



Cutline: JoLinn Hoover of MJ Rising H Ranch in Richland begins training a young horse in her home corral in Richland. Training begins with the basics of riding, progressing from saddle up to finished bridle. Mitch and JoLinn Hoover ride and train horses for three months to a year before selling them to clients.

Custom Fitting A Ranch For Horses

by PATTI WALKER

Of the Hells Canyon Journal

(originally published March 9, 2005 in the Hells Canyon Journal)

The older ranch below a wide curve in Highway 86 west of Richland, sporting a new meandering lane entrance to recently painted buildings and spiffed up corrals, belongs to Mitch and JoLinn Hoover. The MJ Rising H Ranch, as it is called, is a new home for them and for their fulltime horse raising and training business

Both Mitch and JoLinn are longtime horse lovers and sellers.

"Horses have always been a part of our lives," said JoLinn. "I was active in 4H, horse training, horse shows and competitions. Mitch grew up on ranches, and horses have been his first love since he was a kid."

Mitch Hoover was a staple at local rodeos during his 20-plus years as manager for what is now the Pine Valley Ranch. It was during that time that he and JoLinn married. In between raising their blended family of six children and working on the PV Ranch, they started a part-time business, Rising H Performance Horses. But having their own ranch and operating a fulltime horse business was a longtime dream for the pair. They got that opportunity with their move to Richland in 2003.



Cutline: JoLinn Hoover of MJ Rising H Ranch in Richland begins training a young horse in her home corral in Richland. Training begins with the basics of riding, progressing from saddle up to finished bridle. Mitch and JoLinn Hoover ride and train horses for three months to a year before selling them to clients.

"We had the highest selling horses at horse sales in the Northwest," said JoLinn. "That was a catalyst to help us see there was a market for our horses."

The Hoovers buy nice two-, three- and four-year-old geldings and ride and train them for three months to a year before reselling them. With up to six orders for horses waiting at any one time, they are always on the lookout for animals with the potential of becoming MJ Rising H Ranch horses.

Training other people's horses is also a significant part of their business.

"We've found that the biggest problem in training other people's horses is that the owners don't learn what the horses learn," said Mitch. "When the animal goes home, the owner keeps making the same mistakes that led them to send their horse for training in the first place."

To remedy the situation, Hoovers require owners to take lessons with their horses for a portion of time. The approach has been quite successful.

"I've heard the saying 'most horse problems aren't horse problems, they're people problems'," Mitch said. "And I think that's true."

Their brand of training starts out with natural horseman groundwork. It is the part of the training where a trusting relationship with the horse is developed.

"This stage is about earning the horse's trust and respect on the ground and getting them desensitized to things horses are naturally afraid of," JoLinn said. "Horses are fight and flight animals. If they are startled or afraid, their first reaction is to run."

Supplying training, teaching the horse to move different body parts like their head, shoulders and hindquarters, on command, is next.

"It helps the horse build more smooth movements and responsiveness," said Mitch. "Then we do the basics of riding, saddle and progressive work up to finished bridle."

Because of the amount of training they do, whether it is for moving cows, participating in a parade, or riding mountain trails, MJ Rising H Ranch horses command a pretty penny. JoLinn describes their target market as primarily the Northwest, with an eye to a national market in the future, and made up mostly of middle to upper income corporate lifestyles. "Those folks with five acres who are looking for a horse to ride into the mountains and use in the arena,' she said, "They want a dual-purpose horse, and that requires a different type of training. Consequently it makes these types of horses really valuable."

Hoovers market their business through big sales events with competitions that allow them to show what their horses are trained to do in various areas: ranch cow horse and roping, arena roping, cutting and working cow, mountain and pleasure trail.

According to Mitch the biggest trend in the horse market is recreational. "Some say there are more horses now than during the 1800s when horses were an important work tool," he said.

Equestrian events centers like the one that recently opened in Eugene, Oregon, are becoming more and more popular. The centers offer large recreational riding events, many of which the Hoovers also enter as part of their marketing efforts.

Hoovers say their business is good and growing. Things are going so well, they sold all their cattle, to focus exclusively on horses. If things continue at the same pace, they say hiring help in the not-so-distant future is a strong possibility.