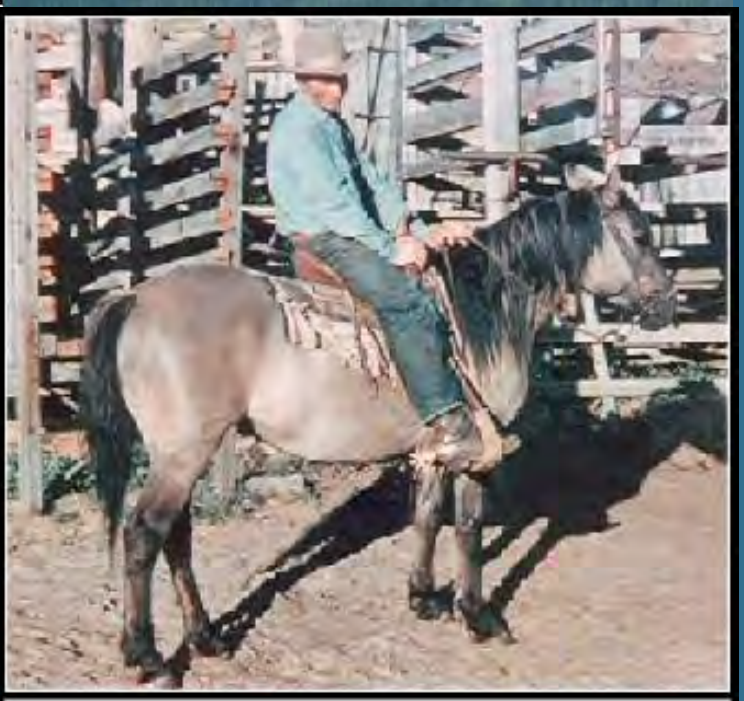
Autumn 2026: Volume 21; Issue 3

HORSE OF THE AMERICAS NEWSLETTER



Phantom Valley Ranch



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"Own a practical, hard-working horse from the original Spanish Barb cow horse strain" ~Ilo Belsky~

Cattle ranchers devote much of their time, often, most of their lives handling cattle. For that purpose, a good cow horse is the working ranches' backbone and ranchers should constantly upgrade their stock on Spanish strains. Always on the alert for outstanding species among horses, I have always known, from experience, with the most practical ranch type cow horses, that the modern, high-strung, stylish stock horses are not the most desirable work animal. Even though they show evidence of various types of breeding, and pedigree claims, their backgrounds breed characteristics that indicate any strain except purebreds. A percent of "cold" blood, either draft, or plain scrub cayuse will gear down hot bloods to appear levelheaded and sensible for their particular type. I knew years ago, you can recognize a superior Spanish horse easily by their expressive, blazing eyes, sharp pointed, alert ears, sturdy legs, firm body, and other noticeable points. Few average people realize or seem to notice the undesirable traits when selecting their foundation stock.

Again, I have always known that the best cow horse had a mind of its own, soon understood the work that was expected of them, and completed their task with positive action without becoming excited, rattlebrained or unruly when fast action was required. Leaning on the bit and jig-jogging most of the day, as hot-blooded animals are inclined to do when driving cattle all day, soon proves to be a miserable nuisance and grind on their riders as well as on the horse.

~Continued on page 6~

HOA Executive Committee

President: Andrea Mulnix; Roundup, MT
andrea.sue.mulnix@gmail.com

V. President: Amy Speissegger; Salley, SC
hardihoodacres@gmail.com

Secretary: Mickey Pliakos; Morristown, AZ
mickeyhauber@gmail.com

Treasurer: Heather Buss; Smithfield, VA
heather.buss1@outlook.com

Registrar: Gretchen Patterson; San Antonio, TX; glpatterson62@gmail.com

Promotions: Minden Fox; Cheyenne, WY
minden.fox@gmail.com

Points & Awards: Stephanie Holland; Smithfield, VA
stephaniehoaawardsdirector@gmail.com

Youth Program: Adam Edwards, Hulett, WY; pahaponies@gmail.com

Newsletter Editors: Gretchen Patterson, Stephanie & Sarah Holland

Social Media: Kelly Caldwell; Tyner, NC
Oneponyshow42@gmail.com

Area Representatives:

Rebecca Pizmoht, VA

Kendra Chavez, NM

International: Martine Lettau, UK



IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER

How you can make it even better:

Share your wisdom. Write articles about horses, horse care, training, riding, healing and therapeutic work, preservation, history, what you're reading, your favorite Spanish Mustang movie, your travels and adventures, your successes and heartbreaks. If all you have is a great photo, send that along with a caption and we'll share it with your community.

Share upcoming events. If you're doing something we should know about, please share. Just pay attention to the calendar below to make sure you get it submitted on time.

Make an announcement. We want to highlight riding and horse breeding successes, especially among our younger riders.

Sell us something-advertise. Place an advertisement in the next newsletter.

HOA Newsletter Publication Schedule

Spring Issue Content deadline February 28
Spring Issue out by March 15
Summer Issue Content deadline May 31
Summer Issue out by June 15
Fall Issue Content deadline August 31
Fall Issue out by September 15
Winter Issue Content deadline November 30
Winter Issue out by December 15

Email: glpatterson62@gmail.com

***SCI Cochise,* HOA-1724**
(Santa Cruz Island)
Hayley Pelton

El Campeon Farms
California



President's Column
Andrea Mulnix

The Problem of Pain
(in rare breeds/registries)

As most of us have observed, there are often long-standing feuds, misunderstandings, and bad blood between some people, organizations, and groups involved in our horses. This isn't unique to Colonial Spanish breeds/strains - it happens in all breeds, registries, associations etc. The issue is, in a large organization - there is a buffer due to the sheer number of people involved. When we are dealing with rare breeds, with lower numbers, and lower overall involvement, these issues - when they arise - get amplified tenfold.

