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design secrets
for western
inspired homes

American Mustangs
the ultimate
Wild Child

Hot Looks

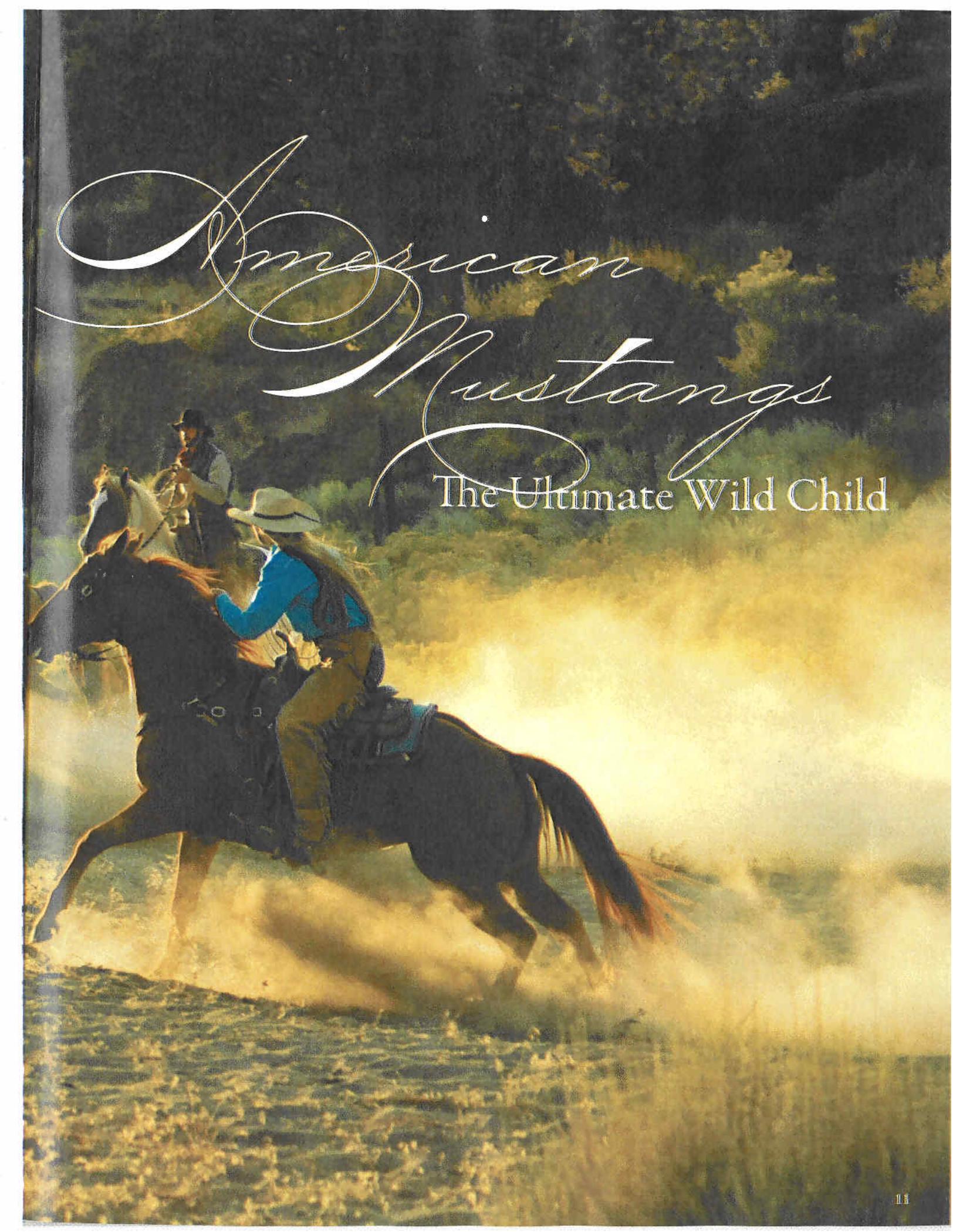
Holiday Style

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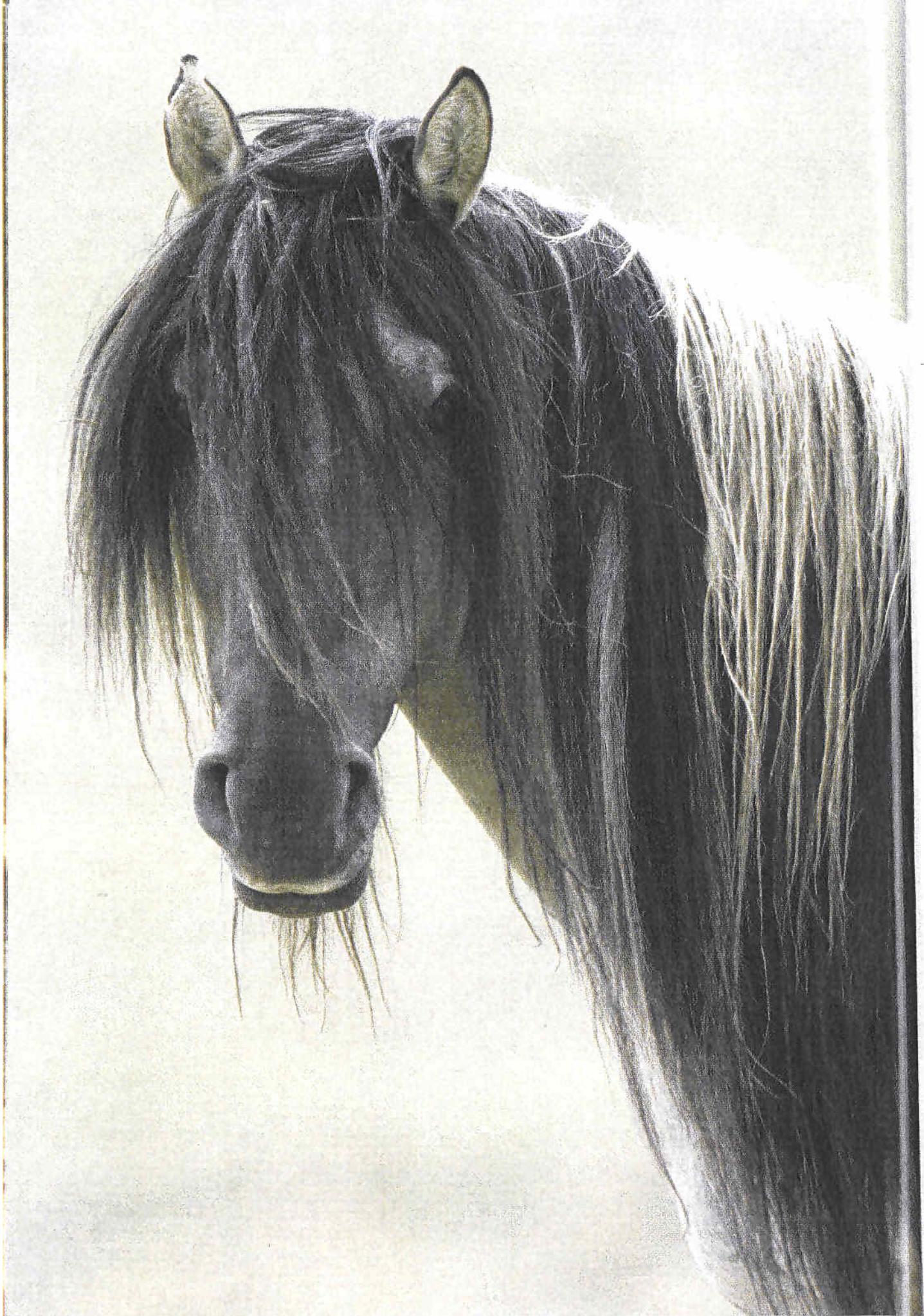
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*American
Mustangs*

The Ultimate Wild Child





American Mustangs

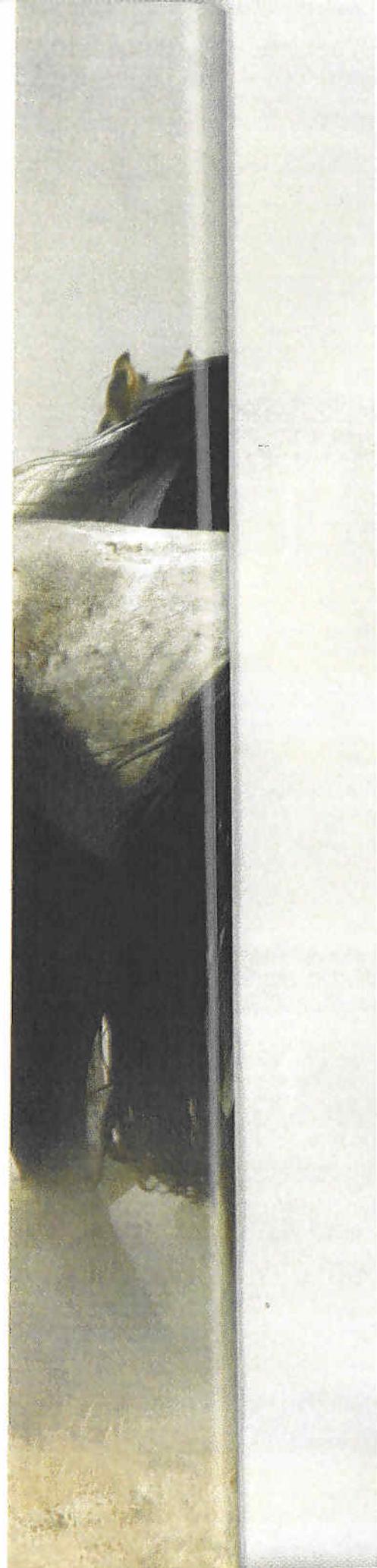
A HORSE WITH NO NAME is making its way through the desert. It's almost July, but the morning air is still crisp in the high sagebrush plateaus of southeastern Oregon. The badlands have received the winter rains, rebirthing them as delicate purple flowers and nutrient-rich grasses. A dun-colored horse is methodically grazing, collecting mouthfuls of grasses in his muzzle before tearing them with a sharp sideways clip of his teeth. His shaggy chocolate mane drapes a glossy, butterscotch neck and shoulders before spilling forward through delicately pointed ears. Rhythmic chewing and warm equine exhalations are punctuated by the sound of rock-hard hooves grinding sandy ground as he nonchalantly moves toward the next patch of appealing vegetation.

