



THE HORSE GAZETTE

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DAN SUMEREL

A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING

By Marilyn Short

Do you think you've seen, read, or watched just about everything when it comes to training, breaking, gentling, or horse whispering? Do you have a tack room full of various bits, halters, lead ropes, lunge whips, lunge lines, and other training equipment or behavior modifiers?

Most horse owners have gone through getting rid of items that were supposed to miraculously stop an unwanted behavior in their horse...even experienced horse people such

as Dan Sumerel went through that phase of his horse life.

Sumerel wasn't always tuned in to horse behavior. He wasn't raised on a ranch, and never dreamed of a career in the horse industry; in fact, he never even rode a horse until he was 40 years old. He spent his time racing cars and motorcycles and working as a corporate trainer and motivational speaker.

Through a twist of fate Sumerel, a green horse owner, purchased an Arabian

stallion named Sunny. During the first eight months Sunny ran away with Sumerel 43 times. Sumerel knew he needed help with Sunny, so he studied various trainers, their methods and philosophies by attending clinics, reading their books, listening to tapes, and wearing out their videos. He studied masters such as Monte Foreman, Ray Hunt, Pat Parelli, John Lyons, and the world famous animal trainer and behaviorist, Gunther Gable-Williams.

"I needed to get control of my horse Sunny, so I gathered as much information about training horses as I could from these 'natural' type trainers," said Sumerel. "What I found was a lot of conflicting information. And too often I was told I needed to buy this product or gadget to correct a problem, but I questioned that if the product was so good and was endorsed by one trainer, why weren't all of the trainers using the same product?"

Attending clinics and watching videos showed Sumerel many different ways to get a horse to respond but it was all a bit confusing and often only

worked with certain horses.

Later on when Sumerel was able to work with Gunther Gable-Williams', Sumerel had many of his own ideas of training horses confirmed by the world-renowned trainer. Williams was best known for his career with the Ringling Brothers Circus training all kinds of animals including horses. His training focused on the individual animal as well as the type of animal. He not only studied the behavior characteristics of the breed of animal, but studied the personality of each individual animal as well.

Those behavior concepts are the foundation for

Sumerel's unique approach in dealing with horses. He believes the Sumerel Training System (STS) doesn't contradict any other valid method of training, but goes a step beyond most with more focus on the individual needs of each horse due to its personality, which makes the training more effective.

"Horse owners need to relate to each individual horse," said Sumerel, "not force or pressure each horse to adapt to a set training method."

It is understood that for an equitable relationship with your horse you need the horse's

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sister creek ranch

By Marilyn Short



Photo: Robbin Cresswell

If you're ready to get away from the stress of the city or pressures from work and are a horse lover, you need to visit SisterCreek Ranch. SisterCreek is the perfect choice for an equestrian weekend get-away, offering spectacular scenery and a memorable Hill Country experience.

SisterCreek Ranch is the dream of owners Bruce and Beth Johnson, previously of Dallas, Texas. Bruce is the co-founder of Sage Telecom and Beth the author of "First You Sigh", so both are familiar with the effort it takes to make a dream come true. This time the Johnson's dream was to find a special place where they could kickback and enjoy life with their horses near by. It took the Johnsons 3 1/2 years to find the perfect location where the serene quiet and beauty soothes and calms the soul and there is plenty of room to ride. They've found the ideal location, and they haven't looked back.

SisterCreek Ranch consists of 700 acres of prime

Texas Hill Country with three creeks, three lakes, six spring-fed tanks, several waterfalls, and incredible views...the perfect weekend getaway for horse owners. Upon entering through the ranch gate, you cross West Sister Creek and wind through the native scenery into a valley to KickBack Flats, the small western town created by the Johnsons at the heart of SisterCreek Ranch.

Like it's name, KickBack Flats is a special place to kick back and relax. The town consists of two rustically elegant cabins, a ranch office, paddocks with shelters, a covered round pen, a 150 by 250 arena, stables, 4 RV sites, and at the center of it all, Sniffy's Saloon.

When you enter KickBack Flats, you think you're entering an old time western town. The old western ambiance is there, but it's all brand new with the entire town taking a little over a year to construct. "The care, thought, and attention to detail has been amazing," said

Don Buyse, General Contractor of the project. "The Johnsons have used native Texas materials for almost everything."

Sniffy's Saloon is the hub of KickBack Flats. It's the place where guests can eat 3 meals a day, drink, play pool, shuffleboard, darts, watch satellite television, or have fun with a full Karaoke stage and equipment. The mantel over the floor-to-ceiling rock fireplace in Sniffy's was rescued from an old barn, which was built in the 1800s. All the cedar used on the buildings was from the Wooden Nickel Mill in Center Point, Texas, and the tile for the flooring and counter tops was from Cinar Interiors of Boerne, Texas. Some of the tin used in Sniffy's was from the old Luckenbach Gin that was destroyed in the July 2002 flood. The Johnsons were allowed to take the tin as a thank you for their generous contribution to the Luckenbach Flood Fund.

If you want to enjoy the outdoors you can take a walk by Jung Creek which runs along the back of KickBack Flats or play a game of horseshoes or washer toss. Or better yet, warm up your horse in the covered round pen or the 150 by 250 arena (both with crumbled rubber footing that is environmentally friendly) and then hit the trails. There are over 15 miles of roads on the property making for a day long trail ride, or for a more scenic and challenging ride, you can always ride the perimeter of the 700-acre ranch.

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riding the range

Photos and Story by Lyn Odom-Cherenzia



Above: Docs Drifter, the Epperson's herd stallion and Williams mount.



Right: My doeskin and tan rodeo cut fringed chaps making their first appearance in a costume class 1998.

Ranching is one of the hardest ways there is of making a living. It's 24/7 and then some. Up before dawn, cattle, horses, sheep and goats to feed and check on, constant gate and fence repair, breeding, birthing, training and culling livestock, vet and farrier skills, clearing land, building pens, welding, hauling in

and unloading hay and grain, tractor and saddle repair...it goes on and on and on. Ahhh, but the romance of it! After having contacted William and Marcy Epperson and doing a recent article about their ranch for The Horse Gazette, they were kind enough to invite me out to their ranch in Rock

Springs, Texas, to go on an angora goat round up and watch the shearing. Now I know ranching on their scale would wear me out but quick, but I got to spend two whole days being pea green with envy.

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Photo: Marilyn Short

THE HORSE GAZETTE
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