



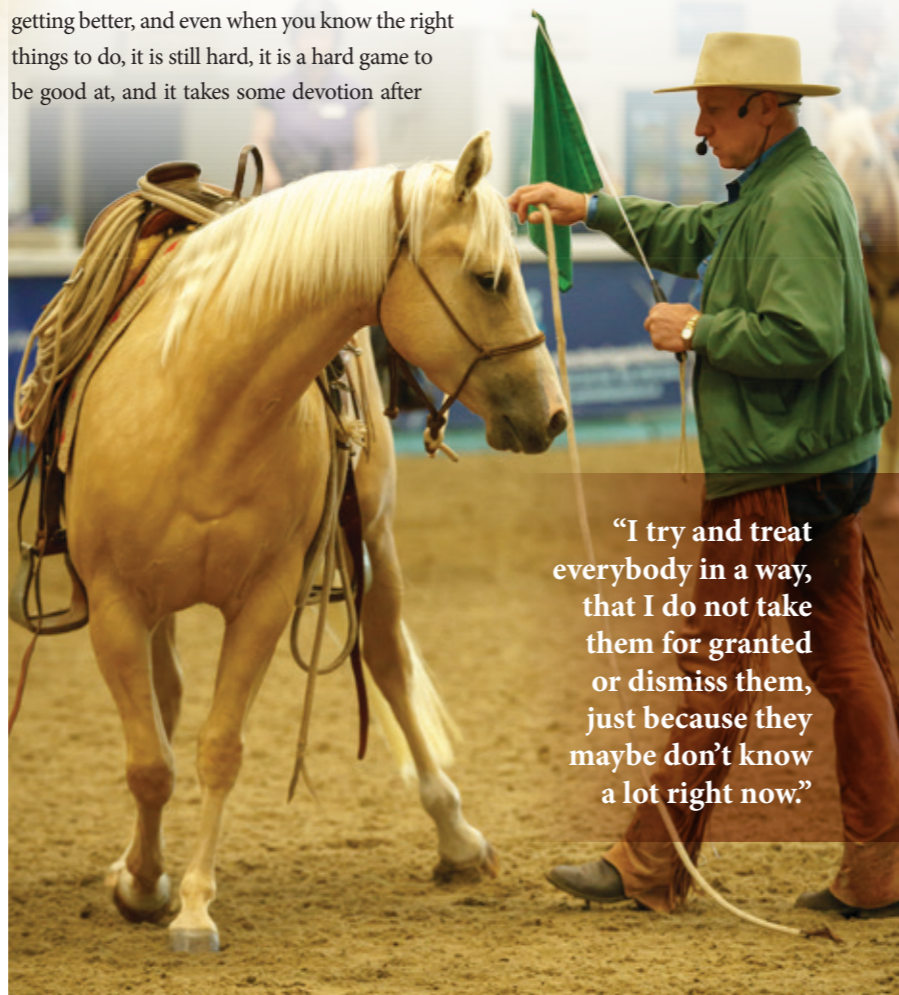
BUCK BRANNAMAN

An interview with

We witnessed horsemanship of the highest calibre during the Buck Brannaman UK clinic earlier this summer, organised by Total Horsemanship. Our own Kate McLaughlin had the privilege of speaking with the man himself in a special interview.

Buck you have a core teaching philosophy which you've advocated over the years, but do you feel that each time you come back, you develop as a teacher yourself as well, with the amount of clinics you teach across the globe?

Well, that's been an evolution over time, this is my thirty-seventh year since starting with the first clinic I ever did, and that's been constantly changing over time. I still try to get better, I don't want to rest on my laurels you know, I want to try to improve on what I'm doing, to be more productive, to get more accomplished with people. It is important for me to get results, as I couldn't keep on doing this if I felt like people weren't getting much out of it, you know. I would have gotten discouraged a long time ago, but my students are getting better, and even when you know the right things to do, it is still hard, it is a hard game to be good at, and it takes some devotion after



"I try and treat everybody in a way, that I do not take them for granted or dismiss them, just because they maybe don't know a lot right now."

"The whole thing is an art, and I approach it like an art, with the respect and dignity that it deserves."

Buck Brannaman needs little introduction. A gifted teacher and horseman, we were lucky enough to have him visit with us again in June, at Aintree International Arena. Riders of all ages, on a variety of horses, spent three days learning from Buck, in what can only be considered horsemanship nirvana. I was fortunate enough to spend some time talking with Buck after the first day of the clinic. Candid, warm and humble, Buck shares his thoughts with me about life and horses.

Welcome, it is fantastic to have you back in the UK. This is your third visit now, how are you finding things upon your return this time?

