



Natural horsemanship clinician, Nettie Barr, helps ordinary people learn how to enjoy their horses.

## Helping ordinary riders reach their dreams

By Heather Grovet

**N**ettie Barr isn't your typical natural horsemanship clinician. She rode as a child, but at the age of 16 was seriously injured by a horse and didn't go near one again until she was in her mid-thirties. "One day my husband brought home a horse," Nettie explains. "I was scared to death of that horse - all horses - but I couldn't stay away."

The couple started taking lessons and courses from some of the big names in the natural horsemanship industry. "I never intended to become a professional," Nettie continued. "I just started to have success with my horses, and people asked me to help them, too. I enjoyed working with them immensely. Soon I was asked to teach a clinic. That made me laugh - me teaching? I finally agreed that I'd run one and they should pay me only if it turned out well."

That was 10 years ago, and Nettie has been instructing ever since. She uses her own style of natural horsemanship, blending techniques from a number of big-name trainers. "I learned from many talented horsemen," Nettie says. "I took the parts of their programs that worked for me and when there were holes in their programs, I went looking for answers. My goal is to help ordinary people work with horses."

Nettie is passionate about being a positive and caring force in the horse world. "What I'm dealing with isn't just training horses," she says emphatically. "I'm also dealing

with people's dreams. The people who just want to 'ride off into the sunset' have dreams that are just as important to them as the riders who want to become champion competitors in the show pen."

What exactly is natural horsemanship anyhow? That was easy for Nettie to answer. "Natural horsemanship is using understanding, communication and psychology to train a horse, not just fear, intimidation and mechanics. Sometimes we try to solve our problems by getting a bigger bit and forcing the horse to obey. Instead we should try to determine why he's behaving that way before responding, explains Nettie. "Often when I'm working with a horse with an issue, I realize that he's just saying 'Nettie, we need to spend more time on that.' Your horse's behaviours are giving you information. It's your job to listen to that."

Nettie says there are two main types of horses - extroverts and introverts. "Extroverts are dramatic and external. You always know how they feel about things. But introverts are polite and want to get along. Sometimes those types can be dangerous because we tend to ignore their reactions."

Nettie gives the example of how an introverted horse might communicate that he's uncomfortable being mounted. "At first the horse just raises his head when you get on. Perhaps he pins his ears, or swishes his tail, or maybe he just tenses. He might even turn his head towards the stirrup, but he's too polite to bite. If we don't listen to what he's saying, eventually

we're going to have problems. One day the horse suddenly realizes 'They aren't paying attention to me when I talk nicely, so now I'm going to have to shout!' And how does a horse shout? By bucking, rearing or running off. Most of the time we could have solved the problem if we'd have listened when he was communicating nicely to us instead of waiting until he explodes!"

For six years Nettie has been a guest speaker for various associations and colleges including three NAIT programs - Equine Studies, Animal Health Technology and Veterinarian Assistant. Recently she ran a "safe handling" seminar for NAIT. "Just because you work for a vet doesn't automatically mean you know the safest way to take a horse's temperature or worm it," Nettie explains.

Nettie, of Beaverlodge, AB, runs natural horsemanship clinics year round. "I take a maximum of six horse/rider pairs," she says. "Often I get people who are new to horses. If I'm not careful these people can lose their confidence and sell their animals. I don't want that to happen. Instead I want them to know they can ask me absolutely anything. And I want them to see that if they make a mistake, it can be fixed. To me the cardinal sin of training the horse is when you 'take the try out of the horse.' And the number two sin is when you 'take the try out of the person.' I don't want either of those things to happen at my clinics."

Nettie can be reached at [www.canadiannaturalhorsemanship.com](http://www.canadiannaturalhorsemanship.com). ✨

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