



# Work Ethic

**IT'S LATE NOVEMBER**, two days before the start of Lamar Community College's Thanksgiving break. The 60 students in the Colorado school's equine program file into a state-of-the-art classroom just steps away from a cavernous indoor arena. The jingling of spurs quiets as the students, evenly split between freshmen and sophomores, take their seats for the last official class of the semester. Few students speak, and the room holds an air of anticipation—mild anxiety, even.

The freshmen have spent the previous three months starting colts under saddle; sophomores have worked with more-seasoned horses, prepping them for competition in performance events. Tomorrow, the horses' owners—primarily ranchers and horse breeders from the Rocky Mountain and Plains states—will arrive on campus for an end-of-semester exhibition, in which the students will demonstrate the progress made with the horses in the preceding 90 days.

Given the variables at work, the show, now just hours away, arguably will be one of the most stressful final exams imaginable.

The group settles and the students turn their attention to J.J. Rydberg, the equine program's manager, who is seated at the front of the room. Before joining the Lamar faculty, Rydberg spent 15 years as a professional calf roper, and 16 years training Quarter Horses for cutting and calf roping, showing two horses to world championships in the latter event. Speaking to the students, he keeps the agenda low-key, offering reminders about tomorrow's schedule and dress code. Reading the mood in the room, he also gives some last-minute reassurance that, after a semester of work, the group is prepared for what's to come.

"You're ready for this," he tells the students. "Just show your horses."

On that note, the students exit the room and make their way to the arena for one last afternoon of riding.

**LOCATED ON COLORADO'S SOUTHEASTERN PLAINS**, Lamar, a remote farming community of 9,000, is painfully short on landmarks. On the north end of town, motorists are greeted by a sizeable feedlot, prompting all but the uninitiated to crank up their car windows before being overwhelmed by what cattlemen refer to as "the smell of money." Then there's the two-story motel where Oprah Winfrey and her entourage reportedly once overnighted while on a cross-country road trip. Word among the locals is that gunfire at a nearby target range prompted the Chicago-based group to make an early departure for the Kansas state line.

Lamar does boast at least one bona fide landmark, though. A massive red barn, the epicenter of the college's equine curriculum, unofficially marks the town's southern edge. Since its start in 1973, the program, nationally known for turning out some of the horse industry's most talented young trainers, has kept this otherwise inconspicuous community prominently etched on the horse-world map.

Offering two majors—equine business management, and horse training and management—Lamar attracts students from across North America. They're drawn by the opportunity to start colts, internships with the country's top trainers and breeders, and the availability of scholarships, partially funded by fees paid by the owners of horses loaned to the school. A recent \$1.9 million upgrade to facilities and classrooms has added to the college's appeal, giving students more space in which to work and a modern environment for classroom instruction in subjects such as equine anatomy, nutrition and reproduction.

Lamar also boasts an impressive record of helping its graduates launch their careers, drawing upon the networks of faculty members Rydberg, Marilyn Camarillo and Jason Kravig—all veteran horse trainers—and Colorado rancher Brad Malone. According to Rydberg, every Lamar graduate who's

wanted a job in the horse industry has landed one, regardless of economic conditions.

Most valuable to students, though, is the work ethic the program fosters. As vital as classroom education is in preparing young horsemen for careers in the contemporary equine industry, it's still that work ethic that separates gifted horsemen from the rest of the crowd. At Lamar, success or failure reflects not only on the student, but also on the school, and, of course, factors heavily into a young horse's future. Learning the importance of showing up at the barn on time—every day, in all weather—and putting in the hours and sweat each horse requires is the most indispensable lesson each student takes from his or her experience at Lamar. On show days, that work ethic begins to offer real payback, as steps skipped or rushed over the preceding weeks can come back to haunt a rider.

**NOVEMBER'S SHOW DAY** begins early at Lamar's outdoor roping pen. Every header-heeler permutation among the sophomore ropers makes a run, then onlookers, students and horses reconvene in the indoor arena. There, sophomores demonstrate their horses' skills in cutting, reining and barrel racing, and each freshman takes a turn in the arena, completing a complex reining pattern.

Horseback work ends midday, and trios comprising a student, a horse and the horse's owner begin to form along the arena rail. For most students, Lamar has provided their first experiences training horses for "the public." As riders interact with owners, answering questions about their horses' emerging strengths and weaknesses, that aforementioned work ethic again comes into play. Having spent hours in the saddle, getting to know these horses better than any previous handler might've, the students have gained a familiarity that allows them to offer specific details on the horses' progression under saddle and informed opinions on what the owners' next steps should be.

If a student has taken any shortcuts in the past several weeks, it can mean an awkward conversation.

The event concluded, owners load their horses into trailers for their trips home, and students attend to last-minute details—packing and stall cleaning—before starting their holiday break. The previous day's anxiety forgotten, it's a time for reflection on the semester that's ended and the semester that's to come. The new year will mean a fresh group of horses and unfamiliar challenges. As the Lamar campus empties, the only thing its equine-program students know for sure is that meeting those challenges will mean embracing the work they require. 🐾

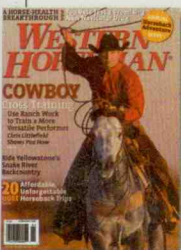
*Lamar Community College is one of several schools whose equine programs are highlighted in "Ride & Learn," an online guide for college-bound equestrians. Find it at [westernhorseman.com](http://westernhorseman.com).*

### Western Horseman Earns Two Folio Awards

THIS PAST DECEMBER, *Folio*, a trade publication for the magazine and media industry, announced the winners in its 2009 Eddie Awards, which recognize excellence in magazine editorial. In the category of best single article in a consumer enthusiast magazine, *Western Horseman* earned a silver Eddie Award for the September 2008 story "Trade Secrets," by A.J. Mangum. *Western Horseman's* February 2009 edition



won a bronze Eddie Award in the category of best issue of a consumer enthusiast magazine. The awards contest, the largest in the magazine-publishing industry, drew more than 2,000 entries last year. Other winners in the consumer magazine division included



*Field & Stream, Food & Wine, Fortune, Golf Digest, Newsweek and Outdoor Life.*



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