

Published in Western Horseman - July, 2001
“Horsemanship U With Dennis Reis”

Please click Print or choose Print from the File Menu to Print this Article.

NEW GEAR: Check Out the Latest in Tack & Equipment

WESTERN HORSEMAN

July 2011

**Get a Leading Edge
In Ground Control
With Chris Cox**

**David H. Synnott:
Diagnosing and Treating
Diarrhea**

**Benny Guitron
Talks Snaffle Bits**

**Mom, Lawyer, and
No. 1 Barrel Racer
Kappy Allen**

**Barn Materials
That Work Best**

**Horsemanship U
With Dennis Reis**

\$3.50 U.S. • \$4.50 Outside U.S.

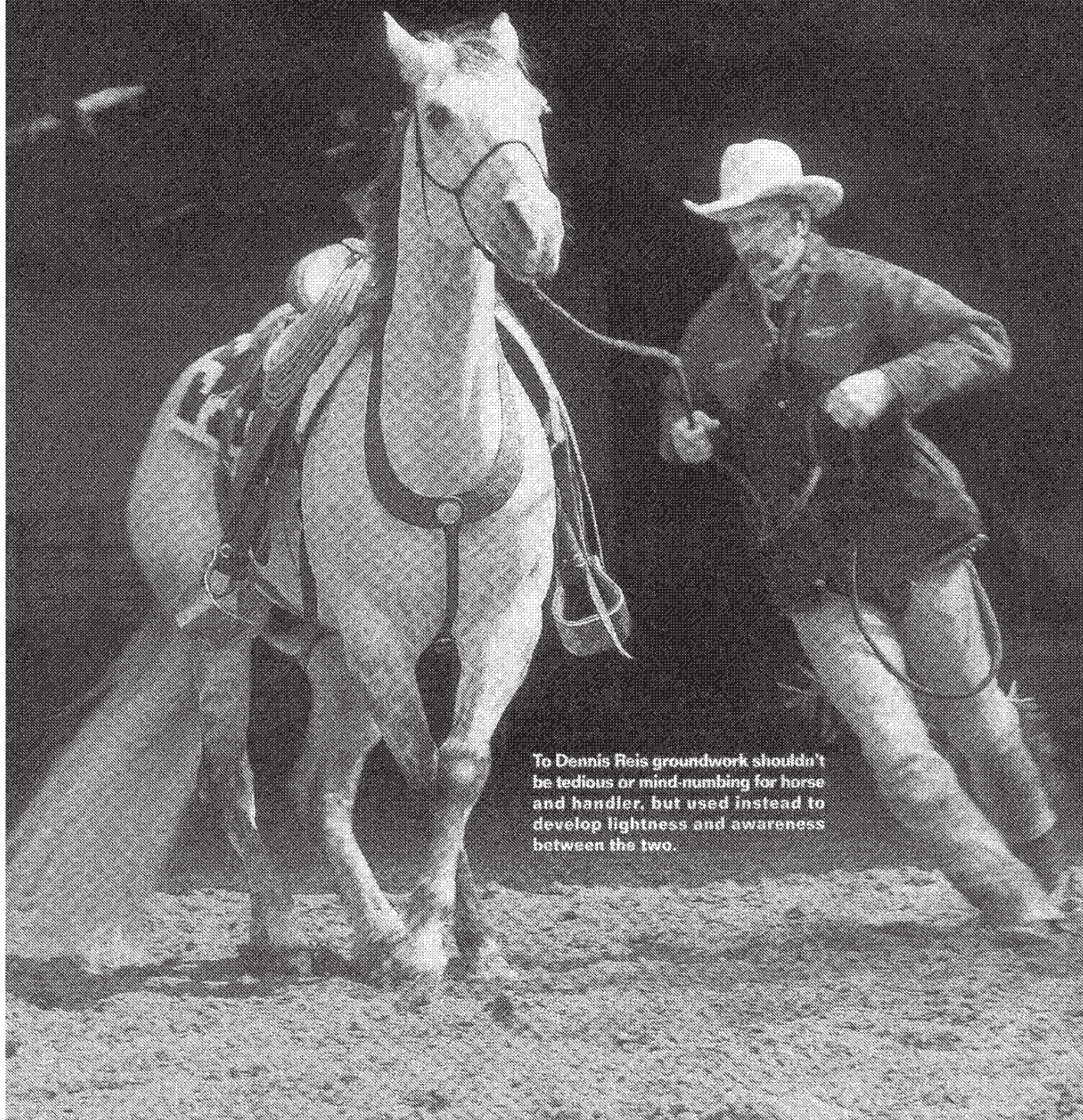


WWW.WESTERNHORSEMAN.COM

Attend Universal

California clinician Dennis Reis teaches the course.

