

# PAUL HUMPHREY

By Ingrid Edisen

Paul Humphrey grew up in a rodeo family with both of his parents involved in the sport. Despite going onto college, he realized he simply wanted to train horses. So, he opted to enter the world he was passionate about and began his true journey. Having ridden barrel horses as a youth and wanting to plumb the depths of training, he chose to pursue an apprenticeship in the working cow horse industry.

“They were the best ten years of my life,” he said. “I got a fundamental understanding of horsemanship.” The working cow horse trainers showed him the importance of explaining to a horse how to operate different parts of its body to function best.

Seven years ago, as he considered what he wanted to do as he got older, he decided to go back into barrel racing and apply his knowledge to that favorite sport of his. “The guys saw I had a natural ability to communicate to a horse and later to the riders themselves,” he explained. Paul devised a series of drills to apply to barrel racing to help competitors get consistent results.

Mentally stepping back for a moment, he took stock and was amazed how much his coaching business

has grown. “I never imagined this,” he said softly.

After producing three training DVD’s, two books and presently working on a larger, hardback book, Paul finds he is busy handling 32 clinics a year



all over the States.

“It is a whole lot easier this way,” he said. “Yes, you might be able to do a successful run but hopefully with some of what I can show you which is muscle memory for both you and the horse, you can do ten more consistent runs, not just one good one.”

“Yes, it takes time but in the end you’ll have a one hundred percent truly trained horse. You don’t have to depend on a bit. It won’t be a matter of grab and go.”

The ideal image Paul aims for is a rider on a horse going into a barrel with the horse’s nose slightly tipped in, towards the barrel, and not much contact on the reins with the rider in the middle of the saddle. He does not want to see a horse drop-

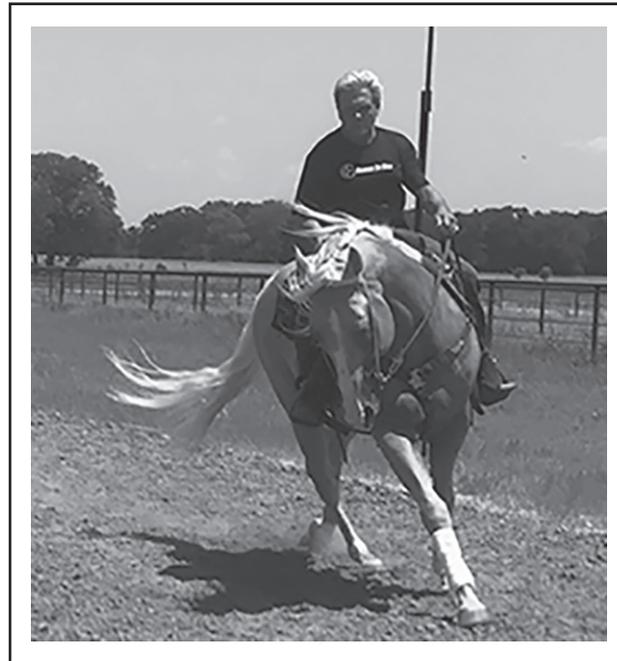
ping its shoulder to circle into a barrel. However, he realizes a photo only captures a moment in time. His drills emphasize balance for the pair—balance and control with the ultimate aim being precision. “I know it can’t be perfect once you add a lot of speed,” he said. But his drills help move the pair to work towards longevity, too.

“Of course once you have speed involved it may not be as fine tuned as that,” he observed. “I have had folks tell me that many of my drills remind them of dressage. You want a horse that knows how to use itself in performance—with consistency and solidarity—not hit or miss. The horse has to be able to flex and give and how to use its feet. The horse will like

its job better, too.”

Paul wants his clients to have less issues and set backs. “Cow horses know how to connect and use their bodies.” That is one of the goals he has for his barrel racing students. “It’s not just riding the face,” Paul said. “There is a whole lot behind the face—like much of the body, actually. You want a horse that knows how to work its body so it’s not a matter of just rip, pull, tug and hope you make it.” Barrel horses can make their runs in as little as 13 to 16 very important seconds. A top barrel horse can command a price tag of \$100,000 and all and up the scale of events there can be some serious money to be won at these events.

“You have the NFR



events, big futurities for three- and four-year-olds, plus end-of-the-year events,” Paul said. “There can be big added money...you could win as much as \$100,000 or just work at the level of the weekend jackpots. Seriously there are barrel racing events all over, so many different events to go to. It is not like they are held just once

shoulder, then ribs, to give in the face. Can the horse make transitions? Shorten its stride to get around a barrel? Can the horse maintain a consistent spacing around the barrel? Is the pair working as a team?” These are the sorts of concerns Paul addresses.

Currently he clinics with a three phase structure—designed to better a horse’s



a month. Plus there is a lot of sponsorship of these events. But it is not an easy sport.

“I’m training folks and horses how to handle the pressure and competition. I teach them muscle memory. Any athlete works out to perform under pressure. The horse and riders need to be ready physically and mentally to operate and do it well. That is why I have all these drills. It is a matter of muscle memory.”

“At first the student may be doing one drill such as the lope in a big circle but the entire time he or she is working on asking the horse to move its

ability to move laterally and collect and extend in motion. A student may sign on and start with Phase One and work up

to clinics that offer increasingly complex requests of the pair. Starting in January, 2018, he will offer what he calls “Ground Zero” which will feature new developments and be applicable to several other disciplines as well as colt starting.

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