

Easy Does It

Dr. Robert Miller and a few of his closest friends host a symposium centered on the principle that lightness is the essence of good horsemanship.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARRELL DODDS

YOU COULD FORGIVE VISITORS to Arthur Perry's

Intrepid Farms in Santa Ynez, California, for thinking they'd pulled into the wrong place. Greeted by strains of country music, the smell of cowboy coffee brewing over an open fire and the sizzle of bacon frying next to Dutch ovens full of sourdough biscuits, it appeared that this was another posh open house, typical of the upscale breeding farms this horse-oriented community is famous for.

Any concerns were laid to rest, however, when they were greeted by event volunteers who directed them to park in a large, freshly mowed pasture. Signs fluttered in the breeze announcing that they had indeed arrived at the second annual Light Hands Horsemanship symposium, hailed by many natural horsemanship aficionados as one of the most innovative learning experiences since the movement began more than 30 years ago.

According to Dr. Robert Miller, one of the event's organizers, he and a group of American horse trainers, equine veterinarians and behaviorists were in Brazil in January 2006 to participate in the first international natural horsemanship symposium when the subject of lightness came up.

"While lightness represents the essence of horsemanship," says Miller, "we realized there wasn't an opportunity for people



The stars of the show, from left: Jon Ensign, Eitan Beth-Halachmy, Anne Judd, Lester Buckley and Dr. Robert Miller.

in the States to get together, interact with master horsemen and explore the topic in detail. After a little urging, we decided to do something about it and this symposium is the result."

Miller, who is best known for developing and refining what has come to be known as foal imprinting, has established a reputation for being one of the most knowledgeable equine behaviorists of our time. Today, foal imprinting is considered by many to be the very foundation of a kinder and more effective way of communicating and training horses.

ONCE THE FORMAT for Light Hands was established, Tom Spalding, owner of Spalding Fly Predators, agreed to sponsor the event. Rick Lamb, Miller's long-time friend and co-author of Miller's *The Revolution In Horsemanship*, volunteered to emcee and provide commentary. Perry,

who had tagged along on the trip to Brazil, offered his farm as the venue.

"When we came up with this idea," says Miller, "we knew we wanted to provide a friendly, intimate experience, where everyone could interact with each other and where there was plenty of time after each presentation for people to share ideas and learn from one another. Rather than having people leave the facility for meals, we brought in a chuck wagon and provided all the meals here so people could stay and socialize."

This year's gathering attracted a mixture of novice, intermediate and expert horsemen and -women from 16 states and three foreign countries. In addition to Miller, seminar presenters included Eitan Beth-Halachmy, Lester Buckley, Jon Ensign and Anne Judd.

Following the opening morning's breakfast, Miller introduced each of the presenting clinicians.

"The revolution in horsemanship has produced no finer teachers than the people you will be watching work with horses this weekend," he announced. "These masters of subtlety will demonstrate what can be done with soft hands and quiet methods of Western, English and classical horsemanship. They will demonstrate how to achieve complete respect and compliance without producing fear in the horse.

"One of the essential themes of this natural horsemanship revolution," con-