

NEVADA JOE

NARHA's Official Horse Ambassador

By Doreen Shumpert

Eight-year-old Kaitlin, who has had the pleasure and honor of sitting atop the former “wild mustang” now known as Nevada Joe, summed it up best. After undergoing two heart transplants, she asked to meet him because of the strong connection they shared. Kaitlin felt she'd been given a second chance in life, just like Nevada Joe. The Wahl® Clipper Corporation, who first adopted him, arranged the meeting. And Nevada Joe filled yet another life with joy, motivation and promise.

As a symbol of the American West, Nevada Joe's ancestors, America's wild mustangs, were battle mounts for Native Americans and working partners for cowboys packing six-shooters and rifles. True to his heritage, Nevada Joe is still fighting battles, just ones of a different nature, and toting cowboy and cowgirl “sharpshooters.”

At Diane and Ernie Purcelli's Shooting Star Ranch Therapeutic Riding Program in Darby, MT, Nevada Joe helps children with numerous special needs confront the physical, emotional and/or mental challenges they face with courage, pride and hope. He also performs successfully in Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association (CMSA) events, a timed sport similar to barrel racing in which contestants shoot black-powder blank cartridges at balloons. For the past two years at WAHL Dare to Dream Shootouts, he has combined roles, giving students at NARHA centers a chance to compete by popping balloons with wooden dowels.

A Living Legend

In 2002, the Federal Bureau of Land Management rounded up a group of mustangs from the Fox and Lake Range herd in Nevada. Among them was a typical mustang—a tough-looking, stocky little bay, about 6 years old and around 14.2 hands. Not so typical were his huge, kind, soft eyes—windows to his incredible trainability.

Nevada Joe's initial training for 12 months (which was chronicled in *Horse Illustrated*) was with noted clinician Pat Parelli. Parelli spent the

year gentling and teaching him the basics. After that, Diane Purcelli, a part of the Wahl® Clipper Xtreme Team, turned him into a western competition horse. He was soon featured at Dodge World's Toughest Rodeo events and began running barrels. Goat tying at junior rodeos, most gymkhana events and team roping are also among his talents.

In 2007, Nevada Joe's accomplishments earned him induction into the Western States Wild Horse and Burro Hall of Fame. He's also been a Breyer® model horse, and Wahl® has



Jessica Beers of Missoula, MT, riding Nevada Joe at Diane and Ernie Purcelli's Shooting Star Ranch Therapeutic Riding Program in Darby, MT.

created a limited edition Nevada Joe clipper.

What matters most to Purcelli, though, is Nevada Joe's incredible disposition.

"Nevada Joe has such a kind eye," said Purcelli. "He's very trusting, extremely trainable, and smart, and he retains what he learns so well. There is nothing he won't do. That's the neatest thing about him. And he's fun to try new things on because he's so good about everything."

Nevada Joe Becomes a NARHA Ambassador

These days, being good at about "everything" encompasses a lot. Based on Diane and Ernie's years of experience as NARHA Certified Registered Level Instructors, they noticed early on that the gelding's kindness and trainability would make him a perfect EAAT candidate. To qualify, a horse must pass a center's stringent testing. Not surprisingly, Nevada Joe passed these tests with flying colors, and soon became a favorite among the students.

"He gives back," explained Purcelli. "No words can describe how much he gives. He was rescued and saved, and now he's doing the same."

Since then Nevada Joe has been on the road every month of the year serving as an ambassador for NARHA. While Joe does his magic, Diane and Ernie educate the public about the efficacy and diversity of activities available through EAAT. They share the importance of seeking out a NARHA member center and letting people know how they can locate a center in their hometown.

Children and adults far and wide call and ask to meet Nevada Joe, ride him and visit him at events. He's featured at horse expos, schools, camps and equine affairs, and his upcoming

schedule includes cancer and muscular dystrophy camps.

"Recently at an open horse show, a boy that competed on him at an event two years ago remembered him and was so happy to see him," Purcelli said.

Nevada Joe also carried a young lady with cerebral palsy to a placing in a regular open gymkhana. A perfect gentleman, the gelding remained as calm and steady as ever.

Equine Assisted Mounted Shooting

Meanwhile, Nevada Joe also became a solid mounted shooting horse for anybody who needed to use him, including Diane, Ernie and their granddaughter.

Naturally, Nevada Joe's adaptability and consistency as a mounted shooting and EAAT horse made him a superstar at the WAHL Dare to Dream shootouts. In these competitions, competitors are assisted and led by a ground crew as they ride up to pop balloons. Nevada Joe has carried several riders through the pattern at the CMSA national and world finals.

"No horse handles this as well as he does," Purcelli said. "He just knows the kids need him. Instinctively, he's so wonderful and seems to know how to care for them

and who he has aboard."

"No words can describe how many people he has touched, their expressions, the joy in their faces when they pop those balloons and their excitement in meeting the cowboys and cowgirls," said Purcelli. "It's overwhelming."

"It's just such a neat irony that an American living legend is giving back so much to America," Purcelli added. "He will continue to promote awareness of the astonishing benefits of equine assisted activities."

Doreen Shumpert, an award-winning equine freelance writer with a degree in technical journalism and a concentration in equine science, specializes in event coverage and how-to training articles. Doreen can be reached at Doreen@x2dhorses.com. For more information on Nevada Joe, or to contact Diane Purcelli, go to www.nevadajoe.net.

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