horse once it becomes spoiled and has figured out that it is bigger than its owner. Horses with this temperament can become outstanding horses when started and ridden correctly, but when mishandled can also quickly become dominant and even aggressive with their handler. This type of horse, if it has become spoiled and aggressive, can be unsuitable and unsafe for a beginning student to learn on.

I also separate types of responses into two categories: instinctive responses and learned responses. Instinctive responses are those a horse is born with, like the behaviors I mentioned above. Learned responses are those that have been taught to the horse either through life experiences or training sessions with a human. For instance running from danger is an instinctive response. Stopping when the rider says "whoa" is a learned response. Whenever any response, instinctive or learned, is repeated a few times it starts to become automatic. This is known as a "conditioned response" to a cue, or a "conditioned reflex".

So when you allow a response, good or bad, instinctive or intentionally taught, to continue it becomes a part of the horse's behavior pattern. This is how you can have a horse who acts afraid, but sometimes really isn't. Acting fearful in a particular situation is something the horse can practice until it becomes a conditioned reflex, linked to that particular situation in the horse's mind long after the initial fear has passed.

Often, "problem horses" are horses that have been allowed to continue an instinctive behavior until it becomes "conditioned" in relation to whatever stimulus elicited that response / that stimulus has become the cue. Now, if the horse also possesses a high aggression/low fear temperament it might take a very knowledgeable and experienced trainer to turn this horse's behavior around since this type of horse can be harder to impress. At the same time, the high fear/low aggression horse can be just as difficult to turn around since it's often more difficult to get this horse to concentrate and stop being reactionary. So, when it comes to selecting a horse for temperament there is a lot to consider; the right balance of sensitivity and confidence for the intended task or event.

## What do you mean by territorial games?

This is the way horses establish their social hierarchy - they move each other around. They find out who is willing to yield territory and who isn't, thereby learning who is dominant over them and who can be dominated by them. This is the basis for their trainability. We ask them to yield territory by moving their body away from pressure, or a part of their body away from pressure - their shoulders, hind quarters, etc.

Food and territory are very powerful - whoever controls the territory controls the food supply (and the breeding rights). Anytime you put strange horses together for the first time in a corral you will see this behavior. They move each other around, and some willingly move away from more assertive horses, and others will argue the point, often kicking and biting to drive the other horse away. After awhile things settle down as a pecking order is established. But then set a bale of hay out there and watch it start over as the pecking order solidifies in this newly established herd.

So, whenever you yield territory to a horse it is a submissive behavior on your part and could cause you trouble later on in your relationship. Most horses are saints and allow us to make these submissive mistakes and then change roles and let us ride them and direct their movements. But some horses resent the fact that you've given them permission to push you around (also known as bad ground manners) and then change the game and expect them to yield to you when you desire. In other words, you change the game which is inconsistent behavior on your part and tears down respect.

I often ask people at a clinic of first time attendees how many of them would love to have a 50/50 partnership with their horse, where they are equals, going places and doing things together. Nearly everyone at the beginning of the clinic raises their hand. Then I explain that if it's 50/50 then the horse has the same rights as you, meaning that if the horse has to yield to you, then he gets to make you yield to him. And if you get to ride him then he gets to ride you, and so on. But in reality, someone has to be the leader. It's obvious that 50/50 doesn't exist in the real world of horses. Horses view other horses as either being above them or below them in the herd pecking order, and they view people the same way.

Remember, we're trying to understand how horses think, and approach them from their perspective, not ours. Some people who really anthropomorphize animals have a tough time accepting this.

## You mentioned the extremely nervous horse who acts badly in a new environment or situation. How do you help a horse like that?

Most often, horses like that are suffering from a lack of leadership on the part of their human owner. What I mean by this is that horses are herd animals who find safety in numbers, and who will willingly follow a herd member who shows leadership in a time of crisis. And being in a new, strange and stressful environment is considered a crisis by a very sensitive and nervous horse. If you are a person who, without realizing it, is constantly moving out of your horse's way so you don't get stepped on, or have to hurry out of the way at feeding time because the horses move in and pin their ears at you, you are displaying an extreme lack of leadership. By yielding territory to the horse, you are telling him that you are subordinate to him, and are therefore not someone he can count on in a crisis. In other words, if he doesn't know how to handle the situation why would he think you would know, since you are beneath him in the pecking order? He's not going to look to you for comfort, safety or leadership. He feels all alone in a scary place, being basically disconnected from the human.

