

Top Hand Joe Wolter Is 'Twice Blessed'



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Joe Wolter figures he's lucky, the way his life worked out, meeting the right people at the right time, learning from the best as he endeavored to become a top cowboy and horseman. "I could just as easily have given up on the cowboy deal and ended up back in California working as a carpenter," he said. "How lucky I was to run into Bryan Neubert in Elko and then meet Ray Hunt."

Yep, Joe learned from the best, including the late Bill and Tom Dorrance, fountainheads of modern horse training and horsemanship. Today, Joe Wolter is one of the top clinicians, sought after by those who want to improve their horsemanship, roping and cow-working abilities. He's a modest man who credits good fortune for his success, but a closer look shows his own determination to learn also played a role.

Joe grew up in Grass Valley, California, about a hundred miles west of Reno on the west side of the Sierra Nevadas. There was a Thoroughbred farm next to the elementary school Joe attended, and Joe got a job at that farm cleaning stalls, feeding and doing anything else that was needed. In time, he started the farm's yearlings; colts that didn't make race-horses were trained to sell as jumpers.

"I loved working there and enjoyed riding jumping horses, but I wanted to cowboy," Joe said. "So as soon as I graduated high school, I went to Nevada to work on the Winecup Ranch. It was a good experience, but I left there with more questions. The next fall, I ran into Bryan Neubert, and he got me a job with Ray Hunt, cowboying at the Soldiers Meadows Ranch, northeast of Gerlach, Nevada. Ray and his horses made a lasting impression on me, and I've been striving ever since to reach that level with my horses."

Joe recalled a time when he, Bryan and Ray were gathering cattle: "I had a horse that was really bothered. He didn't want to buck, but was nervous and uncomfortable. I'd ridden some horses like him in the past, but never got much changed. Ray suggested I get in the drag of our drive and he'd watch. He made

to California. He enrolled in Cal Poly, and became acquainted with Bill Dorrance's sons, Billy and Steve, who were also attending the school. "I went home with them one weekend," he recalled, "and the first day we cut wood and did other chores at the ranch. Then Sunday came and we gathered replacement



Joe Wolter watches a student at a ranch-roping clinic in Montana.

a few suggestions and the horse changed before my eyes. I was hooked."

The Soldiers Meadows job came to an end, and Ray and Randy Layton, another good horse hand, headed out to start a bunch of colts for the Marvel ranch out of Battle Mountain, Nevada. Ray asked Joe if he wanted to join them.

"Ray never did over-match me with a horse," Joe said. "He cut Randy a string of colts and me a string to ride. Ray would set it up and let it happen. When I got in trouble he was there to help me."

When the colt-starting was completed, Joe left Nevada and headed back

heifers and practiced our roping. I'd never seen a rancher have his kids and their friends come rope his cattle just for practice. Bill said, 'If a fellow doesn't practice, he won't get much better.' It also got his replacement heifers gentle. I didn't know it at the time, but that was probably the first ranch-roping school."

Joe rode some colts for Ray during winter break — and never returned to college. He took a job on a ranch that bordered Bill Dorrance's outfit near Salinas, and spent a lot of time riding and roping with him. Tom Dorrance lived at Merced, California, and when

Joe had a problem horse, he didn't hesitate to take him to Tom for help.

"Tom was the greatest horseman I was ever around. He observed everything, and saw things around horses and people no one else did," Joe said. "I feel twice blessed by being able to have worked with Ray Hunt and the Dorrance brothers."

Bill and Joe were talking one day, and Bill said, "Maybe we could start a ranch-roping school." So Bill, Joe and Bill Askew, another top ranch roper and cowboy, started putting on ranch-roping schools in other states.

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In 1998, Joe left California and headed for Texas with his family. "I wanted to learn to ride cutting horses, and Texas was the place to be for that," he said. Joe started, trained and showed replacement fillies and stallions for the Four Sixes' Ranch at Guthrie, and wound up placing 6666s horses at the American Quarter Horse Association World Show and the National Cutting Horse Association Derby and Futurity.

Joe and his wife, Jimmie, and their children now operate their own place at Aspermont, Texas. They ride outside horses and do about 12 clinics per year on colt starting, horsemanship, ranch roping and cow work.

"I'm not out to change the horse world," Joe said. "There's a lot of information out there. But I do really enjoy helping people with their horses."

Contact Joe Wolter at 5701 U.S. Highway 380, Aspermont, TX 79502; 940-989-2570. 🐾

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