Article and Photographs by Fran Devereux Smith



To Dennis Reis groundwork shouldn't be tedious or mind-numbing for horse and handler, but used instead to develop lightness and awareness between the two.

Horsemanship U

DENNIS REIS, equine clinician from Penn-grove, Calif., is a man with a mission, and it's defined in his ranch brochure. His mission statement cites a "horsemanship revival ... dedicated to improving the horse-human relationship through the sharing of age-old methods and knowledge."

Obviously Dennis respects good, old-fashioned horsemanship, but he is by no means tradition-bound. He combines old-time savvy with high-tech convenience and a clear understanding of what riders nowadays expect of a clinician. The end result: His multifaceted approach helps people develop good horsemanship habits, the kind they can take home and use every day.

Four Course Levels

Key concepts in Reis Ranch Universal HorsemanshipSM, as Dennis calls his program, are freedom, awareness, and movement as each student applies them to his or her horse to become a better horseman. In fact, the four Universal Horsemanship course levels are titled 5-Day Freedom, 9-Day Awareness, 1-Month Movement, and 3-Month Horseman.

Students master various horsemanship tasks at each level, then receive conchas set with gemstones of various colors to recognize their accomplishments. Buckles with the distinctive ranch logo, which represents the Universal Horsemanship handshake between horse and human, are awarded to those completing the 3-Month Horseman course. The Day of the Horse, a special celebration, marks their graduation (Aug. 26, 2001 — free and open to the public). It showcases students afoot and horseback working horses in a group and individually — and at liberty much of the time. Students use Reis horse flags or fiberglass wands, 6-foot progress strings, and lariats to maneuver horses through serpentines and over jumps, work horses to a cart, and demonstrate trailer-loading abilities and a tolerance for fireworks.

This program has proven successful. According to Deborah Fish, ranch accountant, 90 percent return for additional Universal Horsemanship activities. That's in part due to program incentives for returning graduates, such as half-price courses, and because, Deborah says, "We want to encourage them to continue their education. We know you can't get it all done with a horse in 30 or 9 or 5 days."

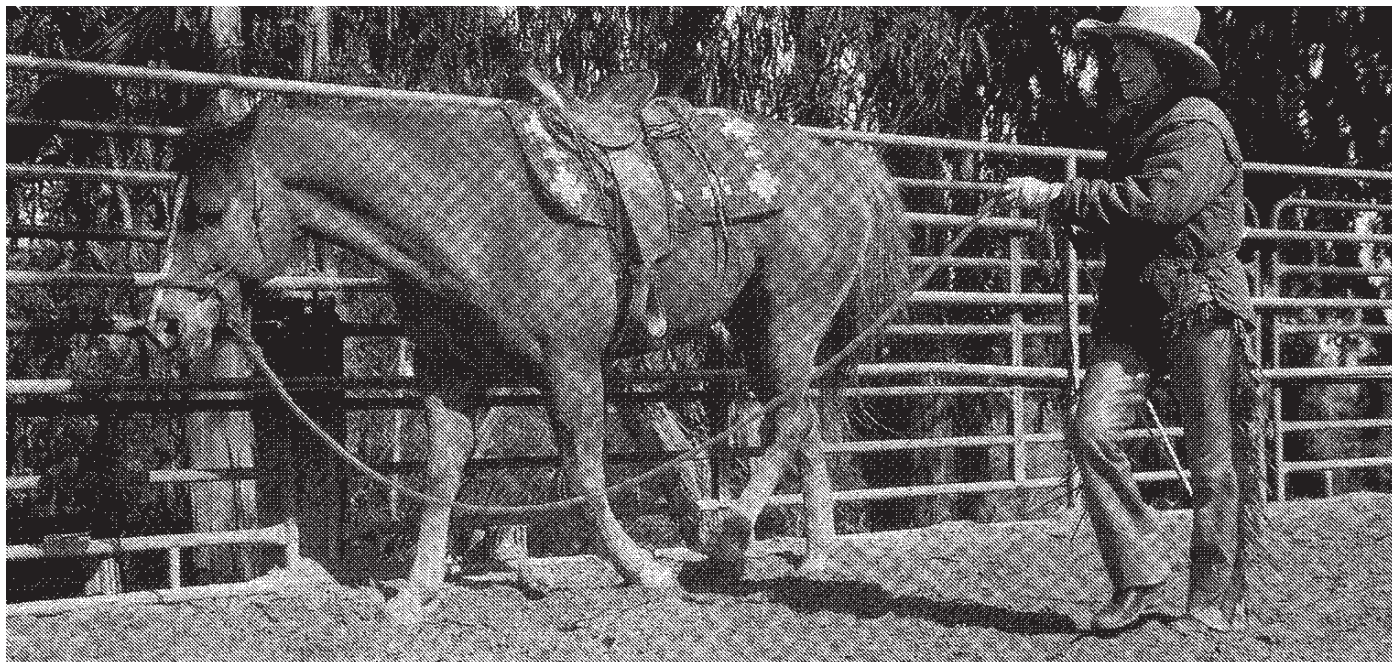
Although most do, not every student graduates every course level; a few have had to return to master the necessary skills. However, each time students enroll in a Reis Ranch course, they move to a new level as they discover that becoming a horseman is a lifelong pursuit. —