I use a series of ground school exercises (yields) to gain control of the hind quarters and direct the horse's attention toward me, without yielding ground to the horse. Horses respect those who control their movement through territorial yields. The degree of respect which can be developed on the spot gives the horse much more confidence in you as a leader, and allows him to feel safe with you in this perceived crisis. So, rather than trying to control a crazy animal by restricting its movement, we need to analyze why the horse feels a need to move around, then work toward taking away his reasons for moving.

## What other types of problems do you usually deal with at clinics?

I sometimes encounter horses with severe behavioral issues that are truly dangerous - kicking, biting, bucking and so on. Most common are less severe but very frustrating problems for the owner, like herd bound, trailer loading problems, rude and pushy behavior, nervousness and insecurity in a new environment, won't stand still to be saddled or mounted, etc. Then there are the even more subtle problems that get in the way of teaching the basics of maneuverability to the horse, and are linked to many of the other problems I mentioned, but may not seem so on the surface. These are often not viewed as a problem by many novice riders because they don't yet understand the connection or the dynamics of how horses learn and the mechanics of their movement. Things like stiff body and neck, pushing through the bit, "heavy headed" and so on all add up to an inability to place the feet where they need to go to perform maneuvers. These "braces", as they are called, are caused by poor timing on the part of a heavy handed rider. And, so many riders these days have been conditioned to think that a certain amount of heaviness is normal, and are therefore incapable of even identifying a brace when its there.

## How do you deal with these problem horses?

To begin with, we have to consider how most problems get started. This usually means that the "wrong" behavior has inadvertently been rewarded, usually through poor timing of the release of pressure by the rider and/or handler. To explain what I mean by this, it is very important to remember that horses seek comfort by nature. We train them by using a concept called "pressure and release". This means that we first introduce a cue or signal, followed by pressure to elicit a response. We wait for the response we want, then release the pressure, allowing the horse to be comfortable again. Release can be thought of as the reward. In this way the horse soon learns to seek the release the moment it feels or hears the cue, avoiding the application of pressure. This is how a trained horse performs.

The very act of living through new experiences exerts pressure on horses, so we must be careful what reactions to these experiences we allow to be positively rewarded. If a horse is allowed to find release (reward/comfort) by running away from mailboxes, for example, then running away from mailboxes will become "conditioned", and mailboxes will become a cue that elicits an escape response from then on. Plug in any stimulus you like and the formula works the same – cars, plastic bags, streams of water, being tied to a post, etc. - all can become cues that elicit bad behaviors if a bad behavior brings release, meaning it is rewarded. It's important to remember that these behaviors become conditioned through repetition, as in any training. The important thing for the trainer to do is to find a way to get the horse thinking again rather than just reacting to a situation. The horse must learn to think his way out of a situation.

I begin by making a quick analysis, based on what I've seen so far, of the type of temperament I'm dealing with, while being open to modification of that analysis as we progress. This helps me immensely in formulating my approach to dealing with any horse. When I take hold of the horse, I cautiously work through a series of exercises to discover where the missing bit of education is and then go about filling in what's missing. Often, the missing link or links is glaringly obvious from the start.

When I walk into a corral or round pen with any horse I don't know, problem horse or otherwise, I don't assume he knows this or that. I start off dealing with him as if he hasn't been schooled at all. And as I begin to work through a few basic moves with him it will become apparent if the horse knows something, good or bad. They all know something, we just hope it's not something undesirable. If I can work through compulsory exercises without a problem then we just move on until we find where that horse needs to resume its training, and move forward from that point. But, most often, moving forward in the training of a horse with any kind of problem, big or small, means taking a step or two backwards and filling in the empty hole left in the foundation of the horse.

I never just climb on a strange horse and assume it's safe. I always check them out from the ground first. And I also don't totally rely on what the owner tells me unless I really know and respect the opinion of the owner, because most often the owner has never pressured a spoiled horse to do anything it doesn't want to do. I will inevitably end up pressuring a horse a little if we are to move forward with training. So just because the owner has never seen the horse buck doesn't mean the horse won't.

And not all problems are "bad" behaviors, meaning dangerous. Some are more benign. I may work on a problem by doing things the owner may not see the meaning of until after I'm finished and the horse no longer has the problem. The owner didn't see what was missing because they didn't know it was supposed to be there in the first place.

