

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

# Tough Horses Make Great Teachers

**H**orseman and clinician Joe Wolter of Aspermont, Texas, considers training icons Ray Hunt and Bill Dorrance his mentors. Wolter has appreciated every opportunity he has had to work with both men, and says the lessons he's learned have stayed with him throughout his career.

Wolter, who conducts clinics nationwide, has started colts for Lindy Burch at the Oxbow Ranch (where Wolter met his wife, Jimmie), as well as for the Four Sixes in Texas. Here are a few of his personal perspectives on the horse world.

**Q What training book, video or DVD has made an impression on you?**

**A** Tom Dorrance's book *True Unity* is probably my favorite book, as far as horse training goes. Margaret Dorrance just put out a new DVD with clips of Tom from years ago. She sent me one, and it's really good. It's called *Feel, Timing and Balance*. Given my background with them, both the book and DVD are pretty special.

Tom's approach was so different from anybody else's. How he looked at things through the horse's eyes was unique. And it [the DVD] just brought back tons of memories. He could get so much done with a horse by approaching things from a way-different angle than most people, and he could work through people to get to a horse. When he was helping a bunch of people, everybody got better with their horses.

**Q What has been a personally satisfying horse-training moment?**

**A** I can kind of get that feeling almost every day. I love being horseback; always have. I'm blessed that I can do that. Now, that doesn't mean it's always easy; it's not. Many times I've thought about what else I could do for a living. It hasn't been easy, but there've been so many things that stand out. And each was usually when I understood something about a horse or felt something when I was riding one.

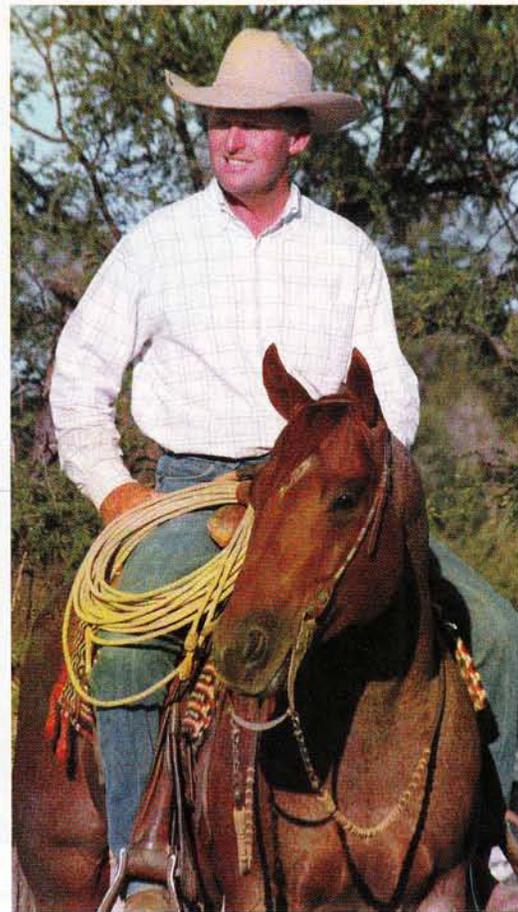
In 1981, when I was working for Bryan Neubert in Nevada, we were riding colts through some yearling cattle. I had a horse in my string that taught me what settling for the smallest change or slightest try meant. If I missed it, I couldn't ride him. He couldn't cope, and he could buck. When it was his day, I didn't want to ride him, but I had to.

I have a picture of me in a meadow in Nevada, and I have a yearling roped and laying on the ground. I'm on that gray horse, Rowdy. That, for me, was like some other guy climbing Mount Everest. That picture means more to me than anything I've ever accomplished in my life.

I made it with the horse, but it was really about me learning something. I might not've changed the horse much, but he changed me. It made me realize that these other horses I'd been riding until that point in my life have put up with a lot of stuff. Horses do a lot of filling-in for us.

**Q Is there a truly memorable horse that you'd like to have a half-dozen more horses like?**

**A** There are a lot of them, and a lot of them that I'd like to have over again because I think I could have done a better job. I had a bay mare in the late 1970s in California. When I got her, she'd been worked with quite a bit by



somebody else. She didn't have any buck in her, but she was really troubled by people.

When I got on her, it was like a Pony Express deal. I was on a ranch there and had 17 or 18 head of horses. It was kind of a steep ranch, and she was the only horse I needed. I rode her a couple of years. I have another picture of me loping her on a loose rein; the reins are just floating and her ears are up. She wasn't always that way.

I'd like to have her over again—and maybe I have. Maybe I have because I headed off some stuff with other horses before things got that bad. I learned more from that mare and the other horse. The ones that did everything I told them to do, the ones that'd fill in pretty good and get along—I appreciate them, but I probably didn't learn as much from them as I did from those horses that wouldn't put up with me. They helped me get better.

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