Students are taught that the elbow should never be higher than the shoulder when haltering or bridling a horse. Top hand and longtime Reis student Mary Jane Mack, Ravensdale, Wash., demonstrates with her Rocky Mountain Horse.



Dennis bends a jointed horse model to demonstrate flexion as Cindy Romero, Cotati, Calif., looks on. The clinician uses a variety of toy horses and riders during classroom discussions.



Bonnie Melby, Rochester, Wash., drives her gelding, Igor, down the fence — just one of the tasks in ground school. Bonnie, who didn't begin riding until she was middle-aged, said horses have "changed my whole lifestyle."

Five Course Modules

Five modules, as they're called, make up each of the four Universal Horsemanship courses — classroom instruction, round pen work, ground school in the arena, mounted work, and refined mounted work.

Each day a classroom reading assignment from Reis' Universal Horsemanship Development Workbook is discussed. Students score themselves after completing a short quiz, and most admit that the more they learn of good horsemanship, the lower the score.

"But," Dennis grins, "if you don't

read this stuff, that's okay — you don't have to. This course workbook is designed for somebody who actually reads the instructions — I don't." What he does is present course material in a variety of ways. "I try to cover all the bases. You read about horsemanship methods, and we discuss them. Then I show them on videotape, and I also demonstrate them. Then you apply the lesson yourself."

For hands-on horse work students move to the round pen, where they learn to position themselves to drive or block a horse and to command his attention. "We work consistently,

safely, slowly, but accurately in the round pen," says Dennis. "You must learn how to speak impeccably to your horse in the round corral. It can be misunderstood and misused, and becomes a punishment chamber when a horse is run around to the point of exhaustion.

"Instead, I use the round corral to draw a horse to me, get his attention, and let him find comfort and relief with me. The bottom line: A horse would rather rest than work; he needs to find his rest with me."

At first, a student afoot works his horse at liberty in the round corral using two flags. When the student holds one upright (while working the horse), it becomes, says Dennis, "a center point to keep you safe." A student can leave this safety zone to correct a horse, but must immediately return to it. Too, holding the pole also helps ensure that a student works his horse, rather than the horse working him.

According to Dennis, some horses nowadays have never experienced being part of a herd. "In my clinics and many others, you learn to relate to the horse as a herd animal, but how can you do that when your horse doesn't know what that means?"

To that end, horses are gradually introduced to run together as a herd in the arena. Students, fully apprised



If they aren't already, horses become herd-broke at the Reis Ranch, and students learn how to handle the herd. Dennis coaches from the fence.



PROBLEM?

- TAIL RUBBING
- SHORT / THIN TAIL
- DANDRUFF
- GIRTH ITCH
- RAIN ROT
- FUNGUS
- SCRATCHES

SOLUTION!



