

## Van Hargis works magic with horses

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World-renowned horse whisperer Van Hargis challenged Kim Loe of Hermosa to "dare your horse to be good." After a two-day clinic with Hargis at the 2004 Central States Fair, Loe's horse has not been a problem.

Other area horse people will have an opportunity to realize similar success during a two-day seminar with Hargis at this year's Black Hills Stock Show and Rodeo. Rapid City is just one of the many stops on Hargis' calendar this year. Another notable event is his participation in the Road to the Horse Colt Starting Challenge where he will again compete with other top-name horse trainers.

Hargis, who lives in Texas, started riding when he was 4 years old. His first paid horse training job came just eight years later, when he was 12, and he has been doing it ever since. In the early 1990s, his focus began to include people and their horses, and Loe said she could not be happier with what he has taught her.

"I brought a 3-year-old daughter of Highbrow Hickory, one of the top cutting horse stallions in the nation, to his clinic" Loe said. "She had a problem of wanting to buck, and she was a little cinchy when you went to ride her. It didn't matter how much you rode her." Loe said she began lunging her horse to work the buck out of her. Hargis told her that by doing that, she was actually encouraging the horse to buck. "He showed me how to work through that. She no longer needs to be lunged down ahead of time. He showed me how to put the mare right to work, and she will forget about thinking that she has to buck. I could not have taken a better horse to the clinic because she's been fine ever since. It was one of the most informative clinics I have ever been to," she said.

Mary London, chairperson of the Black Hills Stock Show horse committee, first saw Hargis four years ago at a horse event in Billings, Mont.

"I watched him for a day up there and felt he would work well with our stock show," London said. "I think the spectators will learn a more effective way of communicating with their horses and become happier horsemen." She said Hargis demonstrates methods to break down difficult maneuvers in more simple steps. "Van doesn't use any gimmicks. No trickery. Just a common-sense approach to working with horses," she said. "We were impressed with his methods, his techniques and his ability to communicate with his participants and spectators at his clinic. He sincerely wants people to learn. He profits from the satisfaction of seeing his spectators and their horses go on to success."

London said they had between 500 and 600 people attend the first day of last year's clinic and 300 the second. She added that Hargis is also going to judge the Ranch Horse Competition Sunday and Monday. "He likes it up here," she said.

Hargis echoed that sentiment. "I have been to Rapid City and the Black Hills area a few times now, and I can honestly say that the area is one of my favorites," he said. "There are a lot of horses and horse enthusiasts in this part of the country, and the ranching culture and heritage runs deep here. It makes me feel good and at home to be around those who have a respect and appreciation for both the culture and the heritage of the West. The horse is a magnificent tool that brings us together to celebrate that culture/heritage.

"I don't really claim to have a particular style," Hargis said. "In fact, though my goal with each colt may remain consistent - to get a saddle and me on him for the first time without a mess - my method changes to suit each individual horse. My style is not different at all from traditional. In fact, what I do has been around for literally thousands of years."

Because of the demands put on our time and our movement away from tradition, culture and heritage, Hargis said, we think we can change or sacrifice the ideas of the horse. "In fact, we should see the horse for what it is - though it is adaptable, it has in its behavior changed very little. It's still a horse that thinks about nothing more than now. It lives in the minute and strives to do one thing, survive. If we spend only a little time to see things from its perspective, then the training thing comes easy. The horse simply wants everything to be good and easy. Horses don't like conflict or stress, mental or physical. The more I consider this and the more I adhere to this and the more I realize that this is the way it has been for the horse throughout its existence, then the easier it is for me to adapt to what the horse needs and wants in order to get what I need and want from the horse. Thank God it is understanding and forgiving and always responsive to the same understanding and kindness."

Hargis said his most common motto is "training from the horse's perspective" but he does frequently use the "dare your horse to be good" quote. Actually, throughout his presentations, Hargis uses several quotes that he coined or learned from others.

"These quotes are always intended to help us see things open mindedly. I also like to use quotes as they are easy to remember and oftentimes applicable to both our horsemanship and our humanship," Hargis said.

He said he hopes to start a colt as part of this year's demonstration. "Hopefully the staff there will have arranged for a colt to start," he said. "I really enjoy it and take a lot of pride in being the first to step onto a good young horse. What an honor it is to be the first. It also does my heart good to know that I did my best to make that first big step in a young horse's life as uneventful as possible. Again, what an honor."

For certain clinics, Hargis uses his own horses. At the stock show, he'll work with horses he has never met before.

"Using one of my own keeps me out of trouble," he said. "If I borrow one, I must adapt to the horse and the level of training and experience of the horse. I have learned over the years that everybody has a different definition of a broke horse. I think that most of the presentations I will be doing at the stock show will be with either green horses, horses with problems or colts yet to be started under saddle."

Loe, who dared her horse to be good, recommends the Hargis clinic.

"He just gets your confidence built up," Loe said. "If I'm a little nervous or something when I go to get on a horse I'm not comfortable with, I think of his motto, and so far it's worked for me. I think so highly of him."