Everyone who has been involved for a while has a story of some feud or disagreement they were either part of or witnessed. This day and age we also have the Internet and social media - which often leaves words to just text and we miss the tone and inflection of what someone is trying to convey. People will often take offense to what was supposed to be helpful advice, or just plain "stating facts". This of course can lead to both newcomers and the old timers becoming the purpose of the Colonial Spanish Community as a whole and with various organizations. I too, have been in my fair share of heated arguments about type, bloodlines, definitions, etc. I think "we" as a community need to collectively think ahead, mend fences we have broken, and learn to not take so much offense when others challenge us.



The problem of pain is that for the horses, this drives the conservators, promoters, owners, and researchers away. Now is this easy? No. It is not.

I am also not saying you HAVE to get along with anyone and everyone. What I am asking (with fingers pointing back at myself) is how can we remain civil and professional? The outsiders do notice when we bicker and fight amongst ourselves. It's not something unique to our breed but have recently seen it do some deep tearing apart in other small breeds. We have had enough rifts in ours for a lifetime, let's move forward with purpose and kindness.

Because without forward movement, the breed dies and once gone, it's lost to the world forever.



Vice-President's Column
Amy Speissegger

As I sit here trying to write an article there are a million topics I could write about registrars, organizations, and clubs getting along, who is right and who is wrong, who can prove themselves to be historically correct to back their agendas, what should be culled and what should be bred, the amount of farmland and natural forest being taken by development, mega/data centers, solar panel fields, politics, religion, who is taking over the world, AI, social media, and all the other crazy going on in the world today. This world is full of greed. Makes me want to crawl in a hole far, far, away and be done with all this war, bickering, greed, lying, upside down world.

So, what brings me peace in all this noise? My Colonial Spanish horses. Why? Because they are calm in my chaos. They are smarter than any other horse breed I have ever come across. Not saying they are geniuses, but I have watched them think and figure out problems. They have personalities and they tell you how they feel. If my horse doesn't like you, well enough said, neither do I. I can walk into my pasture, and they know if I am having a good or bad day. I know when they are having a good or bad day. We communicate in many ways with each other. Through visual cues, sounds, my voice, their neighs, our movements, through touch, our breathing, and even our heart beats. Some say you should approach your horse calmly and never look them in the eye. I approach with my real emotions and look the horse straight in the eye and say everything that is in my heart. They get it. We then touch. I do not tap them. I use my hand, bend my fingers, and rub them, kind of like I am using my fingers to nibble, like they do. Then we hug and calm down. I do this alone and nobody is around. That is my peace.

So, if you want to experience excitement, happiness, good days and bad days. Do things you never thought you could. If you want to feel like you can fly, get a Colonial Spanish horse and become a partner with your horse. Does my partnership with my horse mean I let my horse do whatever it wants, or let them make all the decisions? Of course not, because they will if you let them and you better hang on butter cup. No, we communicate. Sometimes I do let my horse lead, sometimes I lead, sometimes my horse carries me when I need it, and I lead my horse where I want them to go, when I want them to go, at the speed I want them to go.

Life gets messy. Mine did. Sometimes you must give up what is killing you. I quit teaching art in public school. What I learned teaching is I cannot save the world; humans can make their own decisions and pay the consequences for their decisions, good or bad, animals are at the mercy of humans. I would rather fight for my animals. Since I quit teaching and my stress level has gone down, I have lost 47 lbs. working on the farm. I am getting back to my riding weight, and I am going to start riding more. Horse of the Americas has many online challenges that people with registered

Colonial Spanish horses can participate in. Some of the events have buckle awards. My next goal is to focus on my horses, my farm, and win a buckle in the future. **Come join me in the fun.**



Coast To Coast With Horse of the Americas



Hardihood Acres, South Carolina



El Campeon Farms, California

~Continued from page 1~

The one right species…The more natural working horse, regardless of how fast the action is, would soon settle down, calm and relaxed, as soon as the hard, fast work is done. They are also the ones that understand when the time comes to turn on the top running speed, as well as immediate stops, quick starts and fast turns—all at just the right, is most important if their task is to be accomplished in practical cow horse work. Patience is necessary while moving a slow herd of cattle in hot weather. Most cattlemen want their livestock moved as quietly as possible. Here the horse must mosey along, keeping alert to the animals lagging furthest behind without effort on the rider's part. The intelligent and understanding cow horse can be a pleasure to ride and work.

There is nothing that seems more ridiculous to me than a worthless scrub cayuse, with cold, blank, gawky walleyes referred to as the original Spanish cow pony. However, nearly all crossbreds with part Spanish Barb cannot help but result in a somewhat improved individual. Therefore, one can easily say that the Spanish types are responsible for the best there is in about any breed in America. While I may be a poor hand at writing, there are so many errors on the part of modern horse people who fail to take into consideration, either educated or otherwise, that stand out so clearly to me, would seem a crime even in this day and age, that need to be disclosed comparing various species. (I) would rather see the Spanish strains





remain as they once were and registered separately from cayuses or scrubs among Indian ponies years ago. (It) seems odd so many people on TV, especially in eastern states who imagine that droves of Texas cattle are no longer driven north in search of pasture means we no longer have use for cow horses. How is a modern rancher supposed to handle cattle without learning to appreciate cow horses?

Few people ever learn to understand and use horses properly at cow work even when they own the best for (that) purpose. Not only this present generation, but I know the majority among the elders were just as much at fault else they would know (that) speeding across country is not the only advantage. The cow horse is a necessary tool for handling stock on ranches. Some cattle feeders in eastern states have also discovered how useful such a horse can be.