Original M-T-G™ Works!

CALL FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON SHAPLEY'S COMPLETE LINE OF
QUALITY GROOMING PRODUCTS.

1-800-982-2017

www.shapleys.com shapleys@aol.com



**Free
BMB Catalog!**



Source Code: WH2

**THE FINEST IN HALTERS,
TACK AND BLANKETS.**

1-888-BMB-TACK
www.bmbtack.com



Barbara Holley, Medford, Ore., leads Dennis and students in a serpentine drill. Students use whatever gear is comfortable to each — hard hat and English saddle, cowboy hat and western saddle — and in any combination.

of the potential risk to their horses, can decline this opportunity, but most allow their horses to learn from the herd. Once the horses settle, students afoot work the herd, a new experience for some. So the people, too, become herd-broke and learn about horses by learning how to block, drive, or hold the herd.

“We then take the round corral work to a new level. Whatever you do in the small pen, you will do in a larger environment.” That’s ground school, where students afoot work to earn their horses’ respect in the big arena.

In ground school all the students gather in the arena, each working in his own space, his horse in a rope halter with a 12-foot lead. Students work through assigned exercises, based on the Universal Horsemanship components, and learn to control the horse’s direction, send him forward or back, and move individual parts of his body, all safely from the ground. These tasks teach the horse fundamental movements and also allow the owner to work out any problems they might have before mounting.

Ground school also introduces horses to a variety of obstacles, such as a bridge, which helps desensitize horses to potential trail obstacles and, as Dennis says,

“Give students some tools to use in working their horses.”

Students work horseback in the final two modules. Mounted work begins with basics — standing still, transitions among the gaits, lateral flexion, and more. Then most students get what they really want from the clinic — the opportunity to ride over, around, and through trail obstacles without the horse hitting the panic button.

Now students ride to the bridge, and again Dennis takes as much time as necessary until horse and rider are comfortable with crossing it. The same is true at what Dennis calls the car wash — a long PVC pipe suspended from the arena ceiling, from which hangs an old tarp cut into streamers. At first assistants on horseback hold back the streamers while students direct their horses underneath. Gradually streamers are released and, if necessary, horses rubbed with them until every horse and rider is comfortable there.

Another required maneuver: Each horse must push an inflated 6-foot ball along the fence line. Two assistants afoot behind the ball move it back, away from the horse, as the rider encourages the horse to go to the ball and drive it away. In a short time even the youngest of horses and greenest of

riders approach the ball with new-found confidence.

The final mounted-refined module is just as described, requiring a more precise performance. The greater degree of difficulty requires that horse and rider demonstrate an equally greater amount of finesse in their work.

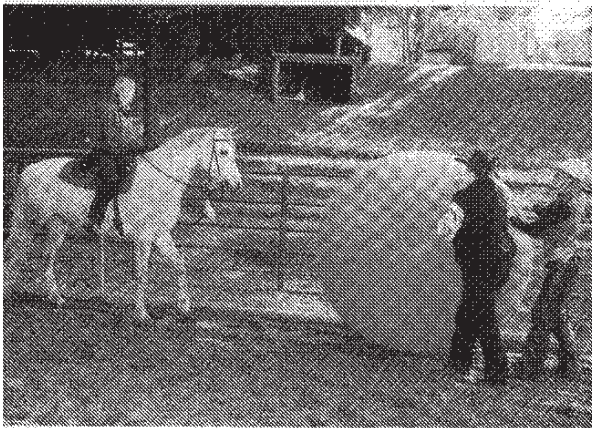
Universal Horsemanship Components

In any Universal Horsemanship course, the components necessary for a satisfactory horse and rider performance are (0) forward motion, (1) lateral flexion, (2) disengagement, (3) vertical flexion, (4) backward motion, (5) leg yield, (6) counter-turn, (7) half-pass, and (8) the stop.

