

Hearing Aids

By Pete Dillingham

Ed Ritter was born and raised in Greenville Michigan in the early 1900's. He was the second oldest of four boys and when his youngest brother was born, Ed's mother died during childbirth. This was a perplexing problem for Ed's father who was the undisputed horse authority in the region, but had limited child-rearing skills. The talented senior Ritter could buy and train rank mustangs, log timber and build roads with horses, use his teams to haul blocks of ice from the frozen winter lakes to "ice houses" and later to "ice boxes" (refrigerators) during the hot summers.....but raise four mischievous boys? Ed's father did raise his boys to be quality adults..... using the same principles needed to raise and train good horses.

The elder Ritter always spoke in soft tones. When he asked for something, he would say (in a low voice), "Ed would you please get some firewood?" If the young Ritter didn't respond, his father would (in Ed's words) "cuff me behind the ear". Contrary to thought, this would improve Ed's hearing immensely.

This Ritter history is applicable to our desire to become good horse persons. First the horse must understand the signals ("Ed would you please get some firewood?"). Next the request should be as subtle as a whisper (soft leg, shifting of weight, sensitive rein, low voice). If the rascal ignores the signal, a swift consequence (a backup, harder leg, circles, firmer reining technique) should follow. If the reinforcement is not quick and firm enough, the rider actually encourages the brat to travel down its rebellious path. Dispensing the proper discipline will develop a horse's sensitivity to quiet signals.... and improving its hearing.

Until Ed died (1987), he had an old photo of his dad on the television set. When Ed spoke about his father, it was with respect and affection. The elder Ritter never failed to balance his discipline with love. Ed and his siblings were all well mannered, caring persons...because their father raised them like horses.