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Starting a New Circle

A VISIT WITH CURT PATE

Curt Pate's journey in the horse world is a testament to the power of observation, a willingness to grow, and a relentless pursuit of helping folks think in a better direction. From his early days riding horses bareback on his grandfather's ranch, to becoming a sought-after clinician and stockmanship resource, and to the loss of his beloved wife Tammy to a heartbreaking battle with cancer, Curt's story is one of continuous adaptation and learning.

Curt's horsemanship education didn't come from formal training initially. Growing up on a ranch, he learned to ride and rope, but it wasn't until he attended a reining clinic with Renee Pipinich that he learned about the soft feel. A desire to learn was ignited.

"I showed up at the clinic with some old broncy ranch horse, and it was the first time I had heard about getting a horse soft in your hand before asking him to do something. I could do anything with my horses but I'd never heard that concept in my life, and I was like, 'Oh wow! There's something else to this!' and it really got me to searching."

While Curt excelled at ranch work and rodeo, he felt a pull toward a deeper understanding of horse behavior. He became friends with Buck Brannaman and his experiences at those clinics and being on the set of *The Horse Whisperer* shaped his philosophy.

The desire to learn more about managed grazing drew him to a school in Mississippi. There he met the organizers of the Midwest Horse Fair, an event that would launch his career as a clinician.

The Midwest Horse Fair opened Curt's eyes to the diverse world of equestrian disciplines. He began conducting colt starting demonstrations, which led to appearances at other horse fairs and a growing reputation as a knowledgeable and engaging presenter. However, his heart remained in the world of cattle work. He eventually shifted his focus from horsemanship to stockmanship, applying his understanding of horse behavior to the handling of cattle.

Curt's experience with colt starting demonstrations, while rewarding, also revealed a darker side of the horse world. He witnessed ego-driven training methods and a focus on spectacle over substance. He became increasingly concerned about the welfare of the horses and the lack of genuine horsemanship being displayed. This led him to write an article for *Western Horseman* on the one-rein stop, which, while intended to highlight harmful practices, inadvertently angered some in the industry.

"When I hear people say, 'I'll never be as good as Ray Hunt,' I tell them that they shouldn't limit themselves. It's not about trying to be like Ray Hunt or any other person. It's not about

"JOURNEY HOME" TO THE MIDWEST HORSE FAIR

April 11, 12 & 13, 2025 will be the 44th Midwest Horse Fair in Madison, Wisconsin.

"It is our privilege to host the best three-day horse fair in the USA. With the 2025 theme of Journey Home, we are grateful to welcome back so many incredibly talented horses and riders from years past such as Curt Pate and to welcome many new friends and features. We are looking forward to an action-packed weekend with several competitions throughout the weekend," said fair executive director Teri Giannetti.



Staying true to its mission of providing the ultimate equine experience through exposition, education and entertainment, and its vision of being America's epicenter for the equine community, the fair promises equine enthusiasts and the public an unforgettable experience.

Returning to the Fair in 2025 will be their fan-favorite, the Breed and Discipline demonstrations with over 35 groups that showcase the very special relationship between horse and rider. Also, the Breed and Discipline groups will continue to spotlight critical and threatened breed designations based on The Livestock Conservancy categorizations. Those featured at the fair will include: Akhal-Teke, Nokota, Dales Pony, and more. Learn about and observe these breeds at the demonstrations scheduled throughout the weekend.

This year, the Midwest Horse Fair will once again host the largest attended PRCA rodeo in Wisconsin on Friday and Saturday evening. Local and national rodeo athletes compete in front of a sold-out crowd at the Alliant Energy Center Coliseum. MHF favorites, award-winning PRCA entertainer and barrelman, John Harrison, with long-time

anything except horsemanship. And that's the trouble. When we get this ego-based horsemanship, the person presenting it with the ego, then they can drag you into being trying to be them, and that's a mistake for them and for the person that's learning."

Curt's experiences with renowned horsemen like Tom Dorrance and clinicians like Sally Swift solidified his belief in the importance of humility, pride, and a strong work ethic. He observed that true masters of horsemanship possessed a quiet confidence and a genuine love for horses, qualities that were often overshadowed by ego and the pursuit of market share. He contrasts "ego-based horsemanship" with "pride-based horsemanship," emphasizing the importance of prioritizing the well-being of the animal and finding joy in the process.

Now, nearly 25 years after his first clinic at the Midwest Horse Fair, he returns to the event to demonstrate his ideas about "horsemanship for stockmanship."

"If I can get my horses content, my cattle content and my land content, now we're living in unison, and I can get something done on that horse, whether I'm working horseback in a feed lot or on a trail ride through the back roads of Wisconsin. Where I am able to stop and take a picture and take my coat off, and my horse is not running and bucking and getting scared, so we can enjoy that ride, and both of us are content...that's the place we're looking for," says Curt.

Curt's journey is a reminder that horsemanship is not a destination, but a continuous process of learning and refinement. He emphasizes the importance of having fun and finding joy in the company of horses, qualities that he believes are essential for building a true partnership. His transition from colt starting demonstrations to stockmanship clinics reflects his commitment to sharing his knowledge and promoting ethical and effective animal handling practices. Curt Pate's story is an inspiring example of how a cowboy's passion for horses and cattle can lead to a lifetime of learning and a lasting impact on the equestrian world.



rodeo announcer Kelly Kenney, will host the evening. Specialty act, Sophie Duch and Wisconsin's own Meyer Farms Belgian Hitch will perform and dazzle the crowd. New for 2025, MHF will also be hosting the International Liberty Horse Association (ILHA) Freestyle Competition, where five Liberty competitors will kick off the evening show each night, with the compulsory component to take place during the day.

There is a ton of excitement that a very famous horsewoman, Amber Marshall, also known as "Amy" from the hit television show *Heartland*, will be attending the fair and is scheduled to perform the discipline of Liberty with Dan James, an expert Liberty clinician.

Over 30 additional expert clinicians plan to share their expertise including Hope Glynn (Hunter/Jumper), JJ Tate (Dressage), Curt Pate (Horsemanship), Dr. Elizabeth James (Liberty), Lee Smith (Horsemanship), Dana Hokana (Showmanship), Tiffany McLaury (Reined Cow Horse), Pam Bound (Barrel Racing), Mounted Justice (Mounted Shooting), Paul Garrison (Mulemanship) and more!

With a focus on education, The Wisconsin FFA State Horse Evaluation CDE is scheduled to take place on Friday, and an equine career exploration feature led by Dr. Karin Bump will be available to attendees on all three days.

The weekend will also boast 400 exhibitors that offer everything for horse and rider from head to toe. There will also be a Working Equitation Challenge throughout the weekend as advanced riders from diverse equestrian backgrounds demonstrate their expertise in this exciting sport!

Last but not least, attendees may also catch a glimpse of a few more film crews around, as hosts Del Shields and his wife Shevawn are on the grounds speaking on trail riding adventures and filming a Midwest Horse Fair episode for their show *Best of America by Horseback*.

The Midwest Horse Fair 2025 is positioned to be a wonderful event that those in the horse community won't want to miss!