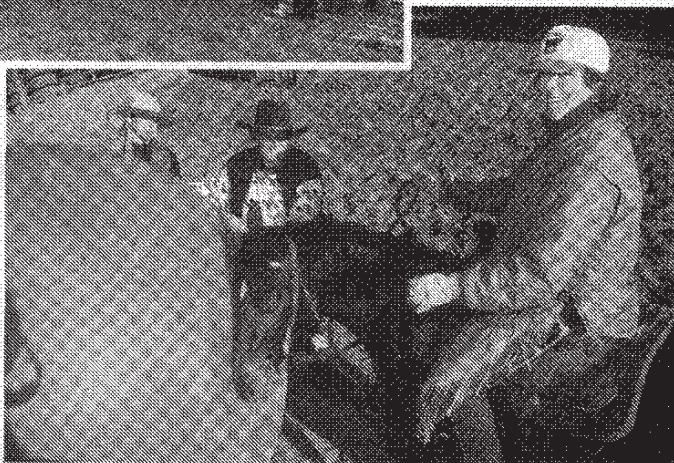
According to Dennis, each

horsemanship maneuver breaks down to a combination of these components. So when a student masters a single component with his horse, achieving a more advanced, complex task is a simple matter of combining individual components. Periodically, Dennis says, for example, "Do 2, 3, and 4 for three steps." So a student should disengage the horse's hindquarters to stop forward motion, then ask the horse to flex vertically at the poll prior to backing up three steps.

Although going by the numbers might seem a somewhat stylized approach to horsemanship, students who don't have good horsemanship habits are forced to think literally in a step-one-two-three-manner and be consistent with it. Consequently, horses figure out all the quicker what is required of



During orientation, Sue Chiverton, Philo, Calif., said she wanted learn how to ride her new horse "through obstacles safely." She got a chance to practice her approach on Dennis' big, red ball.



Pug Plantz, Suisun City, Calif., couldn't help grinning when her young horse made friends with the big ball. Deborah Fish (left) and Pat Murphy are two reasons the Universal Horsemanship school runs so smoothly.

SUREFOOT⁴

Livestock footing and flooring system

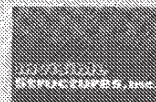
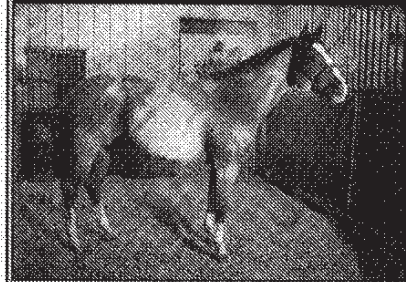


Surfacing Solutions!

- Veterinarian recommended
- Firm, stable, non-slip surface
- Eliminates holes/ruts from digging and pawing
- Improves drainage
- Reduces bedding waste 50-75%
- Reduces odor

Ideal for stall flooring, auto walkers, bridle trails, cattle working areas and much more!

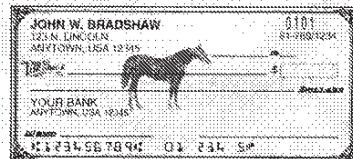
Stall Flooring



20100 E. 35th Drive
Aurora, CO 80011-8160
1-800-233-1510
Fax: 1-800-233-1522
www.surefoot4.com

PERSONALIZED HORSE CHECKS

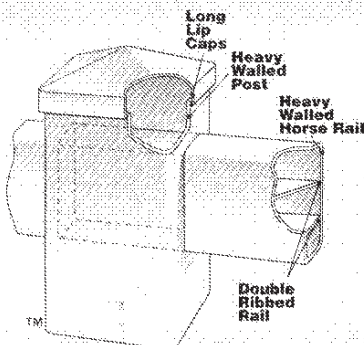
\$12.00 FOR 200 SINGLE CHECKS
\$18.00 FOR 200 DUPLICATE COPY CHECKS
ALSO CUSTOM CHECKS
(YOUR OWN PHOTO)
\$25.00 ONE TIME ART CHARGE PLUS
PRICE OF CHECKS
VISA AND MASTERCARD ACCEPTED



ALSO AVAILABLE: 3-TO-PAGE BUSINESS CKS
WRITE, CALL OR VISIT OUR WEB SITE
www.kbnc.com
KANSAS BANK NOTE CO., DEPT. WHM
P.O. BOX 360 - FREDONIA, KS 66735 - 316-378-3026

The Best Fence. The Best Price. Guaranteed.

Gardner Fence offers the highest commercial-grade fence in the industry at the **BEST PRICE**. You'll **NEVER** have to paint again!