Gilbert Jones sent me a picture of a roan appaloosa mare who was of the Copper Bottom strain who were great cow horses. I doubt they had appaloosa blood in them which shows up some in (the horses) he now owns, especially ***Chief Pushmataha***, SSMA-60; SMR-47.



Chief Pushmataha
& Emmett Brislawn

~Photo by Josie Brislawn

This makes him so unusual when compared with the average run of appaloosas there were years ago. Like the other breeds or species, all have since become mixed and bred beyond description from those (in the past) which few today could verify. So many assume (that) all Spanish horses were of exactly one type which I know myself is an error.

~Ilo Belsky~

Editor's Note: In 1969, Robert E. Brislawn, Sr. and Gilbert Jones traveled to Nebraska and inspected Belsky's thirty head of working ranch horses. Belsky owned the Phantom Valley Ranch, located north of Eli, Nebraska. Brislawn approved the entire herd for registration with the Spanish Mustang Registry (SMR) established in 1957. The Belsky strain of horses came up from Texas trail to that country in 1885. Belsky called them "Spanish Barbs" and bred for conformation and a smooth gait like the ancient Spanish Jinete horse. These three small bands owned by Ilo Belsky, Gilbert Jones and Weldon McKinley broadened the genetic pool accessible to other SMR horse breeders.



***Johnny America,* HOA- 1891, AIHR O-5153**
High % Belsky Stallion +
Book Cliffs, Brislawn & Choctaw
Dry Creek Ranch; Roundup, Montana
AIHR National Show Color Champion; 2011 & 2012
Reserve Champion, Western Pleasure (Green); 2011



***Tygyrys,* HOA-2162**
& Renee Beckwith
Sulphur, Choctaw, Brislawn & Belsky
Aguanga, California



***Smoke and Mirrors,* HOA-1981**
High % Belsky Stallion +
McKinley-Romero & Book Cliffs
Karma Farms; Marshall, Texas

HOA Awards

If you have horses that are working for high point awards, but are not registered, December 31st is the deadline. All points must be turned in by February 28th, but earlier if you have them.

HOA will award a customized buckle for each high point champion in the 11 categories.

Horses that achieve the **Caballos de Corazon Award (1,000 points)** will receive a custom belt buckle.

Horses that achieve either a **Sundance Award (300 points)** or a **Legends Award (500 points)** will receive a plaque for the award year.

Buckaroo Awards (50 points) for riders 18 and under will receive a certificate and a HOA sticker.

We have simplified the system and hope to make point keeping easier for the riders and competitors.

The categories are:

1. **Carol Stone Ambassador**
2. **Competitive Trail Riding**
3. **Individual Pleasure Trail Riding**
4. **Group Pleasure Trail Riding**
5. **Endurance**
6. **Farm & Ranch Work**
7. **English Performance**
8. **Western Performance**
9. **Working Equitation**
10. **Driving (Pleasure & Competitive)**
11. **Rodeo Events**
12. **Speed Events**



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Training Thoughts: New Place; New Horse

By Kelly Caldwell

Recently, a post came across my Facebook feed, and it's one most of us have seen before: *“I just purchased this new horse. They seemed very happy and rode well at their old place. It’s been about two weeks and the horse doesn’t act the same. What happened?”*

There’s often an assumption that the buyer was swindled. Allegations that the horse was drugged, switched, or misrepresented are unfortunately sometimes true, but most often, it’s simply a matter of horses being living creatures with opinions, experiences, memories, and preferences. And man, do Spanish Mustangs have opinions.

The good news? Opinions can change.

A horse's memory of familiar people can last for years, supported by patterns built through routine handling. Research by Liehrmann et al (2021) found that horses with multiple regular handlers, shorter relationships with their owners, and multiple owner changes showed increased reluctance toward novel objects and surfaces. In other words, a horse that was confident in one environment and relationship may need time to find that same confidence somewhere new.

Spanish Mustangs are especially sensitive and soulful horses— some of the very qualities we admire most about them. That sensitivity means that breed preservation isn't simply about keeping bloodlines alive; it's also about helping these horses successfully navigate the human world. Introducing them to different people, environments, and barns can be an important part of that work, but we must give both horse and human a reasonable expectation that the relationship will take time to develop. Think about two people who speak the same language but come from completely different regions: the words may be the same, but the dialect is different. A horse may know how to lead, load, stand, respond to cues... but the new person's timing, body language, and expectations will be completely different. What looks like a regression may simply be a mistranslation.

Planned unschooling can provide an adjustment period. That doesn't mean free-for-all mayhem, by any means. It allows new handlers to observe, explore, and learn how this particular equine student learns best. Before we start drilling the things they supposedly "already know" the horse needs a chance to decompress. Giving them time to adjust while forming new emotional and neural pathways is only fair. These horses aim to please; it's our job to give them a chance to do so.





Out & About With Our Colonial Spanish Horses



(l) *Miss Emery County* & Laura Geissler, Wisconsin

(r) *Mankato Cloudwalker* & Karen Gedge, United Kingdom



Tejon's Carolina Girl; Nathan Crisp, North Carolina





Moon Warrior & Curtis George
Copper Head Ranch, Texas



El Campeon's Cha Cha & Abigail Martinez
California



Prairie Rose Dawn &
Karen Potter, United Kingdom



BC Brasas; Kendra Chavez,
New Mexico

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Burn the Ships HOA-2376

2022 HOA National Pleasure Horse
2022 HOA National Endurance Champion
2025 Caballos de Corazon Recipient

Windrider's Hatak Hullo HOA-1909
2025 Caballos de Corazon Recipient

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(803)378-2633

LL 498 Saint Helena aka Jewel HOA # 2309

Sire: Barrier Island Nightlight

Nightlight's Buck HA was born August 15.

