

Catching Up with *Marilyn Camarillo*

The seven-time National Finals Rodeo barrel racer is still teaching the trade.

By Julie Mankin



Marilyn Camarillo gives horsemanship pointers to college students at LCC's outdoor facility.

It might seem an unlikely place for her to turn up, but it's not hard to see why Marilyn Camarillo is living in a small town on the southeastern Colorado plains.

The veteran competitor, trainer and teacher spent nearly 30 years in California and had been living in Oregon for the past few years before Lamar (Colo.) Community College finally enticed her to head up its equine business management course.

The school provides degrees in horse training, with certificates in starting colts, and recently opened a brand-new 40,000-square-foot indoor facility that includes classrooms, a demonstration lab, a 210-by-90-foot indoor arena and 95 horse stalls.

Regardless of the bells and whistles or accolades about her career, and despite the bad hip that prevents her from riding anymore, Camarillo, now 60, is still focused on one thing—horsemanship.

Simplicity Reigns

Raised in Missouri riding English and jumping horses, Camarillo had her Women's Professional Rodeo Association permit by the age of 14 and began starting barrel horses early. She competed at every National Finals Rodeo from 1971-76, and then returned for a last hurrah in 1992.

Camarillo trained all three horses that carried her at the Finals, starting with Eugene—an unregistered, 12-year-old steer-tripping horse that she picked up after a barn fire in Oklahoma. She bought him because he was in her price range when she was in college, studying, as she puts it, “how I could get to the NFR.”

Ever the modest trainer, Camarillo points out that she's been lucky, that you don't make the really good horses, you fall into them.

“Eugene wasn't the fastest horse alive,” Camarillo recalls, “but he would always get you a check.”



Charmayne James and Marilyn Camarillo pictured together at the 1992 NFR.

Her next ace was a hot-blooded Depth Charge-bred gelding named Porky that she picked up as a 3-year-old and was running at the NFR in Oklahoma City less than two years later.

Sugar was her final NFR gelding, one she also bought as a 3-year-old and that carried her favorite bloodline, Sugar Bars.

There are a few other horses with Camarillo's stamp on them that have been to rodeo's Super Bowl. Remember Ruth Haislip's sorrel mare, Scarlett? She's one, and Camarillo also had Tami Purcell's grey horse Elliott for four months in the early days when he had a tendency to drop his front end too much. Between Camarillo and Purcell, he was running at the Finals the next year.

Camarillo says she simply taught Elliot “how to go in there and stand up.” Her training philosophy might sound simple, but she says most people make it too complicated. For instance, she simply wants an anticipator to lope toward the fence until she tells him to turn.

“Horses that are anticipating just want to go near that stupid round thing,” she says. “That kind of horse is zeroed in on the barrel and not listening to the rider. Change his train of thought and make him look back at the rider. You're Lord and master, captain of the ship. Take the control away from the horse.”

Another crucial aspect of Camarillo's training regimen was to take her time with a horse. Charmayne James has said that one

of the greatest things she's heard on building speed and confidence in horses came from Camarillo, whom she quotes as saying horses don't really grow up until they're 10.

“I've always said I think they should have a futurity for a 10-year-old,” Camarillo says. “I like to work them some and turn them out. It's really hard to keep a barrel horse liking the game. It's a boring game. It's not like cutting or roping.”

According to Camarillo, over-training is a common problem today. It's easy, she says, to forget that a horse that's doing really well is still only 4, so you need to force yourself to quit training occasionally and let a horse be a horse, too.

For years, Camarillo trained between 1 and 20 horses a day. When she got them to where they knew the game, she'd stay away from the barrels. She had a half-mile track and she'd just gallop or maybe rope or those horses instead of taking them through the pattern.

Teaching Fun

Camarillo conducted her first clinic in the early 1970s and still enjoys it, having done three this year, with the latest being held last month in Sanger, Calif.

Throughout 30 years, she says she's seen barrel horse quality skyrocket and horsemanship suffer, probably in part due to the sheer numbers of newcomers to the game.



Camarillo shows students the anatomy of an equine foot as part of her equine business management curriculum.

The biggest horsemanship need she sees today is lack of "feel," or not being able to read a horse. Some people are born with a lot of feel, and some may never get it, but she says to really win something, you've got to find it.

You've also got to spend time in the saddle. At a Camarillo clinic, students are on a horse seven to nine hours a day.

"By spending that kind of time, people end up getting their horse ridden down," she says. "They get more feel for the horse, and at the end of the second day, they say, 'Wow, I can't believe he improved that much."

"Putting more time in on the horse means you know him better, and you'll improve. It's not just 30 minutes and put him up."

Camarillo spends all her clinic time one-on-one with people, and the door is open for anyone to ride up and pick her brain during a lesson. Still, she tries to prevent information overload.

"You can't ride exactly like me," she says. "Pick what you need from different clinics, and take away what works for you. You can learn from the biggest idiot in the world [what you don't want to do]."

But don't necessarily listen to everybody.

"Sometimes, instead of working on a problem and listening to someone they respect, people will listen to everybody that walks by," she says. "You think that horse isn't confused? It's overload. Work on one thing first, and then work on that other thing."

Today, at LCC, Camarillo teaches two or three courses in the classroom and two riding classes.

"I try to teach in a hands-on style using layman's terms," she says. "If the kids stay in the horse business, I'm teaching them stuff they need to know, like what 'sidebone' is and what causes splints and bog spavin."

In the Horse Training Management class, students start 2-year-olds that have never been under saddle, but Camarillo teaches Equine Business Management.

"A lot of people aren't hand enough to ride colts, but they want to be in the horse business in breeding or boarding or giving lessons," she says. "I get the kids who just want to better their riding skills."

Camarillo is having fun, and she always plays life by ear. But one thing's for sure—she'll keep teaching.

"I really enjoy these kids," she says. "Talk



Want More Marilyn?

For more on barrel racing clinics by Marilyn Camarillo, visit sebbarelhorses.com or call Sandi Biewald at (208) 420-1740. For more information about Lamar Community College, visit lamarcc.edu.

about keeping you young. They'll do anything to get around what they need to do. They're just like a colt. We laugh and joke now and then that I might need to tie one's head around."


If she has as much success with her students as she did with her colts, they have nothing to worry about.

Julie Mankin is a veteran BHN freelance contributor. E-mail comments on this article to bhneditorial@cowboypublishing.com.


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Traffic Guy

2004 Buckskin Stallion




Ridden By:
Xenna Squires




Clay Logan

<p>Frenchmans Guy A Leading Barrel Futurity Sire; Progeny Earnings In Excess of \$1 Million</p> <p>Evening Traffic sl 93</p>	<p>Sun Frost Proven Performance Sire Progeny Earnings \$1.8 Million</p> <p>Frenchmans Lady Progeny Earnings \$185,000</p> <p>Dash Thru Traffic Progeny Earnings \$5.5 Million Race Earnings \$1,056,943</p> <p>Bunny Eye Race Earnings \$17,990</p>	<p>Duc's Jack Frost Prissy Cline</p> <p>Laughing Boy AA Lightning Bar AAA x Bonnie A</p> <p>Casey's Ladylove</p> <p>First Down Dash sl 105</p> <p>Lady Meter Reader</p> <p>Bunny Bid sl 104</p> <p>Fili Baby sl 88</p>
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