Call for a hassle-free quote today!
800-788-3461

GARDNER FENCE



New!
ONLINE ORDERING

www.gardnerfence.com

AUSTRALIAN

Take Another Look.

SYD HILL & SONS



- Lifelong Quality
- Comfort & Security
- Lightweight
- Fitting the Hard-to-Fit Horse

Designing and crafting saddles for the stockmen of Australia for over 120 years.

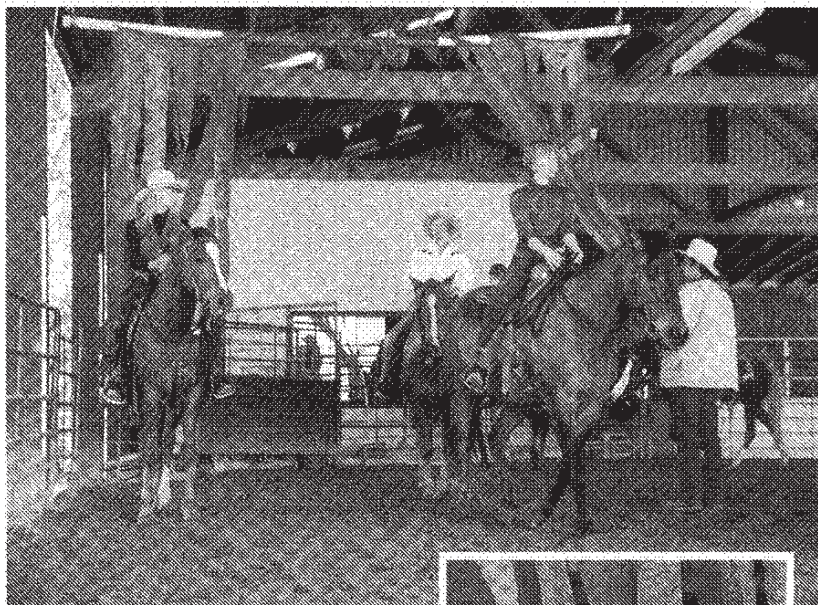
WE ALSO CARRY A COMPLETE LINE OF ACCESSORIES FOR YOUR AUSSIE NEEDS.

OUTBACK RANCH

AUSTRALIAN SADDLES, TACK & ACCESSORIES

P.O. Box 427
Colama, CA 95613

Call for free 2001 catalog.
Ph. 530-295-1417



Dennis calls this obstacle the carwash for obvious reasons. Katy Sommers, Ukiah, Calif., and Bonny Melby, Rochester, Wash., make an initial pass underneath as Deborah Fish and her mount and Jim McDermott offer reassurance.



Something about riding through the carwash streamers brings a smile to student faces. A case in point: Casey Warner, who lived in San Rafael, Calif., at the time.

them, and the pair is more likely to achieve a successful performance.

Horse and Human Factors

"In Universal Horsemanship," Dennis explains, "you learn what makes a horse tick, what motivates him, and why he does what he does. You learn to read his body language — a lowered head or licking and chewing. These things are outward expressions of what's going on inside your horse. Your horse is an emotion with four feet. Work his feet, and his mind will follow."

A fearful horse isn't part of the program to Dennis. "I use the word respect, and I'll even go so far as to say dominance — without force and without the expression of anger. To earn a horse's respect you sometimes must be dominant, and you might need to be forceful — but without being mean, mad, or angry. You must be assertive, not aggressive."

A gradual escalation of aids enables the horseman to be neither

wimpy nor aggressive. Dennis describes the escalation as "ask, suggest, promise. You ask the horse to do something; then you suggest," he says, using more flamboyant body language. "With some horses gestures mean nothing because the horses have become numb to them. That's when you leave the safety zone to spank the horse on the butt — and that's the promise. Then you go back to your safe environment and just ask. That's your goal.

"Once or twice," he grins, "you might have to judiciously promise your horse, to get him going. But that's with respect and without fear or force. You become the dominant

mare in the pasture. The herd is savvy to her leadership; otherwise, she wheels and promises her way through the herd. A horse is willful, but will follow you as a leader."

The Student Body

Inquire about a Reis clinic, and you're asked to complete a profile about you and your horse. A series of yes-or-no questions asks about everything from simple equine ground manners to major riding problems to stable vices. Then Dennis calls you, a service other clinicians seldom provide.