## Do you have a basic philosophy about starting young horses?

Yes. A young horse's mind is like a computer hard drive. If you can get a young horse started without putting any viruses into its hard drive, meaning bad habits or anything else you will later wish he hadn't learned, you won't have a virus (bad habit) pop up later on. The tough part is that horses are learning every second, not just when we decide that training is officially in session. So, you must be constantly aware and be very consistent every second you are with that horse. I know this sounds mentally draining, and it is at first, but it becomes second nature when you've practiced it.

I want to begin to teach a young horse not only the basic movements we will develop into more complex maneuvers later on, but also to get his mind right. This means getting him to think his way out of a situation - realizing that every time I pressure him a little there's always a release if he'll learn to look for it. This requires proper timing of the release, which takes time to develop in the human. When the horse starts looking for that release, fear, nervousness and apprehension begin to fade away and the horse starts enjoying the training session. He's no longer moving away from pressure, but rather moving toward a release.

I also like to challenge a young horse to try things he thinks he can't do. This builds confidence every time he succeeds, not only in himself but in me. I never challenge him to try something that is too much for him to handle. That would destroy his self-confidence and his confidence in me. I always make sure it ends with a success. If I ask him to do something he thinks he can't do, and he succeeds, he realizes two very important things: that what he thought was scary

really isn't, and most importantly, I asked him to try it, he did, and everything turned out OK. My prestige and respect as a leader is elevated in his eyes each time we have a success like that.

I like to get a young horse knowing it can move forward freely without apprehension, and to always stay out of a young horse's mouth as much as possible at this point in their training. Lateral rein work is what's needed at this point. They don't yet know what a direct rearward pull means, and because of opposition reflex it's extremely easy to harden a young horse's mouth and teach it to run through the bit without realizing it until it's too late. For example, a lot of young horses get started by being saddled, mounted and ridden with no real understanding of the concept of yielding to pressure. The rider asks for forward movement and if the horse lurches forward, being unfamiliar with the whole situation and with carrying weight, many riders immediately pull back on the reins to slow the horse down. Then the horse sticks his nose up and pushes forward through the bit. So, in reality, on the first ride the horse learns to raise his nose and run through the bit. Then the rest of the horse's training from then on will be dedicated to trying to keep his nose down and keep him soft on the bit - after first teaching him the opposite. The usual solution I see a lot of people do is to tie the head down in some way to prevent the nose from going up. But this doesn't take away the cause of the problem. It only means the horse is prevented from showing a visible reaction to the uncomfortable and confusing situation. I prefer to look at why the head went up in the first place.

**I see that you often have horses and riders in a clinic with varying degrees of experience and training. How do you deal with this situation?**

I deal with it the same way I work with all horses, as I described in the answer to the last question. I don't know these folks or these horses, so I make no assumptions. I start everyone off by going through some basic movements to find out what the people and the horses know or don't know. If they have a good education and can move on to higher levels of training I can get them started on some exercises and leave them to it temporarily while I go back to the others and do the same with them at their level. There is never a clinic where everyone is exactly at the same level. This is probably the hardest part of teaching clinics - keeping everyone moving along at their own pace. Very often I will divide the clinic into two groups and work with each group alternatively while the other group watches. A lot of times people will benefit tremendously by watching the other group.

**You also deal with riders from different disciplines and horses of varying breeds. How do you approach this?**

This is one of the most interesting parts of all this for me. It's important to remember that all horses possess the same basic behavioral characteristics and process information the same, while at the same time being individuals. The horse doesn't care what kind of saddle you have on it. This really simplifies it for me. If a person knows the mechanics of how horses move and how they learn, it removes a lot of barriers that get built between riders of different styles. A person who rides reining horses needs to be able to place the feet of his horse where they need to be to perform a maneuver, just as the dressage rider does. Some folks may ride dressage, some may be reiners and some drivers, but we all hopefully want the same thing in our relationship with our horses. We want them to perform to the best of their ability and to the best of our ability to bring that out in them, and to have a good, healthy relationship with them.

Of my European clients, the majority of them are dressage riders, jumpers or trail riders. The rest are competitive western riders of some sort. I've coached Grand Prix dressage riders and horses as well as western riders and horses that have gone to the European championships. The wide variety of levels and styles makes it fun and interesting for me.