Well you know, like anywhere that I have been a few times, I start to accumulate a few more friends each time I go, so for me that's what makes me come back, because for me once I've seen somewhere, I don't come back for the scenery. I live in Wyoming, people go there for the scenery, but I go for the horses and for the people and that's what keeps me coming back.

I leave town to get handy, but it is nice to see the results, it looks a lot different to me compared to the first time I came.

There are familiar faces again at this clinic, who have attended in previous years, have you seen a progression in your students here?

Oh yeah, absolutely, absolutely, I remember where some of them were the first time I came and to look at them now, it's cool.

As you've mentioned, you have been giving clinics for thirty-seven years now, what drives you to keep teaching, to keep it fresh and committed to the evolution of your craft? What is it that brings you back time after time?

I love horses. I really want things to be better for the horse and for people to understand the horses. I really care about people, I'd like people to enjoy the horses and be safe and both can win, the horse can be safe and the person can too if they find a way to work with each other. I still love what I do, granted two or three days ago when I was getting ready to come to the UK, I was reluctant to come. I was home, and I hadn't been home since February, and I thought to myself, gosh, dang, what the heck were you thinking? You're going to England, and you've finally got home after 10,000 miles of travelling in the States, but once I get here, and I get started, and I feel the energy of everybody and the appreciation for all of this, then it takes me about five minutes to think, glad I came.

It's an art form in itself, isn't it? You are exceptional with horses, but also it is rare to find someone like yourself who is also exceptional with people. Trying to teach people to be handier without doing a disservice to the horse must be a challenge, as humans I imagine can be trickier to teach than horses?

Yeah, they can be, as humans are more complicated in terms of their psychological make up, but the whole thing is an art, and I approach it like an art, with the respect and dignity that it deserves. I tell people, I get it, that for some of you the horse thing is an activity - like bowling or something, and it doesn't make them bad or any less a person, but I have to approach it as an art form, as that is how I see it. Therefore, in order to give everybody a fair shake, I approach everybody with the assumption that they too want to become an artist with horses, and if they fall short and don't, well that's ok, but I don't want to sell them short, and not try as hard with some people, that maybe I pre-judge them, thinking they may not amount to much, as you just don't know what thirty or forty years of being devoted to this can turn them into, they may start out pretty green with me, and end up maybe toward the end of their life having way more to offer than I was ever able to achieve. So, I want to be the one to help them along and not to crush them, just because they are green and don't know very much. I try and treat everybody in a way, that I do not take them for granted or dismiss them, just because they maybe don't know a lot right now.

How do you feel the horses have been instrumental for you personally Buck?

I can't even imagine what I would have been as a person without the horses to teach me about life, how I might try to live my life, I can't imagine it would have been anything good. They have taught me so much I could never pay the horse back for what it has done for me in my life and I will always fall short, but I'm working at it.

What does the future hold, are you still going to be doing clinics in the years to come?

Well, right now kinda where I am, I don't really have any plans of doing much different to what I am doing. But, I was talking to friends here tonight that there will come a time where I probably won't travel internationally anymore, because I have more than I can ever do in the States, and it is a sacrifice to come to the UK, Australia, New Zealand, or Italy. It's not handy for me. I go because of the people that I know, and there will come a time, even though I hate the thought of it, that I will just say you know, I have had all the travelling I can do overseas. I've travelled around the world enough,



I understand why people want to live in America, it's pretty clear to me. It's not that there are not a lot of wonderful places where other people live in the world, but I do love living where I live, especially out west. Without the horse however, I would never have seen all the places I've seen or done all of the things that I have done. The horse has made all of that possible for me.

I cannot really describe how it feels to be around Buck, apart from to say he has an energy that immediately puts you at ease, and makes you feel comfortable. Despite the level of skill and dedication he clearly possesses, Buck exudes humility and humanity on a plane like no other. You can see why horses respond to him so naturally and seek the comfort he offers them. It was such a pleasure to speak with Buck, he is truly committed not just to the horse, but also to helping us become better for our horses and ourselves.

I would like to thank Mr Brannaman for taking the time to talk to me, I will be forever grateful for your generosity. I would also like to thank clinic sponsor Tina Griffen of Total Horsemanship for organising, once again, an amazing clinic. Your hard work and dedication do not go unnoticed!

Of course, there would be no clinic without the riders - the dedicated students who have travelled from all over the UK, Ireland and Europe to spend three days under the tutelage of Buck. Thank you for putting yourselves out there, in order for us all to be taught through you. I'm sure the lessons learned at Aintree are still being worked on, now you are all home.

Want to know what it is really like to ride with Buck? Read on to find out what one student learned at Aintree, and how that lesson continues to influence her horsemanship.

For information about future UK clinics, visit www.totalhorsemanship.com ❖