"I get an idea of your expectations and how I can best help you resolve problems and get a realistic riding program in place. I might suggest that you first audit a clinic or get a videotape," he says, then grins. "If you can answer all those questions well, you don't need a clinic."

The typical Reis Ranch student is a middle-aged, professional woman, who now has the time and money to devote to a hands-on horse experience. She wants to learn although she might be "a bit timid with a horse or has been ripped off, buying a truck and trailer and paying a trainer," Dennis points out. "And she still couldn't ride. That's not fun. So I offer her the Universal Horsemanship program — then keep riding safe and keep it fun. We go at a snail's pace, but we get stuff done."

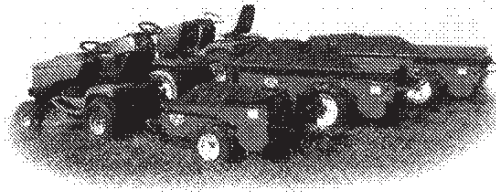
Part of the fun, no matter the riding discipline, is learning about other aspects of the industry. Mary Jane Mack, Ph.D., Ravensdale, Wash., a graduate of Reis Ranch, speaks to students on horse nutrition, muscle testing, and related therapy. Another frequent guest speaker, for example, is Eleanor Criswell Hanna of Novato, Calif., who developed Equine Hanna Somatics® and teaches relaxation and stretching techniques for both horse and rider. Ritch Rand of Rand's Custom Hats in Billings, Mont., also stops by the ranch to discuss his specialty as do chapmaker Dave Thornbury of Cal-

Load it. Spread it. Job's done!

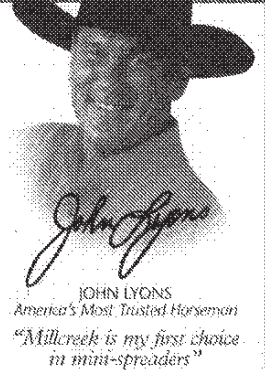


Clean Stalls in Half the Time

A Millcreek spreader makes stall cleaning faster and easier so you'll have more time to enjoy your horses. Pull a Millcreek spreader right to the stall with your garden tractor. The low sides make it easy to load. Then drive it to a nearby field or pasture, where spreading takes only a minute. That's it. You're done. No more wheelbarrow. No more manure piles or disposal costs.



Model 15: 1-2 horses Model 25: 2-4 horses Model 35: 4-6 horses
Three sizes of mini-spreaders, starting under \$1600.
Larger sizes too!



John Lyons
JOHN LYONS
America's Most Trusted Horseman
"Millcreek is my first choice in mini-spreaders"

Call today or visit our web site:



Bird-in-Hand, PA

1-800-311-1323
www.millcreekmfg.com

THE HORSEMAN'S RADIO WEEKLY

With Your Host: Jim Campbell

The exciting new radio show that talks about every breed of horse and introduces you to every type of equine performance event!

John Lyons ♦ Barbra Schulte ♦ Dr. Jim Morgan
Tips from the Experts ♦ Joe Howard Williamson

Stations in...

AZ • CA • CO • FL • ID • MT • ND • NV • NM • OK • OR • SD • TX • UT • WA • WY

More stations being added every day!

Call (800) 523-1560 for a station near you!
or listen on the internet at www.hrwnet.com

Safety First

STI's Safety Breakaway Stirrups proven to prevent serious injury or death while providing full riding enjoyment.



Documented draggings prevented.

"The World's Only Safety Breakaway Stirrup."