## What breeds of horses do you usually have in a typical clinic?

Since what I teach is directed at helping riders of all disciplines, I usually see a wide variety of breeds in my clinics. When I do clinics in the U.S. there's usually more Quarter Horses, Paints and Arabians than anything else, with a variety of other breeds as well. But when I'm working in Europe I see lots of the dressage type breeds, some Quarter Horses, lots of Arabs, but also breeds that are not usually seen in the States - Nordsvensk, Hannover, Swedish Warm Blood, Fjord Horse, New Forest, Connemara, Icelandic and Haflinger just to name a few.

## Do you have a favorite breed?

That's kind of a subjective thing I guess. It all depends on what you want to do with a horse as to what breed of horse you like. If you work with cattle in the western U.S. a Quarter Horse will probably be your favorite, although you see breeds like Appaloosas and Paints being used in cow work as well. But if you're an endurance rider you're probably an Arabian fan. If you pull logs out of the forest in Scandinavia you are no doubt a draft horse fan, maybe Nordsvensk or Fjord. Horses have been bred into different shapes and sizes to perform specific tasks for us. It doesn't mean you can't ride a draft horse, but it does mean that a draft horse may not make the best dressage horse or cow horse. And a dressage or cow horse wouldn't make the best horse for pulling logs out of the forest.

Different breeds definitely have their own temperament and dispositional traits. And different blood lines within a breed can definitely have their own characteristics as well. So you may have a favorite breed, but you may learn to avoid specific blood lines within that breed that consistently produce, for example, ill tempered horses. So I guess it's not just as simple as having a favorite breed. It all depends on what you want to do with a horse.

## How about geldings vs. mares, and stallions?

Different people have their preferences, but I think, once again, there's a need to consider what you want to do with a horse. Most ranchers where I live prefer geldings because of their generally more even disposition. Most don't like to have mares around when there's work to be done because often when a mare gets around other horses she'll go into heat, causing the geldings to act silly, and it's a lot harder to get the work done when that's going on. Also mares tend to be more temperamental than geldings and can be more territorial. But I tend to like mares a lot. Yes, they're more emotional, but it seems to me they really want to develop a relationship. And if you have a good relationship with a mare she'll be extremely loyal. But if you have an antagonistic relationship with a mare she'll be your enemy and be trouble. A local rancher where I live has an interesting take on things. He uses mares exclusively on the basis that if a gelding gets injured and permanently crippled or otherwise unable to work, he's useless for his purposes no matter how good quality or how well bred the horse is. But a good quality, well bred mare who becomes permanently unable to work can still have a baby and produce more good quality horses if bred to the right stallion.

Stallions are a whole other ball game. I have a rule in my clinics that there are no stallions allowed, and that if someone wants help with a stallion they should book time with me separately from the clinic. This isn't always because the stallion may be dangerous or unmanageable. It's to some degree because of the way the mares in the clinic may act with a stallion present. And we never know this until the clinic is underway. But more often than not, the stallions brought to my clinics are there because they've become a problem, usually dangerous and unruly, and they end up taking up all my time just to keep them from hurting someone or another horse. This is unfair to the other students who have paid the same amount of tuition.

Stallions have something the other two types don't have, and that is high levels of testosterone and an often aggressive, competitive and very territorial sex drive. And there's nothing that causes males of any species, and others around them, more trouble than their sex drive. At this point there is always someone who speaks up and tells of a well mannered stallion that isn't like that at all, and I know of some myself. And often a student calls me and asks me to make an exception to the rule and allow them to bring their stallion because their stallion has never done anything dangerous

before. As I said earlier, we often ask horses at a clinic to do things they've never been asked to do before. And a spoiled stallion with a low fear/high aggression temperament, indignant at being asked by a lowly human to yield territory is a very different animal than the average spoiled gelding or mare.

People can certainly do what they want on their own time at their own house, but I've learned to stick to the no-stallion rule at my clinics. There's enough to worry about keeping everyone safe without the added worry of a stallion in among a bunch of mares, geldings and inexperienced people. As a general rule of thumb, if you have a legitimate need to own a stallion then by all means own one. But by all means have an experienced person handle him for you if you are not a capable and experienced handler yourself. Unfortunately, some people tend to not believe their stallion could hurt them until it's too late.