Preserving Colonial Spanish Horses

It's all in her name: *Burn the Ships;* HOA-2376

2025 Caballos de Corazon

By Samantha Shoemaker

I get a lot of puzzled looks when I share Rosa's registered name. They're often accompanied by the same question, too. "What's that mean?"

It's then I get to share the incredible story of this Caballa de Corazon. And in celebration of her recognition among HOA's top-honored horses, I'll share it with you.

My previous riding experience spanned various disciplines, breeds, and even continents. I grew up riding English and Dressage with Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, Arabians, and even an Andalusian stallion. In my late teens, I even trained with world-class Arabians and trainers for Endurance Riding in the United Arab Emirates at the leisure of a royal family member.

But some personal tragedies and life barred me from riding for over a decade. And when I got back into it, I found myself lost in the sea of endless yet somehow limited options. And there, I found Rosa.



I openly admit that I did not wisely choose Rosa. In a moment of serendipity, I saw her and knew at once that even though I had never trained a horse from scratch, she was the horse for me.

She was also unlike any kind of horse I'd ever owned or ridden. Solidly 14h, extremely nervous, a mare (I'd previously sworn off mares after a very bad experience with one), with a petite build. It took me a month to be able to catch her in the field without assistance, and that was just the beginning. Foreshadowing the months to come, she threw me the very first time I rode her. But I dug my heels in, determined that I'd get to her heart and win it over.

The first month under saddle consisted of turning or walking backwards only, since she insisted on not moving forward. It then became a slow progression of literal and metaphorical steps forward, then back. I would later that year sustain an injury that kept me out of the saddle for three weeks, but I still chose to show up and continue training Rosa.

No horse has ever frustrated me more, yet no other has ever reached so deeply within me. As her training progressed, one day it hit me like lightning: what I found frustrating about her was her continuous fear despite my consistency. And that was because I too suffered from deep-set fears and mistrust.

Rosa was the mirror into my own trauma.

Like her, I also held fears that were entrenched in my heart and refused to let go. And now, that fear was dragged into the light,

exposed for me to see with clear vision. To train Rosa successfully, I had to face my own trauma head on. It was time to leave the darkness of my pain.

So, as I softened and healed, Rosa began to relax. She began to respond to my leadership. And before I knew it, she and I were in the running for the HOA's National Pleasure Horse Championship.

What started in fear became a flourishing relationship, built on mutual trust. And Rosa didn't just take us to victory. She also carried me through a high-risk pregnancy. Through navigating the world of foxhunting and helping us achieve the honor of earning colors for our hunt. Through 50-mile endurance events (and being HOA Endurance Champions for 2022!). Through the sudden death of my mother and other family members. She even now graces the cover of my poetry collection! Through tragedy and joy, Rosa has been beside me; reminding me to be present in spite of life's storms.

Which all comes back to her name, *Burn the Ships.* I chose that name based on the song of the same name by the band, For King & Country. It's a song about giving up the toxic hold of the past, to race towards the future without shame.



"Step into a new day
We can rise up from the dust and walk away
We can dance upon our heartache
So light a match, leave the past, burn the ships
And don't you look back."



I walked away from what I knew in pursuit of a horse that felt like destiny. I defied expectation and left behind the hurt I was carrying inside of me for something better, despite my initial fears. Because of that leap of faith, we've achieved something incredible. And as I now put my daughter on her back for rides, I recommit to cherishing all the time before and what lies ahead for us. For me, Rosa exemplifies what it means to be a horse of heart, one of the Caballos de Corazon.



“I’m Nervous, Please Go Slow”

Five years and 1,806 miles with *Windrider’s Hatak Hullo* (HOA-1909, SSMA-2833)

By Timothy Shoemaker

When Manny went to a rehab facility this spring, his intake sheet had a notes field. It said: *“I’m nervous, please go slow.”*

Truer words have never been written about this horse.

I met him in the fall of 2021 at Mill Swamp Indian Horses. Monique Henry bred him up in Pennsylvania – a 14.3-hand tobiano foaled in 2010, out of *Goblins Prescription* by *Windriders Runner*, with *Choctaw Ricochet, Chief of Choctaws*, and other notables like *Chief Quanah Parker* stacked up behind him and the whole thing running back to Bryant Rickman’s Choctaw foundation stock in Oklahoma.

When Monique had to disperse her breeding herd, she gave Manny and two other geldings, Joey and Twister, to Mill Swamp. By the time I got to him he’d spent about two years turned out on pasture after a career pointed at endurance. Nervous, excitable, and by my count he’d spent roughly a decade looking for his person. Monique called him a “soul connector.”

She was right, but it took a while to get there.

I restarted him from the ground up. Six weeks of regular groundwork before I ever put a leg over him, most of it aimed at convincing him that he was allowed to go slowly. He trotted and cantered beautifully in the round pen – that was never the problem. Getting him to walk calmly, move up to a trot, and come back down to a walk without lighting the whole thing on fire, that was the work. Based on what I’d been told, I half expected him to trot off the second I sat down



the first time. Instead, he waited for me to get set, then walked off gently around the pen.

Then there was the bridle. He decided one afternoon that he didn’t care for me putting it on him, so we spent fifteen minutes on pressure and release until he’d hold his head near me at waist height with no pressure at all. Picked up the bridle and we were back to square one. Ten more minutes and he let me slip it on, and we walked around outside the pen grazing so he could live with the feel of it. When I took it off he shot away from me like he was saying *let’s not do that again.* So, we did it again. And again. And again. By roughly the sixth time he was practically putting his own nose in. There’s a metaphor for life in there if you look for it.

