



## A Way with Horses

### Bruce Anderson teaches riders the skill of listening to a horse’s body language

By Deena C. Bouknight | Photography by Jeff Amberg



Bruce Anderson doesn’t work with horses. He doesn’t train them either. Instead, he considers himself a “horse helper.” The step-by-step system he uses to work with horses begins with allowing the horse to help the person. Thus, even though his clientele is primarily of the four-legged variety, he also is sought after by businesses, police departments and various organizations to teach workshops and one-on-one using the “horse as a mirror” method for understanding body language, anger management, decision making, empathy, accountability and so on.

In his outback attire and road-weary hat, Bruce trots throughout the countryside aiding in a pressure release method that seeks to strengthen mental tools. One recent morning, he arrived to work with a previously feral 2-year-old Austrian mountain horse filly, called a Halflinger. The owner had gentled the horse and taught it to stand, walk and be brushed. However, the horse’s short past, as Bruce likes to point out, was all about the three F’s: freeze, fight, flee. When it came time for the owner to equip the horse’s back with a blanket and saddle, the horse fled.

“It wasn’t the blanket and saddle, but the pressure created by the blanket and saddle, bringing up something from her past,” says Bruce.

Fleeing was a response the filly exhibited with Bruce as well. She effortlessly sailed over the crude fencing that made up a round pen. When Bruce gently brought her back to the ring, she tried to bolt – rearing straight into the air. However, he applied pressure, not force, through the aid of a lasso and his voice. When the filly realized that Bruce was worthy of listening to, she gave up control. She relented and returned to the pen. Within the hour, the filly was following Bruce with no rope all around the ring, stopping when Bruce stopped and starting again when he walked forward.

He points out that instead of forcing the situation, which managers sometimes do in business, he was able to set the example so that the filly could follow.

He explains that the horse has to have trust and patience in the person, and the person has to have trust and patience in the horse. Nothing can be forced. Bullying and scaring the horse into submission never works. Instead, horses have to be given the proper mental tools. He adds, “Every moment is an opportunity to learn. I’m not the teacher; the horse is.”

At his home near Camden – which is an equestrian community and home to bi-annual steeplechase events – eight horses are teaching Bruce on a regular basis.

It is not uncommon for Bruce to take a cell phone call, atop a halter-less and bridle-less horse, riding bareback down the side of a busy road. Sometimes he will “pony” or lead other horses doing the same. He says he does this not to show off, but to demonstrate that by giving the horse the tools it needs, a connection is made, and the horse acquiesces.



Bruce has not always called South Carolina home. Originally, Bruce hails from Trinidad. He was born in Venezuela and lived in Mexico City as a young child before moving back to Trinidad, where he helped with the family’s coffee estate. His father was a native of Trinidad, and his mother was from England.

His first equestrian memory is with a broomstick horse. Then he rode the estate’s horse. He began learning how to jump, and he competed for a while as a representative of the sister islands of Trinidad and Tobago. When he became an adult, he earned a degree in agriculture in England. Eventually, he moved to Florida to manage horse barns. He says he always had a connection with the land and with horses that he thinks came primarily from his late mother, but it was after he read Monty Robert’s book, *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, that it all came together for him. “That book turned on the lights,” he says.

He learned to connect with a horse in a round pen, and he began to understand why horses and humans have had a connection for thousands of years. “Horses are tuned into our feelings as they are displayed in our body movements, tones and attitudes,” he points out. Horses don’t have problems, he learned. “Horses have people problems.”

The revelation enabled Bruce to help himself through some difficult times, and he began to formulate a philosophy that would help countless horses – and people. He realized his purpose with horses was not just to train or manage them, but to truly help them. “I help horses by showing how they can help people get back in touch with their humanity – taking us on a journey of self-discovery,” he says.

Bruce ended up working with horses in Camden’s equestrian community, and he felt so much at home that he decided to settle there. Besides horses, he also has chickens, goats, dogs, peacocks and goldfish on his property. In his distinct Trinidad accent he says, “I don’t see myself leaving Camden. It’s my home now.”

He has worked with race horses, hunter-jumpers, abused horses, retired race horses and many different breeds in a variety of situations. People who are interested in having an “equus experience” instead of needing help with their horses are given this scenario: “Imagine being enclosed in a 60-foot diameter ring with an un-tethered, unbridled 1,200 pound horse, and you’re asked to get the horse to perform specific tasks, but you can’t touch the horse. Now imagine being enclosed in a board room with an un-tethered, unbridled \$120,000 a year vice president, and you’re asked to get the VP to perform certain tasks, but you can’t, as much as you’re tempted to, touch the VP.”

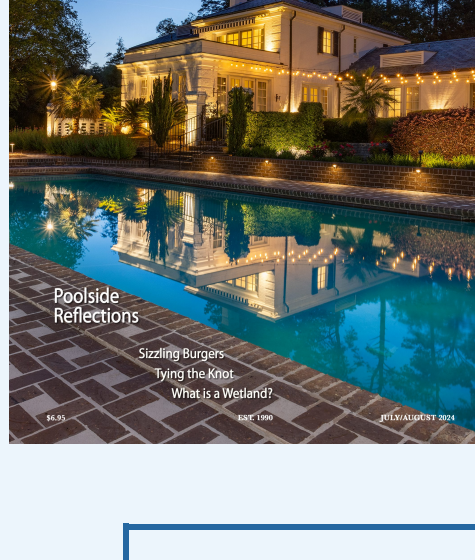
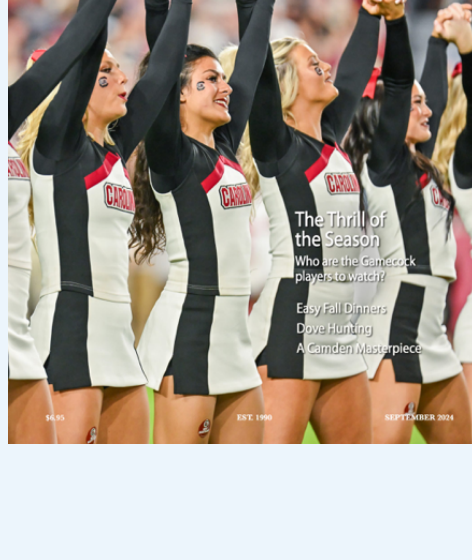
Bruce laughs as he describes the comparison to the real life scenario. “The stuff that comes out of people when they’re in the ring is an amazing window to the soul. Powerful emotional experiences are frequently encountered, Bruce says.

“Helping horses – and in turn helping people – is what I was meant to do with my life.”

« back to issue

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