

Horse Trainer
By: Cindy Lawrence cblawrnc@aol.com

How do you select a trainer for the Mustang Gentling Program at Warm Springs Correctional Facility?

First, you have to find a person who can work with WILD Mustangs. These horses come in scared, untrusting, and are dangerous animals. Then, you have to find someone who can work with inmates. These men are untrusting, and can be dangerous if pushed into a corner.

I think the best person for this job would be a cowboy - And, you might be asking, just what exactly is a cowboy in the year 2008? Well, a cowboy is a cowboy, no matter what era you are looking at.

According to Cowboy Code of Conduct, adapted from Riding Tall in the Saddle by: Angel Vigil;

A cowboy has courage, keeps his word, and never talks down to anyone.

A cowboy is respectful to women.

A cowboy offers friendship to strangers.

A cowboy does not complain.

A cowboy is loyal.

A cowboy will risk his life to save his partner.

A cowboy renders assistance whenever he is asked.

A cowboy settles his horse before he sits down to dinner.

A cowboy never talks rudely in front of a woman and always tips his hat.

The first person I think of when I hear the word "cowboy" is our son....who was born about 100 years too late. Then, I think of the person that our son would probably say has most influenced him, outside his Dad, and that would be Hank Curry. Hank personifies what a modern day cowboy is!

Hank has been the Trainer of Men and Mustangs at Warm Springs Correctional Facility for over 6 years now. I'm not sure who hired Hank, but they certainly found the perfect person for this Mustang Gentling Program!

Some people bowl you over with their personality - that's not Hank. Hank is a big, gentle man. His knowledge of horses runs very deep, from his life with horses. Hank is soft spoken, and a man of few words.

The prison Mustang Gentling Program is a lifesaver for Wild Mustangs. The program takes once wild animals, and turns them into trusting, gentled horses that can find loving homes, where their training will continue.

To get into the Mustang Gentling program, inmates have a face-to-face interview with Hank, pass a personal background check and must have a clean record in prison. For Hank, one of the most important factors is that the guys get along with each other and that they respect the program, the horses, and each other. Some of the guys that enter the Mustang program have never held a real job in their life, so Hank has to teach them to work hard, be dependable and to be honest. Guess you might say that Hank has to teach the inmates the "Cowboy Way!"

Once the men are in place, into the equation enter 15 wild Mustangs. If Hank was working with one Mustang, he could probably darn near mark the calendar with how he would progress through the training steps...But, this process is now influenced not only by the horses' personalities, but the inmates' personalities and abilities.

Hank is a wealth of information, but will not force his knowledge on anyone. As long as none of the men are endangering the horses, Hank will let them make mistakes. If they come to him for help and are willing to learn, then the education begins.

I'm not sure how Hank teaches the men to have good seats, but when we are there taking pictures, and Hank is trying to get the horses attention by clattering a clipboard, waving his hat, etc. we've seen a few horses get worked up and take off, but we have never seen one guy come out of the saddle (They probably would never live it down if they came out of the saddle in front of us!).

Hank has the greatest laugh you will ever hear. AND, this program gives him plenty of stories to tell and moments of almost fits of laughter. My favorite story came from an inmate who trained our son's horse; he was in the outside arena, and his reins broke. The horse took off and the trainer was hanging on for dear life and yelling for Hank.....Hank walked over, and starting laughing....He said to the inmate, 'Yep, they stop better with reins!'

It is safe to say, that every guy who has gone through a four month training process with his Mustang is forever changed! These men and horses have become a team. I can tell you from personal experience, I've seen big, burly, tough men with tears in their eyes when their Mustang is adopted.

We have coined the expression that the program, "Gentles men and mustangs!"

You can check out the next group of horses at www.wildhorseandburroexpo.com - Come check out the program during the Wild Horse and Burro Expo - August 15-17, 2008 at the Reno Livestock Events Center.