That first fall we put on 27 miles in two weeks and 18 in a single week, and I thought we were flying. What came next was harder. Something happened his first week out on the trail that left my wife and a friend pretty banged up. After that, I became cautious about who I’d ride with him. In late November I had my own bad fall off him after a frustrating session, and I barely rode him at all in December. We went back to groundwork, teaching us both to relax again – just getting him to stand and let me rub him all over was a chore at the start. Then one morning a light bulb clicked, I spotted the source of the confusion around mounting, cleared it up, and we rode a half mile in the round pen.

January is when things turned. Sam started riding an older gelding, Ta Sunka Witco, and we'd go out on steady five-mile trots to burn his anxiety off. By March I was riding him regularly again, and not long after, Sam and I were hacking out with just Rosa and Manny – her mare cautiously learning to lead, him slowly settling into following. That was the whole method, if you can call it that. Consistent miles, a calm leader, and no rush.



Manny isn't gaited. But he has an extended trot so fast and so smooth – closer to what I imagine a Missouri Fox Trotter feels like, but smoother. On a 3.8-mile ride with good footing he averaged 9.9 mph and we were probably moving 16 to 17 mph on the first half of the stretch home, his feet churning underneath us while I sat there barely moving in the saddle. In one 700-mile season we only logged 27 minutes of canter, total, because he almost never needs it. When he does open up, it is at a speed most horses are galloping to hold.



Teaching him to canter on cue was Sam's idea, not mine – get into galloping position and ask. After riding a fast trot that way for 300 yards, I pulled him out from behind Rosa and he stepped right into a canter beside her. We rode side by side for nearly three tenths of a mile in a canter so easy it could've put me to sleep.

The miles quickly piled up after that. 731 with Manny in 2022, another 701 in 2023. We once rode 35 miles in 6 hours and 9 minutes at an endurance ride before scratching at the second vet check after his nerves got the better of him and he refused to settle down. We hit 1,000 miles together 535 days after our first trail ride, on a day when a vulture exploded out of the grass beside us. Old Manny would've exploded across the open field, instead he barely flinched, turned, and carried on.

Every 50 miles or so, it felt like we unlocked something new.

Fox hunting was never part of the plan for Manny. Plenty of people would've told you in 2021 that this horse had no business in a hunt field – some questioned whether he'd ever be safe on a trail. His opening hunt with the James River Hunt was at Bacon's Castle, with 17th-century reenactors, musket fire, strange horses milling everywhere, and first flight galloping the edges of open fields with sudden stops, abrupt turnarounds, and every jump I asked him to clear. He handled all of it.

We earned our colors in three years and now serve as an honorary whipper-in, and he's better at the job than I am. One day, before Thanksgiving, he locked both ears on a black and brindle coyote and tracked it through the woods before I ever knew the animal was there. I regularly see game in the

field before others through his eyes.

Barefoot, bitless, and sharp enough to be a handful about it. He still won't take an oral medication – we hid bute in a molasses cookie exactly once, and he's never touched another one. We've stopped trying to fix that. We've reached an understanding on the things that matter, and that's good enough.

This spring he fractured the splint bone in his left hind, almost certainly through a normal disagreement in the pasture. He stood calm and steady through triage, through surgery, through two weeks in a stall, and the first thing he did back in his round pen in May was find a sandy spot, dig it up, and drop down for a long roll. Best sight we'd seen in weeks. He moved to a bigger paddock in June and has been on turnout since, trotting, galloping, and bucking around the other horses with no sign of lameness.



Joey & Keli Evans



In the midst of all that, he earned the registry's **Caballos de Corazón** award for lifetime achievement in points. An award named for exactly what he is.

397 rides. 493 hours. 1,806 miles. I haven't been back on him yet, but we'll start him up again soon and see where we are before hunt season. We'll do it the way we've done everything else with this horse. Slow.

Windrider's Average Joe;

HOA-1908; SSMA-2763

2025 Sundance Award

By Keli Evans

Joey possesses the kind of stoic confidence that comes from hundreds of miles under saddle, being ridden by some of the best riders to ever mount up here at MSIH. When you ride a horse like that, you have to take on that same level of confidence. With that in mind, I chose him to be my horse during my first extended position as ride leader with a string of 3-7 riders.

Leading a ride on Joey is thrilling in the best way. You get the sense from the very beginning that he is inexhaustible. His ground covering trot starts off a little bouncy but once we find the rhythm it's incredibly smooth. With just his ears and the trail before you the miles melt away. He has all the very best traits of a (Choctaw) Colonial Spanish Horse.

Spark, HOA-2338

2025 Farm & Ranch Horse of the Year

Sundance & Legends Awards

By Caleb Jensen

Bookcliff Barbs strives to breed the best Spanish Barbs, but we also have another goal for our horses: to be good using horses. One of the horses we're most proud of is *Spark*, winner of the **Farm and Ranch Working Horse of the Year Award** for three years running, and recipient of the **Legends** Award.



Spark came from the Quien Sabe Ranch during the dispersal of the Robert Painter herd and was under saddle in no time at all. She was already working on cows by the third ride. She has been used extensively for the past two years, as she's been part of a working string for one of the biggest seedstock cattle operations in the West.



To date, she's roped countless calves; heeling, heading, and taking them down solo. She has taken down cows and helped pull bulls into trailers. She can cut and track cattle as well as some high-bred ranch horses, earning the respect of diehard Quarter Horse riders.

Spark is truly at home working livestock. She's moved cows for hours bridleless, and when turned loose to follow other horses, she kept chasing the cows anyway. She has chased down coyotes and carried baby calves. She has done everything that has been asked of her, even standing her ground while I shot three rounds into a charging bull. Last winter, she helped gather an escaped horse herd off the desert with helicopters overhead and dirt bikes racing by, without missing a beat.