## Do you always start with ground school?

Yes. Ground school is where the horse learns the concepts of yielding to pressure, not only with his whole body but with the different areas of his body we will want to move separately later on. It's where he learns the basics of how to be ridden, where his feet are and how to place them in order to perform a specific maneuver later on under saddle. It's also where the horse learns the basics of lateral work used later with a snaffle bit.

## I see various types of halters used by various clinicians. Do you recommend any particular type?

I prefer the basic hand tied rope halter for ground schooling a horse. It's a simple, non-leverage device that speaks directly to the horse's head. Lateral work, starting with the hind quarters, is how I gain control of a horse, and a simple rope halter works very well for establishing this on the ground. A quarter-inch rope halter is a lot less comfortable (as it should be) for a horse to lean into and drag a handler around with than a flat nylon or leather halter. I usually don't have a need at a clinic for halters that apply leverage to the jaw, nose or poll, although I'll stop short of saying that leverage is never a legitimate tool under the right circumstances. But I do see leverage type halters currently being marketed to novices as an all-around training device, and I've seen people get into trouble with them. One mare literally exploded when the leverage was applied, went straight up and then attacked the handler. She didn't have a very good disposition to start with, and she didn't know how to deal with the pressure - but she knew who did it to her. So you have to be careful.

If you look at the rope halters that I and several other clinicians use, you'll see that they are made up of the same components as an old time "vaquero" type hackamore, but not what people these days call a hackamore, which is a leverage device without a mouthpiece, more properly called a "mechanical hackamore". On these rope halters you'll see a bosal, headstall and fiadore. And the lead rope constitutes a mecate which is a rope rein. So you can actually start a horse under saddle with a rope halter since it is actually a rope hackamore, just as many great horsemen do and have done, from the early-day vaqueros to many of today's top trainers.

## What type of bit do you recommend?

Bits can be divided into two categories: leverage and non-leverage. Non-leverage bits, like what is commonly called a "snaffle" bit, are often what is used to start young or inexperienced horses under saddle, or to correct or re-school an older horse. Many people are under the impression that if a bit has a "broken" (two or three piece) mouthpiece then it's a snaffle, even if it has shanks which give it leverage. The reality is that the definition of a snaffle is a bit without shanks, or leverage, regardless of the type of mouthpiece it may have.

Non-leverage bits are intended to be used, generally speaking, one rein at a time, meaning for lateral work, although flexion of the neck and poll begin with a snaffle as well. Lateral work is how you gain control of a horse, by placing his

feet laterally where you want them to go. Many people think the bit is what you use to control a horse, and therefore graduate to more and more severe leverage bits as the horse no longer responds to a milder bit like a broken-mouthpiece snaffle. That's not at all how things are supposed to progress. I constantly demonstrate at clinics how lateral work is the way to gain control of a horse. And this can be done most effectively with a snaffle or hackamore (bosal).

The beauty of the snaffle bit is its simplicity. It offers a direct connection between the rider's hands, via the reins, and the horse's mouth, with no extra leverage applying pressure in multiple areas at the same time. With this bit, using the natural impulsion of the horse, you can direct the movement of the feet. When the horse has an understanding of these maneuvers and is not trying to run away with you, you can graduate him into a leverage bit if he's ready. The tough part is that many people have a sliding scale of when "ready" is. Leverage bits apply pressure to multiple areas at the same time, which, to an inexperienced horse who doesn't yet know where his feet are, much less how to move them, can be very confusing and distressing. A horse who knows where his feet are and knows his maneuvers, and isn't a run-away can handle the leverage bit. The leverage bit multiplies the amount of pressure relative to the snaffle because of its lever effect, with the bars of the horse's mouth being the fulcrum. So a rider must keep this in mind when pulling on a horse's mouth. A few ounces of pressure on a snaffle bit can become a few pounds with a leverage bit, depending on its design. When a horse is ready for a leverage bit it is never because you can no longer control it with a snaffle. It's because it responds well to the snaffle and the leg aids, and the extra leverage of the new bit allows more detailed and refined communication from the rider's hands with a lot less pressure, not more.

