



# In from the

# Wild

**Both a tribute to our Western heritage and the ultimate test of horsemanship, the 2007 Extreme Mustang Makeover showcased the spirit, versatility and trainability of our country's wild horses.**

STORY BY JENNIFER ZEHNDER

**E**AST OF THE CALIFORNIA STATE LINE, the Bureau of Land Management's Palomino Valley Center occupies a flat, arid patch of Nevada's outback. This is the first stop for mustangs gathered off surrounding ranges. Here, horses are segregated by age and gender, and candidates for adoption are identified.

On a visit to the center this past April, I stood atop a steel catwalk that looked over a vast network of corrals. Below, nearly 1,000 mustangs, fresh off Nevada public lands, filled the pens, their coat colors forming a living, breathing quilt of bay, sorrel, gray and every other equine hue imaginable.

The quiet of the area was broken only by the squeals of horses getting acquainted, and gates clanging shut as riders moved new arrivals through channels connecting the pens.

Many horses were rough and stunted, bearing the scars of a feral existence. Others could've passed for the horse next door. Reactions to their new environment varied. Most seemed perfectly content as they ate within the confines of the corrals. Others eyed the fenceline like prisoners.

Shortly after my visit, the BLM, which is responsible for managing the 29,000 wild

horses and burros that roam freely in 10 Western states, handpicked 100 range-raised mustang geldings for the first Extreme Mustang Makeover, a horsemanship challenge created by the Mustang Heritage Center in cooperation with the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program.

Through a random drawing, each mustang was partnered with a trainer, who then had 90 days to gentle the horse, start him under saddle and prepare for a competition held September 22 in Fort Worth, Texas. There, trainers vied for \$25,000 as their mustangs were judged on conditioning, groundwork and their performance on a "horse course." The following day, the mustangs were auctioned off to proud new owners.

This inventive, yet daunting, contest drew trainers nationwide and from a wide range of horsemanship traditions. Here, we meet five horsemen who took on the horse-training challenge of a lifetime. >>

*For results from the 2007 Extreme Mustang Makeover, visit [westernhorseman.com](http://westernhorseman.com). Learn about wild-horse and burro adoption at [wildhorseandburro.blm.gov](http://wildhorseandburro.blm.gov), or by calling (866) 4MUSTANGS.*

**EXHIBIT O - LANDS**  
Document consists of 6 pages.  
Entire Exhibit Provided  
Meeting Date: 10-24-07

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# True American

**A** MEMBER OF NEW MEXICO'S SPANISH MUSTANG ALLIANCE, Roeliff Annon has spent more than two decades training horses of all breeds for careers in reining, dressage, back-country riding, eventing, pony club and forestry work. The 41-year-old horseman is a lifelong student of the language of the horse, particularly the wild horse.

"A mustang has a lot of survival, self-preservation," Roeliff says. "I don't access that part of him, because whenever he's stressed, he'll fall back on that. I don't want to take the mustang's instincts away. I just want to establish a bond with him, so when I ask him to do something, he's there 100 percent."

Such was the mission with 6-year-old Nick, Roeliff's project mustang for the September makeover competition.

"Right away, I knew it was not a good idea to push him," Roeliff remembers. "He was a reserved and subtle horse, so a few expressions went a long way with Nick. I think being able to read that early on helped a lot."

As with many Spanish-bred, BLM-raised mustangs, Roeliff notes, Nick was an intelligent, yet critical, thinker, and required time to consider things.

"Mustangs aren't as tolerant as other breeds, so there's less margin of error when working with them," Roeliff explains.

"Many times, you can create an issue by forcing a situation. That's when a less-is-more theory comes into play. If you give a mustang 30 seconds to consider something, there's often no issue."

The trainer says that approaching mustang training with a set agenda is not always a good idea.

"I try to find out what the horse needs from me," he says. "When I have an agenda, I lose track of what the horse needs to build his confidence."

Roeliff applies the same philosophy to other breeds.

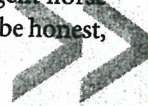
"The gentlest horse is capable of being dangerous, and the most dangerous horse is capable of being gentle," he says. "You must approach each with respect."

Roeliff contends that the highest honor a person can give a horse is to give him a purpose, a job to do.

"The sad thing is, the real usefulness of the horse isn't what it used to be," he says. "You don't need that really tough, loyal, intelligent horse that will die for you anymore, and to be honest, it's kind of depressing."