Spark has been a pack horse, a kid's horse, a ranch horse and a true friend. She's a shining example of what we strive for in all our horses.

~Bookcliff Barbs~



She Did It Again:
Sawbraw Cami, HOA-2396
2025 Western Performance Horse of the Year
By Ginger Hipp

I'm not sure there's enough space in a newsletter to explain what this little mare means to me. Cami was recently named the **Horses of America Western Performance Horse of the Year**… for the second year in a row. I still have a hard time wrapping my head around that.



~K. Williams Photography~

When I first got Cami, I thought I was buying a nice little Marsh Tacky that I could trail ride, maybe do some endurance with, and just enjoy. I had absolutely no idea she was about to change my life. She has opened doors I never expected to walk through.

She's taught me more than I could ever teach her. And somewhere along the way, she gave me something I didn't even realize I had lost… my confidence.

If you've followed me for very long, you know I've talked about anxiety in the show ring. For a long time, I honestly thought I'd never do it. I figured I'd stick to trail riding and endurance, and I was perfectly okay with that.

Then Cami came along. She just kept showing up every single day, doing her job with that steady, willing attitude that she has. Before I knew it, we were entering horse shows. Then we were winning classes. Then came my first belt buckle.

Now, somehow, at 49 years old, she's helped me earn my second one. But Cami believed in us before I did. One of my favorite things about her is watching her walk into the arena. It's almost like she flips a switch that says, "Okay, it's my time."

She knows exactly where the cameras are. Seriously, I don't know how she does it, but she always seems to find them. She notices the kids sitting along the fence, and she seems to enjoy every second of being there.

Yet she's the exact same horse outside the arena. Calm. Steady. Kind. The same horse that gives riding lessons, patiently takes care of beginners, and gives 110% no matter what I'm asking of her. That's just who she is.

The awards are incredible, and I'm so thankful for every one of them. But when I look at this year's award, I don't just see another title. I see every ride that rebuilt my confidence. Every time I almost talked myself out of entering. Every lesson she quietly taught me without saying a word.



This little Marsh Tacky has changed my life in ways I'll probably never be able to fully explain. She reminds me every day that it's never too late to try something again. It's never too late to start over.

Congratulations, Cami. You deserve every bit of this honor, and I couldn't be prouder to be your teammate. Thank you for believing in me.

I Am Not Too Old Too Appreciate Beauty, Just Too Old Too Surrender To It

Holland, HOA-1649

2025 Legends Award

By Steve Edwards

Were I forced to choose, I think that I would have to say that Holland is my favorite horse. *Ta Sunka Witco* is a great horse and he is beautiful. *Tradewind* has more heart than any horse that I have ridden and he is beautiful. *Manteo* is a perfect example of a Colonial Spanish stallion and he is beautiful. He is so pure that he not only speaks Spanish, he also reads it. *Windrider's Average Joe* (Joey) is a Choctaw who impresses me more daily.

Holland was born wild on Shackleford Island. His head is big, coarse and crude. He does not have Manteo's look of nobility. I strongly suspect that his mother and most of the other members of his herd called him "Bubba." Even a quick glance at his eye makes it obvious that he is not contemplating deep philosophical issues and is more likely trying to remember where he left his RC Cola and his Moon Pie.

But when I ask him to go, he goes. Where I ask him to go, he goes. When we get to the briers, he goes. When we reach deep water, he goes.



As far as I ask him to go, he goes. As smoothly as I asked him to go, he goes. With the ground frozen rock hard, he goes. When the ground is parched and baked rock hard, he goes. With the sun glaring down on us, he goes and in the pitch darkness of the night, he goes.

And with all of that do you still think that I should care that he does not look 'refined'? Oh, go on.
Until I believed in myself again.



Steve Edwards & Holland ready to ride, March 23rd.

Editor's Note: His registered name is ***SWH Diamond City Pony Boy***, **HOA-1649**. He arrived at Mill Swamp Indian Horses with the name on his HOA certificate but became known by his call name, Holland.

To Ride a Real Horse:
Little Miss Sharpshooter, HOA-2131
2025 Sundance Award
By Natalie Porter

I met Lilly (*Little Miss Sharpshooter*), a Choctaw/Grand Canyon mare, in 2023, when she was 6 years old and I had been riding for a little over a year (if semi-regular 1-hour walking trail rides per week counts as riding). When I expressed interest in conditioning myself and a horse for a long-distance ride, Steve Edwards, who owns Lilly, recommended that I work with her. I don't know if he over-estimated my skill level or simply hoped that I would prove undaunted, but our first training session did NOT go the way I'd imagined it going.

At the time, Lilly had been trained to saddle and ridden in the woods, but she'd been out to pasture for at least a year. She did NOT want to leave. I got her all tacked up and rode her partway down the driveway, but that was the end of it. She refused to willingly leave sight of her pasture, and I ended up dismounting and practically dragging her the rest of the way to the arena, where she made sure everyone knew she was upset by constantly calling for her herd mates. It was not a fun ride.

So, we had to start at the beginning. I'd pull her out of the pasture, and we would walk up the driveway, side-by-side, day after day, doubling back every few minutes. At one point, it took me almost an hour to catch her before I could even take her out of the pasture. We spent hours in the round pen, going around in circles, like a conversation that never gets anywhere. I won't lie and say I wasn't discouraged. I was. But one day, she stood still and let me catch her as soon as I entered the pasture. We walked down the driveway together. Easily. Somewhere along the way, in all those circles, we'd learned to communicate and I'd earned her trust. It was incredible. But still, it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows after that.

Lilly agreed that following me down the driveway was safe enough, but letting me ride her down the driveway? That was another situation entirely. And one that might very well get her killed. She did NOT like that idea.