-Benjie Lemon, CCFA

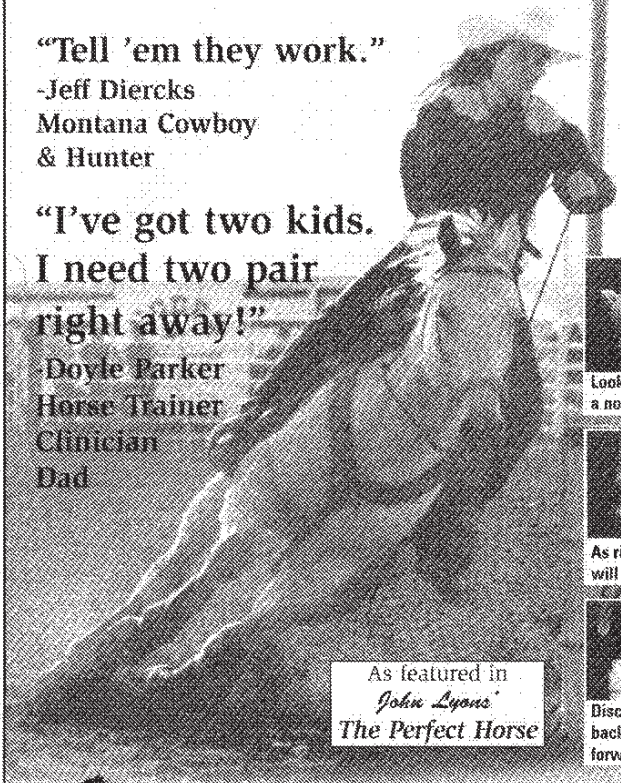
"Tell 'em they work."

-Jeff Diercks
Montana Cowboy
& Hunter

Becky McCoy
and R.B.

"I've got two kids.
I need two pair
right away!"

Doyle Parker
Horse Trainer
Clinician
Dad



Looks and rides like a normal stirrup.



As rider falls, stirrup will rotate.



Disconnects at 45° backward or 72° forward.

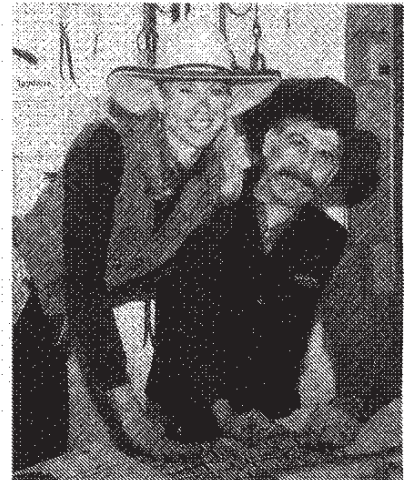
As featured in
John Lyons'
The Perfect Horse



Don't become another dragging statistic.

Come ride with us!

Call (406) 248-7331 or 628-8565 to order a set today!
Visit our NEW website! www.breakawaystirrups.com



Deborah Fish and Dennis Reis share a lighthearted moment in the Universal Horsemanship classroom.

abasas, Calif., and imprinting mastermind Dr. Robert M. Miller of Thousand Oaks, California.

Clinic students bring horses of all breeds to Reis Ranch — Appaloosas, Rocky Mountain Horses, Warmbloods, Pasos, Quarter Horses, Andalusians, Tennessee Walkers, and more. According to Dennis, "You don't always see that. But it's fun, and the people have a great time." He grins, then sums up his Universal Horsemanship program as "a non-denominational horsemanship clinic. It's open to anybody with any breed, shape, or size horse." 🐾

Coming Soon

Later this year a new Reis home-study course, the Mentor Series, will be out. The boxed set will include video of Dennis demonstrating both ground and mounted work in a step-by-step, how-to format; a different version of the Universal Horsemanship Development Workbook; and an audio tape, suitable for use in the arena.

For more information
Reis Ranch Universal Horsemanship
411 Highland Ave.
Penngrove, CA 94951
800-732-8220, 707-792-0629
www.reisranch.com



BASIC GEAR

This 48-page booklet is the bound version of the nine-part series that previously ran in *Western Horseman* magazine. **BASIC GEAR** chapters cover halters, leads, grooming supplies, blankets and pads, saddles, breast collars, headstalls, reins, and bits and curbs.

The user-friendly format includes an overview of each piece of gear, tips for its use, and helpful hints for fitting and repairing gear. Charts throughout compare the materials, hardware, styles, and price ranges commonly found at local tack shops or through mail-order catalogs.

Product No. 72
Only
\$10.00
plus \$2.00
shipping and
handling

Send check or M.O. to:

WESTERN HORSEMAN

PO Box 7980 • Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7980
MasterCard, VISA, and Discover orders only, call TOLL-FREE:

800-874-6774

(24 HOURS A DAY/7 DAYS A WEEK)
Outside U.S., call 719-633-0700

westernhorseman.com