**"It was his  
ancestors that  
made this country,  
especially the West.  
The mustang has  
grit; he's a survivor.  
If we don't value  
him, we don't value  
our history."**

**—ROELIFF ANNON  
ALCALDE, NEW MEXICO**



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## Loyal Partner

**T**HE GRANDDAUGHTER OF HORSEMANSHIP PIONEER JOHN SHARP, Kitty Lauman has gained everything from ponies to Percherons, but still feels most at home working with mustangs.

Wild horses were a regular part of Kitty's childhood, and she often shadowed her grandfather during his horse-gentling sessions.

"You didn't rope them and choke them; you worked with them," she explains. "The goal was to become their friend. That's what I was taught, and that's what I still believe."

Those early lessons have served the 36-year-old horsemanship well throughout her career. In 1999, the BLM invited Kitty and her husband, Rick, to participate in a pilot program. For six months, the couple successfully worked to halter-break and gentle 36 previously unadoptable mustangs, aged 4 through 14.

Kitty's makeover horse, Ranger, was not unlike the horses she worked with eight years ago. Passed over by adopters, the solid brown, 3-year-old gelding was a great horse in the making, she says.

"It's hard to pick one horse out of a pen of hundreds," she points out. "So, many times, great horses get overlooked simply because they don't catch your eye. Horses with their manes rubbed out or witches' knots in their tail, or scruffy or thin horses don't look as appealing as those with a little color or shape to them. You have to be

able to see through the mud and the debris to see what's there."

**"Mustangs have such wonderful qualities to contribute to our lives."**

**—KITTY LAUMAN  
PRINEVILLE, OREGON**

Trainers in the competition were assigned their horses, but Kitty says Ranger is the kind of horse she would've picked for herself.

"He likes to stay busy," she says. "I could see him excelling in several events, even cowboy mounted shooting. There, a rider needs a horse that is quick and athletic, not hot and hyper."

Kitty says the gelding's willingness is a typical mustang characteristic.

"In the wild, a mustang learns he needs to work with others to survive," she says. "A real jerk doesn't make it on the range. He needs his friends. Once you become that mustang's friend, you can ask him to do something, and he'll try because he knows you'll keep him safe."

Kitty offers the following advice for selecting a loyal mustang partner: Be sure you know what you're getting into, and if you still want to adopt, take someone along who can help you make a good selection.

"Don't pick out the fancy, flashy horse that's running around looking pretty," she says. "Pick the quiet one in the corner, especially if this is your first. Afterward, take the money you saved adopting him and invest that in his training. If you do, you'll have a partner that'll last a lifetime."

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# National Treasure

**I**N VOLNEI RODRIGUES' NATIVE BRAZIL, the Crioulo horse is revered as a national treasure. The South American cousin to the American mustang, the Crioulo is considered a purebred breed, having maintained much of its original influences. The hardy horses are used extensively as cow horses by the gauchos of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, but have also found popularity in reining, endurance, trail and pleasure disciplines.

Volnei's 4-year-old mustang makeover horse showed faint traces of a Spanish heritage: a compact, balanced body, and a short, refined head.

"He was a smart and wonderfully athletic horse," Volnei says. "I was afraid to fall in love with him because I knew I had so much work to do with my own Crioulo program."

The Brazilian veterinarian and his family moved to the United States seven years ago to start the first Crioulo operation in North

America and to pursue their interests in working cow horse and reining disciplines. Since then, the 50-year-old has grown his mustang herd and has trained other breeds.

For Volnei, "Gaúcho" presented a training challenge and an important tie to his new American home.

"To me, the mustang is the symbol of the American West and its heritage," he says. "The Crioulo has always been a part of my Brazilian heritage, and this was a chance to make the mustang part of my new American heritage."

When working with mustangs or other horses, explains Volnei, there are two options: dominate or be dominated.

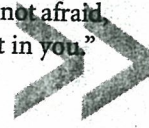
He encourages horse owners to be leaders, explaining that if they don't, their horses will.

"Horses are prey animals, herd animals," Volnei says. "They love the leaders. If you show them you are a leader and that you're not afraid, they'll develop confidence and trust in you."

