

# A HORSEMAN *with Some* History

**Jack Brainard nears his ninth decade  
pursuing a new discipline, writing a new book  
and, always, riding the horses he loves.**

**Story and photos by Holly Clanahan**

JACK BRAINARD'S FACE BREAKS INTO A wide grin as his horse, Calboy King Fifty, canters in place beneath him. His expression lights up even more as the little gelding begins changing leads nearly on the spot, every few strides.

"These are the things that are possible," the 89-year-old horseman tells his rapt clinic-goers, most of whom are also grinning broadly at the display.

Jack's the kind of guy who, when he rides a demonstration, you watch, and who, when he begins talking about the secrets of horsemanship, you listen.

His resume is, indeed, an impressive – and a lengthy – one. Early this year, he was putting the finishing touches

on a new book, an autobiography titled "Jack Brainard: A Horseman Remembers His First 90 Years."

Sure to be included are his experiences as one of the original organizers of the National Reining Horse Association and the Stock Horse of Texas, or SHOT, program, which was a predecessor of the AQHA versatility ranch horse classes. Jack also founded the Southwest Reining Horse Association and its futurity, and he helped form the AQHA state affiliates in Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. He helped start the equine program at the University of Wisconsin-River



Falls, the achievement he is the proudest of because it has given so many young people a leg up in the industry.

He has also been an award-winning rodeo stock contractor (with great behind-the-chutes stories), a longtime judge, trainer and breeder, and the recipient of a number of honorifics, including an induction into the NRHA hall of fame and the 2010 Western Horseman award.

For the last few years, he has been consumed with the pursuit of western dressage, a marriage of classical dressage principles and western traditions – hence the reason “Calboy” can canter in place, perform a beautiful piaffe (essentially a trot in place) and also dig into the ground for a sliding stop or a reining spin. (See related story, Page 22.)

It’s a treat to watch Jack ride, but it’s just about as much fun to sit down with him for a visit. We’ll let you listen in:

### **On the answer we’re all looking for:**

“IF I COULD DESCRIBE THE SUPREME secret of true horsemanship in one sentence, it would be: being able to show the horse how and

when and where to place his feet. That’s the answer, and this is what we’re about (in western dressage). This is what we’re doing in the piaffe, this is what we’re doing in the half-pass, the turn on the back hand, the turn on the forehand, we’re showing that horse how and when and where to place his feet.”

### **On a horse’s “must-haves”:**

“STRAIGHTNESS IS EVERYTHING; COLLECTION IS EVERYTHING. IF you have a collected horse who is straight, you’ve got a much better chance of doing anything you want with him. A great horseman of 300 years ago said the secret of all horsemanship is to keep a horse calm, forward and straight, and I think that’s right. When a horse is straight, it’s the only time he’s in perfect balance. When he’s straight, he’s probably carrying an equal amount of weight on all four feet, and this is what keeps him balanced. ... We must remember that as a horse is just standing around, he carries much more weight on his front end than he does his back end. For this horse to perform correctly, we’ve got to transfer that load off the front end to his back end. That’s why collection is so important. You just must have it doing anything with a horse. It’s the one prerequisite of doing anything with a performance horse.”

### **On good horses and late bloomers:**

“I’VE RIDDEN SOME NICE HORSES, PROBABLY MORE NICE HORSES than anyone. One great horse I rode, I didn’t train him but I rode him quite a lot, was a horse called Sonora Monkey, and a close friend of mine brought this horse out of Texas, and he was by a horse called Lauro, a King Ranch horse (and son of Wimpy), and one year, he was the world champion calf roping horse, the world champion reining horse and the reserve world champion barrel racing horse, all in the same year. I don’t think any horse has ever done that. He was one of the great horses.”



Calboy is “sort of an old man’s horse. He’s a tremendously nice dispositioned horse, and he tries to do everything I show him. I broke into this cowboy dressage with him, not knowing a whole lot about cowboy dressage. But he does some nice things, and I’m pretty high on him. He just does some things the average using horse doesn’t. He changes leads every stride



Jack Brainard asks “Calboy” to do one-tempi lead changes, or lead changes every stride.

and lopes in the pirouette, and he can do the piaffe, and he is still a nice-handling horse. He could almost be a competitive reining horse if I wanted to get after him.

“He hasn’t had a lot of work, because of my heart surgery (a quadruple bypass in November 2009, from which Jack has recovered wonderfully). He missed out on eight months (in late 2009 and early 2010). He’s just now coming into his own, and I’ve been riding him pretty regular now. I’m not telling you that he’s one of the greats, but he’s just a nice horse that I have a lot of fun with.”

Calboy is a paternal great-grandson of Smart Little Lena, who himself is a grandson of Doc Bar, an American Quarter Horse Hall of Famer who never did find success in the performance ring or on the racetrack but who gained eminence as a sire. Jack remembers riding him:

“Charley Araujo in California had Doc Bar, and he was a very good friend of mine. We judged several shows together, and I consider him one of the great, great horsemen. ... One day, he said, ‘I’ve got a horse that I want you to ride; I can’t make this horse change leads. I want you to see what you think about him.’ ... And he brought out this little sorrel horse, and so I got on this horse and started to ride him, and I wasn’t at all impressed with him. ... Neither one of us was very impressed with his abilities, but he was a really cute little horse. God, he was pretty. ...

“But he changed a lot when they crossed him on those (Poco) Tivio mares. Those horses did great. The first one, of course, was Fizzabar. Harry Rose started her, and then Don Dodge bought her at an auction, and he did a lot with her. (She was later inducted into the National Cutting Horse Association Hall of Fame.) Then the colts began to catch on. It was a rags-to-riches story.”

### On how to succeed:

“YOU REALLY NEED A MENTOR. IF YOU WANT TO LEARN SOMETHING, you’re going to have to go to somebody who knows more than you do. The old, hard way is experience; you just stay there and work at it, work at it, work at it. But you must remember that experience is the most expensive teacher you can have. Profit by someone else’s experience. Let somebody else show you how, and you can get by a lot better. If I want to learn something, I want to go to somebody who knows more than I do.

“And the strangest thing is that you never get through learning. Jimmy Williams, you know he was California’s greatest horseman probably, said that it’s what you learn after you think you know it all that counts. That’s pretty good advice. I learn all the time. I’ll learn something or see something or figure out something and think, ‘Why in the hell did it take me 50 years to learn that?’

“The biggest thing I see, from the standpoint of people having success with their horses, is the work ethic. It takes time, and it takes persistence and you must, must work at it if you’re going to be successful.

“There are no shortcuts in training a horse. You know, horsemanship is an art, and it has always been considered an art form in Europe. You don’t become an artist without practice. Did you ever hear of a great violinist or pianist who got that way without practicing? It’s the same way with horsemanship. You better spend the time.” 🐾

*To learn more about Jack Brainard of Tioga, Texas, and see his 2011 clinic schedule, visit [www.jackbrainard.com](http://www.jackbrainard.com).*