

Handling horses through communication

By Jan Murawski-Evans,
Correspondent

DENVER — On July 9th and 10th Pat and Linda Parelli and their contingent of accomplished students showed a crowd of fans and newcomers at the National Western stadium arena how simple handling horses safely can be.

The Parellis invited two horses who had never been exposed to this method of horse handling. The owners had problems with their horses pulling back and breaking lead ropes and halters, spooking, and refusing to back out of the trailer.

The halter and lead rope breaking quarter horse, Doc,

was so skeptical of Pat that the owner and Pat walked two circuits around the arena together before the horse could be gently handled off while the owner walked away. Parelli began tossing the tail of the lead rope over the horse's back until the horse relaxed. He then used steady pressure to move the horse around. The horse seemed gentle

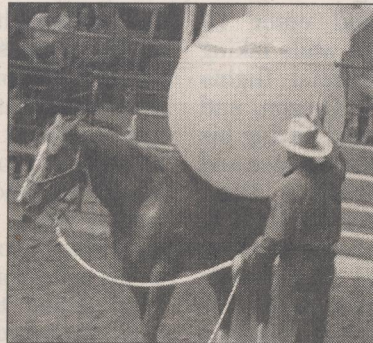


Photo by Jan Murawski-Evans

Pat Parelli builds trust and rapport with a skeptical horse by introducing unusual objects using the strategy of approach and retreat.

to move the horse around. The horse seemed gentle

and obedient

between two barrels, so Pat made it easier for him by widening the gap, getting the

until Pat asked him to step onto a tarp and Doc jumped sideways to avoid the scary object. Parelli asked until the horse was willing to put his head over the tarp then moved on to the next task.

The horse wouldn't walk through the narrow space

horse to accept that width, then gradually making the space smaller.

Parelli used this approach and retreat method with other objects and obstacles until the horse calmly and confidently accepted them all.

Linda Parelli worked with a buckskin quarter horse Arab cross that was spooky and refused to back out of a trailer and when he finally backed, he ran out. Linda started getting the horse accustomed to rhythmic motion by swinging the lead rope over the horse's back until he stood still.

To simulate trailer loading, she used a round stand like elephant trainers use and asked the horse to put one foot up then

back down. Soon the horse put both front feet up on the stand and stood still until Linda asked him to back down. She repeated this exercise until the horse would confidently step up and back down.

When she went near the trailer, Linda asked the horse to move between her and the trailer several times before asking the horse to take one step up then backed him out. She repeated this several times until the horse willingly walked into the trailer and stood until she asked him to back out which he did, slowly and carefully.

With these small victories, the crowd erupted in loud applause and cheering. The audience appreciated the demonstrations and explanations on how to overcome these ordinary problems. The Parellis had easily and safely conquered the fear and skepticism of these two horses.

Pat encouraged the horses'

See **Horsemen** Page 16 ▶

◀ Horsemen learn horse savvy From Page 10

owners to continue playing with their horses for the next four days to make the learning complete. When asked for comments, Doc's owner, Clarence, said, "People say that these Parelli shows are staged, but I'm here to say that they're not."

Along with the performances by the Parelli's highly trained horses were demonstrations by students of the tasks that are part of the savvy system learning program. Neil Pye, dean of the Parelli School, explained that the first three levels of the system is a program for people. It's not about training horses, but about teaching humans how to communicate with horses.

Carole Custer of rural



Photo by Jan Murauski-Evans

Linda Parelli simulates trailer loading and backing out with this stand.

Westcliffe, Colo., brought her two grandsons and a friend to the event. They have one horse that "runs away every chance she gets."

"All of us had a very good time at this uplifting, fun filled seminar. All three boys were engaged and came away enthusiastic and ready to get started on

Level 1 of the Parelli training program. We are hooked. We joined the Savvy Club, bought the complete Level 1 training package. I sincerely hope that with the support of the materials and support groups the boys will be able to sustain the initial momentum and follow through. At this point it is too early to say, but it is worth the try. It also helps that this is a southern Colorado based organization.

Maybe the boys will be able to be energized by courses and clinics and other Savvy Club events. I was pleased to see a strong fun/play connection with the horse games and fun activities that young boys can enjoy with their horses," reflected Carole after the event.

Barb and Lyle Klee of Owl Ridge Belgians in Ault, Colo., came to the conference to find out if Parelli had any strategies to help them deal with their brood stock and the sometimes problematic mares that were brought to their farm to breed with their stallion. Both had years of experience with horses (Lyle had worked his way through college riding pens) but had no formal education regarding horse behavior.

In addition to staying safe with their horses, the Klees want to find better ways to gentle their colts so they are controllable for sale and train their show horses, so they are more manageable and will perform better. Barb said, "We've had little education except from what the old timers shared and there are few of them left. We're always open to other people's theories and don't believe we know enough to solve some of the more difficult situations that arise on a breeding farm." She was impressed with the patience exhibited by the students as they worked with their horses both on the ground and riding.

Lyle concluded, "We learned that we're the problem, not the horses."