**"I think it's wrong to call them 'wild horses,' because horses are domesticated animals.**

**Mustangs are not wild. They are in a wild situation."**

**—VOLNEI RODRIGUES  
WEBSTER, FLORIDA**



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## Solid Citizen

**I**N HIS YOUTH, LONNIE ARAGON MADE POOR DECISIONS, but they ultimately led the way to his calling in life. While incarcerated in Colorado's Cañon City Correctional facility, he explored opportunities within the institution's wild-horse training program and quickly became a top horse hand.

Today, with his debt to society paid, Lonnie serves as assistant manager of the U.S. Air Force Academy Equestrian Center. There, the 30-year-old oversees daily operations, including horse boarding, training and rentals. He also teaches a "leadership through horsemanship" class for cadets.

"The mustangs were my saving grace," Lonnie says. "Working with them made me realize I couldn't bully my way through life."

It was this valuable lesson that he shared with Peno, his 4-year-old mustang makeover partner. Though the gelding stood barely 14 hands, he carried his rider's 5-foot-11-inch frame with ease, covering the Colorado terrain at a brisk walk.

Lonnie admits that Peno's size was initially a concern.

"I was a little worried about it, but the more I got to working with him, the less it mattered," he recalls. "He might have been small in stature, but he had a big ol' engine."

After working with everything from Arabians to German Warmbloods over the last few years, Lonnie found working with a mustang refreshing. Unlike domestically raised horses, he explained, mustangs enter the training pen with little-to-no "people-imposed" issues, and instead bring a "fresh perspective" to everything they encounter.

However, just because mustangs offer a clean slate, Lonnie warns, doesn't make them a perfect fit for timid or inexperienced horsemen.

"When I first started Peno, he tolerated everything, but you still had to watch him," the horseman explains. "If he had the chance, he would have kicked me. Fight or flight—this horse had a

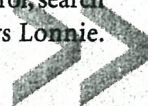
little bit of both, so I never got after him for it. I just didn't give him a chance to think about doing it."

The Air Force Academy Equestrian Center currently uses nine BLM mustangs in its daily operations. They're especially popular with senior officers.

"We've used our mustangs for everything—English, Western, mounted horse patrol, search and rescue, rodeo and roping," says Lonnie. "They're solid citizens."

**"When I trained horses at Cañon City, I couldn't wait for the day they would leave because they were getting out and moving on with their lives. It was a new start for them."**

**—LONNIE ARAGON  
COLORADO SPRINGS,  
COLORADO**



# Real Hand

FOR 22 YEARS, TEXAN WELDON HAWLEY has ridden for the Waggoner Ranch's Three D brand.

As ranch manager for "the nation's largest ranch under one fence," he is horseback often, responsible for day-to-day operations of the ranch's 14,000-head cow herd. Given the breadth of his duties, the 56-year-old cowboy has come to appreciate a solid, versatile horse.

And though he is partial to the ranch-raised Quarter Horses he rides daily, range-bred mustangs have occupied much of Weldon's free time since 2003.

"I knew they were good horses that needed good homes," he explains, "but I adopted my first mustang because I wanted a challenge."

During the makeover experience, Hidalgo, the 4-year-old mustang Weldon was assigned, taught the cowboy some lessons about himself.

"Mostly, I learned I needed more patience," he shares.

Instead of steadily improving after three weeks of training, the gelding became flighty and aggressive. Weldon's horsemanship mentor, George Townsend, pointed out that Hidalgo was acting out, like a caged animal. The horse had been worked in the round pen so long that he was bored.

Townsend's suggestion: "Get that horse out of the round pen and let him see some country."


Weldon followed Townsend's advice, and the gelding began earning his keep by helping Weldon check cattle and fences on a neighboring spread.

"When you're riding a horse in a pen, he quickly learns its shape and diameter," Weldon says. "All that changes when you ride him outside for the first time and all he sees is wide-open spaces. For Hidalgo, it made all the difference."

Since his first mustang project four years ago, Weldon has adopted and trained several wild horses. Training the horses for everything from roping to trail riding has never been this horseman's shortcoming, but managing to keep them has.

"I adopt one, invest the money and time in him, then give him away," Weldon says. "That doesn't sound very smart, does it?"

Will there be a mustang program on the Waggoner any time soon? Don't count on it.

"Our ranch is in the business of selling good horses that we raise, but I think there's room out there in the world for mustangs," Weldon says. "If enough people work hard at it, maybe we can save some of them." 

**"They might not be the cowiest horses, but there isn't anything I can't do on these mustangs."**

**—WELDON HAWLEY  
ELECTRA, TEXAS**