So, we started over again, this time with me on her back. Mostly. She's really good at the 6ft-to-one-side teleport, and the 180-degree turn-on-a-dime. At this point, it had been almost two years since I'd gotten on my first horse, and my riding muscles were still in the developing stage. She shied at shadows, bright colors, empty places where things weren't, EVERYTHING (except the real live rat snake). She balked at puddles, branches, gates, and every. single. trail that didn't lead straight home. I won't lie and say it wasn't frustrating. It was. But one day, we turned on the sand path, and I asked her to canter, and she did. She flew down that trail without argument, without hesitation, and we ran for the sheer joy of running. We went over 700 miles in 2024, with 40+ miles in a single day. Together.

Was there an easier way to learn to ride? Probably. But I wouldn't trade what I learned for anything. Lilly challenged me on every level, and she taught me that persistence pays off, that trust is earned through consistency, and that there is no counterfeit for confidence that has been earned through bruises and tears. She's still a moody mare who shies at nothing and sometimes doesn't like to be caught, but she will always have a place in my heart as the one who taught me what it meant to ride a real horse.



Lilly & Natalie Porter

The Donnelly Family Experience

2025 Group Trail Riding Award

By Sammi Donnelly

We have been riding at Mill Swamp Indian Horses for a little shy of two years. We actually have three generations of our family spanning in age from 6 years old to 62 years old. My three children, myself, and my mother, their grandmother, all participate in the weekly riding program and/or the homeschool program together.

One of the most special parts of our experience has been watching the program benefit every member of our family, from the youngest to the oldest. The skills we are learning are not defined by age.



Abigail and *I Knew You Were Trouble*

Each of us has grown in different ways through our experiences here at Mill Swamp Indian Horses.

I have especially seen my middle child, Abigail, grow exponentially in confidence. I've watched her work in the round pen with a horse, and at first she was never very vocal or assertive. Over time, I have seen her learn to communicate clearly and show an almost adult-like assertiveness, both in the saddle and on the ground. Watching that transformation has been incredible as a parent.

I have also watched my 62-year-old mother grow through this program as well. One of my favorite memories was seeing her ride Belle the mule through water after months of Belle refusing to go through it. The first time Belle calmly and confidently walked through the water, my mother threw her hands up and shouted, "Yes!" The joy on her face was pure childlike excitement. It was such a simple moment, but it reminded me that learning and happiness do not stop with age. Through this experience, I've seen an adult experience the simple joy and excitement of trying something new for the first time while also seeing my daughter have adult-like assertiveness.



Paula Alverez and *Belle*

My oldest son typically rides *CWH Sampson*, a once wild Banker horse from the Corolla herd. It has been amazing to watch how alike they are. They both have the same calm, laid-back demeanor, and neither of them likes to be rushed. Their personalities fit each other perfectly, and I think working with Samson has helped my son grow even more comfortable and confident in himself. One thing that always stands out to me is how Sampson gently lowers his head to take the bit and how patient and steady he is with my son, even when my son has had to un-tack and re-tack him to ensure proper saddle fit. Sampson just stands patiently. Watching how gentle and patient Sampson is with him is such a good reminder of the importance of gentleness and patience we need to show others.



Sammi and *Pasquinoke*

The horses have also taught me lessons personally. I tend to rush through things and always move quickly, but *Pasquinoke*, a Shackleford/Corolla Banker, has taught me how to slow down and be calm. I remember thinking, "This horse has a biting problem," because she bit me while tacking up, but I quickly learned she actually had a "me" problem. I was constantly fiddling with the latigo too much while saddling her, and my nervous energy caused her to nip. Once I slowed down and paid attention to what she was telling me, everything changed, and that is rarely an issue now. Pasquinoke has taught me that horses respond to our energy and actions and that sometimes the problem is not with the horse, it's us.

These are not simply horses, and this is not simply a riding program. The horses have taught us in more ways than one. They have a way of showing us our strengths and weaknesses in ways people often cannot. We would not take kindly to a person biting, kicking, or not listening to us, yet when a horse does those things, it forces us not to get offended, but instead to question why they reacted that way. Funny enough, it is often much easier to receive that kind of correction from a horse than it is from another person. Instead of taking it personally, we reflect and realize they are usually responding to something within us, our energy, our impatience, our nervousness, or our lack of communicating clearly. In doing so, the horses teach us not only about them, but about ourselves. They have taught us that assertiveness and childlike joy are not exclusive to being an adult or a child. There is something powerful, humbling, and deeply honest about them. Horses seem to reveal what is already inside of us, whether it be our impatience, nervousness, pride, calmness, or confidence. They force us to slow down, listen, and become more aware of ourselves. It is hard not to see God's design in animals capable of teaching people so much without ever speaking a word.



Ryan and *CWH Sampson*

In addition, Steve, as well as many others at Mill Swamp, have instilled in my children the belief that children are far more capable than society often gives them credit for. They are encouraged to problem solve, take responsibility, communicate clearly, and work through challenges independently. Instead of lowering expectations because of their age, the program teaches them to rise to challenges with confidence and resilience.

One of the greatest lessons Mill Swamp teaches is to never think you are too old or too young to do something. Whether it is a child learning confidence in the round pen or a 62-year-old riding a mule through water for the first time, everyone here is encouraged to grow, help one another, try new things, and believe in their own capabilities.

This experience has become so much more than horseback riding for our family. It has helped each of us grow in different ways. Mill Swamp Indian Horses has given our family more than riding skills; it has given us partnerships with the horses we interact with, life lessons about ourselves, friendships, and a timeless place where kids run barefoot, bug hunt, jump rope, and play music outside on the porch. Most importantly, it has given us a deeper understanding of ourselves that we will carry with us for years to come.



