

55 Christmas GIFT IDEAS for Avid Horsemen

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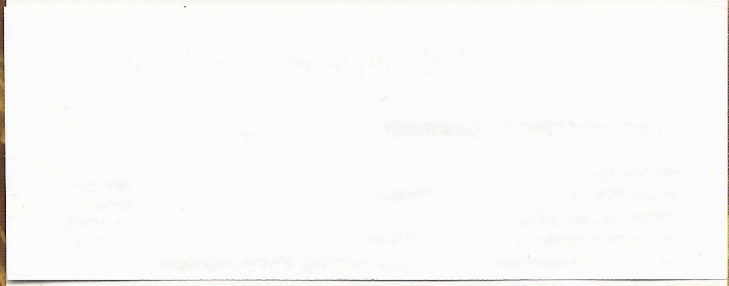
RODEO SPOTLIGHT

Bobby Mote Ventures into a New Event
Ranch Bronc Riders Thrive in Their Niche
Mary Walker's Improbable NFR Debut

Busted Covey by Tom Browning

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Ride to Remember

American Competitive Trail Horse Association hosts Veterans Day benefit rides.

WHEN RIDERS HIT THE TRAIL on Veterans Day weekend this year, they have the opportunity to help a program that helps veterans of the U.S. armed forces who have been wounded or suffered combat trauma lead better lives.

The American Competitive Trail Horse Association's Ride to Remember, to be held November 10–11, will benefit Horses For Heroes—New Mexico, Inc. Rides will take place across the country, with proceeds going to the Santa Fe, New Mexico-based non-profit program that uses horses to assist veterans' return to civilian life through ranch work and involvement with horses.

"We seek out other non-profits to try to benefit the horse," says Karen VanGetson, one of the founders of ACTHA. "We were brainstorming and thinking that Veterans Day is around the corner, started doing a little research and came across Horses For Heroes—New Mexico. Soldiers go to the ranch from around the nation, and can benefit and heal via horseback for as little or as long as they need. They really get to heal by making bonds with horses."

Horses For Heroes—New Mexico Director Rick Ianucci, a former Green Beret and retired U.S. Marshal, says the program allows veterans with injuries or post-combat trauma the opportunity to learn about horses and ranching while recovering.

"We have 13 objectives [for participants], and they start with horsemanship," he says. "It usually takes about a season to complete. If they come in the spring, by fall—if they stick with it—they're usually good to go."

Ianucci first opened up his ranch with a 4-H program that became one of the fastest-growing in the country. In 2007, he began offering services

for veterans. Although many former soldiers have stayed as guests in his home, a bunkhouse is under construction to give participants a place to live while they are in the program. The 501(c)(3) corporation receives no government funding, and relies on donations to continue its work.

Several participants have found a niche in the ranching or horse communities, Ianucci says.

The program's instruction includes not only riding and horse care, but also in the daily chores involved with ranching and working cattle. The staff is all volunteer, and includes working cowboys, many of whom are veterans, from surrounding areas.

The Ride to Remember events are being held at locations across the country. Seventy percent of the proceeds goes to Horses For Heroes—New Mexico, and 30 percent goes to a local charity of the ride host's choice.

"We're allowing the ride hosts to select a local veterans group [as a beneficiary]," VanGetson says. "ACTHA also gives \$3 per rider to a charity on top of that, and the ride host has the opportunity to select where that goes, as well."

The weather and the opening of deer-hunting season may affect scheduling of some rides, so ACTHA will allow ride hosts to select another weekend for a Ride to Remember, she adds.

ACTHA offers trail rides nearly every weekend, with each benefitting horse-related charities. Each ride includes competitive aspects, and riders and their horses are eligible for awards and year-end prizes.

For details on Ride to Remember events or ACTHA, visit actha.us. For information on Horses For Heroes—New Mexico, Inc., and its programs, visit horsesforheroes.org.

—SUSAN MORRISON