So, I recommend a simple O-ring or maybe an egg butt type snaffle for riding a young or inexperienced horse. I normally never have a need for a twisted wire mouthpiece or other severe type mouthpieces on a snaffle. A simple "broken" (two piece) mouthpiece is usually fine, but often a three piece mouthpiece is more comfortable for the horse and causes less "fretting" with the bit. Then when and if you get him to the right place, a mild leverage bit for most people is fine. However, as I mentioned, I think a lot of people graduate horses out of a snaffle too early. And the severity of the bit should never be increased as a means to control an unruly horse. If he's getting out of control its time to go back to the snaffle and lateral work.

## Do you like to use a round pen when starting a horse?

I prefer to work a horse in a round pen before I take hold of him, but in my travels I don't always have access to one at a clinic. So I basically use the same techniques I use in a round pen with a rope halter and 12 foot lead rope. That may sound strange, but in reality that's what I'm doing because the concepts are the same.

It's interesting how loosely people throw around the term "working a horse in the round pen". You can make fantastic things happen in a round pen, or you can really mess up a horse in there if you don't know what you're doing. A lot of people just make the horse run around the round pen to tire him out before school starts. That's only working a horse's body, not his mind. So if he is a hot horse and you have to get him tired to ride him, it'll take longer each time to get him tired as he gets in better and better shape from all that running around. And worse, he can develop a conditioned reflex to run around and act silly for awhile before activating his brain, if he activates it at all.

People can also get into trouble in a round pen with a dominant horse. A lot of people learn to use a round pen by watching a video or reading a book and find out they can get a horse to come to them and "join up" if they back off when the horse looks their way. The problem is that they're missing some very small but extremely important details. A dominant horse, a stallion for instance, can view your backing off as a submissive act and literally charge you. There have been numerous people severely injured and even killed in this situation. The rule of thumb is that it's dangerous to teach any horse to come to you or into your space in a round pen if you do not first teach him how to move away from you and out of your space. This little rule will help keep you alive.

## Do you consider yourself a Natural Horsemanship trainer?

Well, it's interesting to me how the term Natural Horsemanship has evolved over the years. It started out as the name of a book written by Pat Parelli and also as a term Pat used to describe his approach to starting and training horses in the tradition of the California hackamore (bosal) and bridle horse. I come from the same part of the country, influenced by the same traditions, yet I do many things differently from Pat, as is the normal course of things among practitioners of this art. He and I are old friends and I have a great deal of respect for him, so I have always considered the term Natural Horsemanship to be Pat's brand for what he does, and I don't at all advertise myself as a representative of his work. It seems that too many people are doing Natural Horsemanship clinics these days who are unassociated with Pat, and have, in some cases, not helped the reputation of Natural Horsemanship.

I've noticed in recent years that people in different countries in Europe have shortened the term to just Horsemanship, which has led to a lot of confusion. The word horsemanship simply means the art of handling, riding and dealing with horses regardless of what style of riding you do. The word has been around for centuries. In fact, Xenophon, the classical Greek and friend of Socrates, wrote a book titled *On The Art Of Horsemanship* in the third century B.C. So, it took me a long time to realize that when I told someone in Sweden, for example, that I taught horsemanship clinics, they thought I meant Natural Horsemanship as in what Pat Parelli does. I do a lot of things Pat does, but I also do a lot of things differently from him.

I've also had several people come to my clinics and learn a few things and then right away start doing clinics themselves, calling it Natural Horsemanship without really knowing the whole story. This hasn't helped the growth of knowledge at all, and has led to even more confusion.

## What do you most enjoy about your work?

Well, there is nothing more rewarding in my life than the feeling of making a connection with a member of another species that cannot be done with words. It thrills me when a horse I'm riding learns something new and I see him making progress while maintaining his respect. It tells me we've connected. Horses to me are the embodiment of honesty. Even when a spoiled horse intends to kick you, he'll come right out and show you his intentions if you're astute enough to notice. He doesn't pretend to be anything other than what he is. The same can't always be said of people. Horses cause us to honestly evaluate ourselves if we have any hope of having a healthy relationship with them. Do we always say what we mean and mean what we say? Are we always consistent and dependable? The way a lot of people interact with other people just won't work when dealing with horses. A lot of people try it and think they're pulling it off, but optimum results never occur when we're not holding up our end of the deal. In other words, the horse shouldn't be the only one in the partnership who has to go through a self-improvement course.

The other rewarding thing about this work is seeing someone who really tries hard, is dedicated, willing to look at themselves as their horse does, and reaches their goals and forms a positive relationship with their horse. I love to work with people who are as interested and as excited about horses as I am.