Great Blazes Farm
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Windsor, South Carolina
Clinician: Stella Wise
Hosted By: Patricia Stafford
Contact: marshtackyfoundation@gmail.com



The riders of Mill Swamp Indian Horses
2025 Group Trail Riding Award

Smithfield, Virginia

Marsh Tacky Conference



The Marsh Tacky, SC State Heritage Horse Retirement Foundation is in its second fall. Established in 2025 by a few enthusiasts who recognized a small but fragile population in rare breed horses – those that end up in rescue care or lost into the auction system, or worse. In 2025 we took in *Blue Duck*, a 30 y.o. Marsh Tacky. Truly, we thought this would be all we did – to see to his care to his end of life.

That is not what happened. We have been contacted about a variety of horses, we have helped get their history, DNA typing to verify if they are registered stock that lost their papers, and through amazing donors we were able to retrieve *Whiskinboo,* a registered horse that made it to a kill-pen in under 30 days, and through another donor able to place a horse on consignment into our program to make sure she isn't at risk of the auction cycle.

We have hosted three Free webinars in 2026 to help horse-owners. Our first was **Mud Management for Horses for Clean Water** https://horsesforcleanwater.com with Alayne Blickle.

Next, we asked Colleen Callahan, an experienced Marsh Tacky horse owner and actively caring for PSSM horses to talk with us about **Managing the PSSM horse.**

Last, we hosted **"The greatest gift you can give yourself, your Vet and your Horse".** Rebecca Gimenez with TLAER https://tlaer.org/ talked with us about end of life care and planning. We hope to bring more webinars for 2027.

Our Foundations goals are to assist Marsh Tacky Horses in need. This comes in many forms – from horsemanship in caring for your Marsh Tacky horse, to assisting with unexpected medical costs, end of life funds or this years hay drive to make sure no Marsh Tacky goes without.

Our website is:
https://marshtackyretirementfoundation.org/

You can send donations via PayPal to
marshtackyfoundation@gmail.com
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We would love your support.

LL Whiskinboo



More Out & About



Blue Duck, **Retired**
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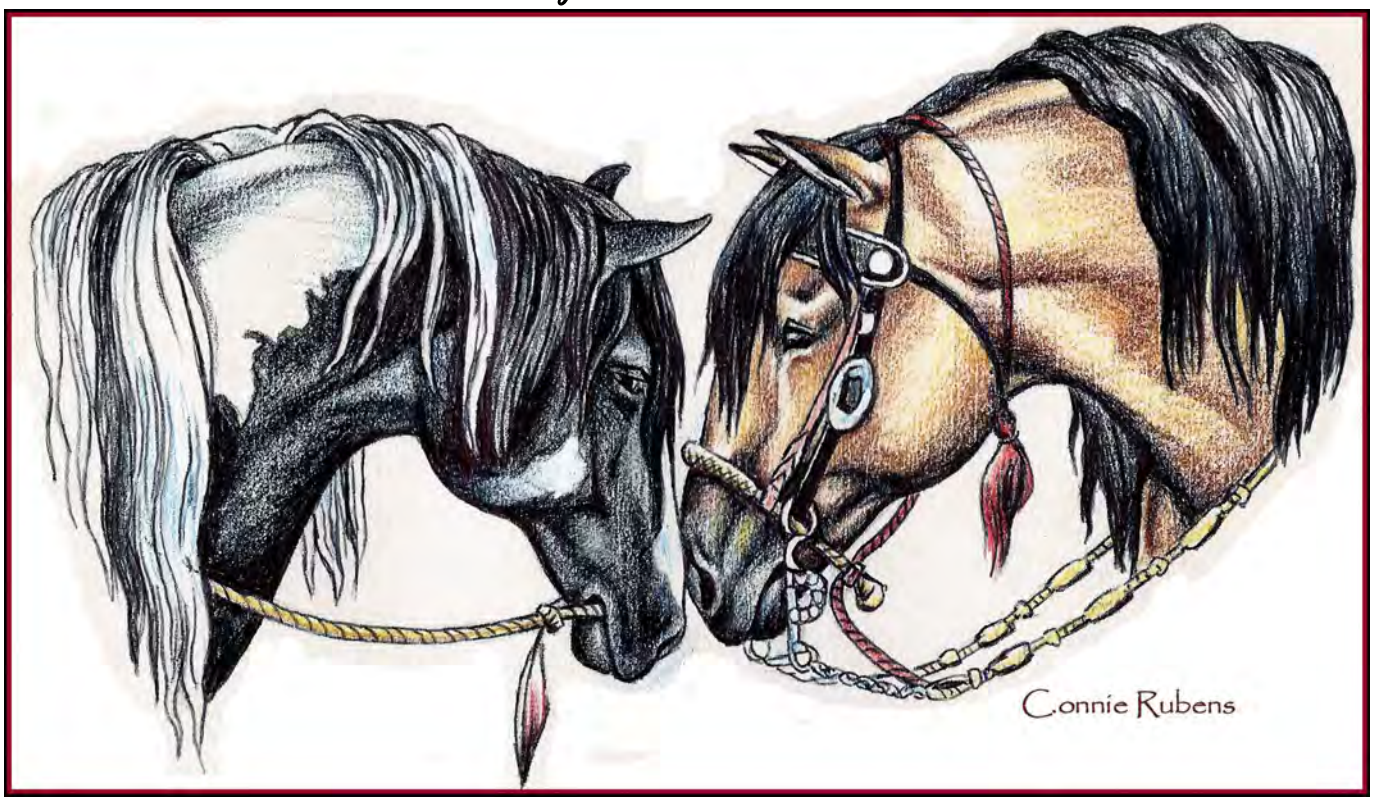
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