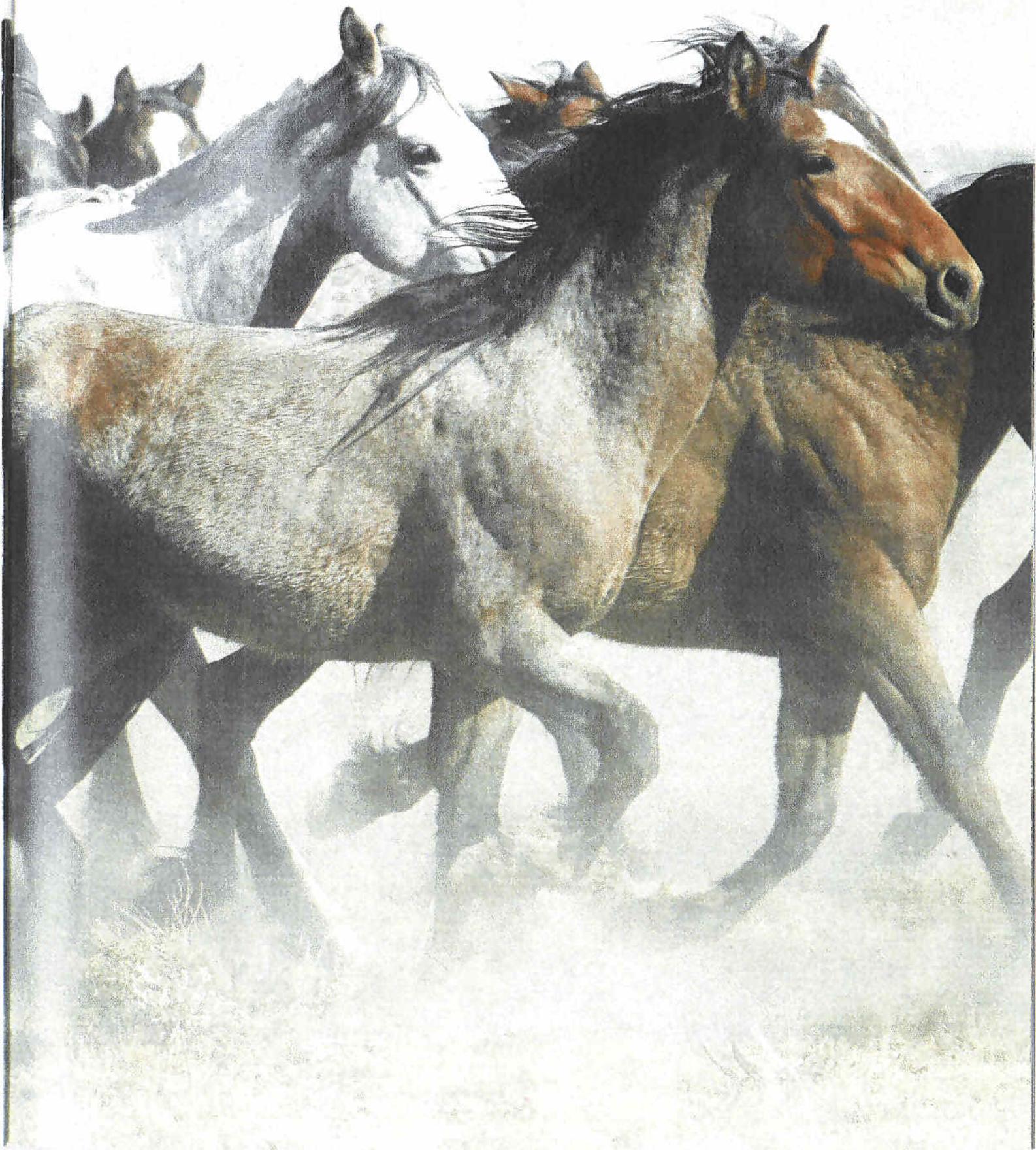
American Mustangs

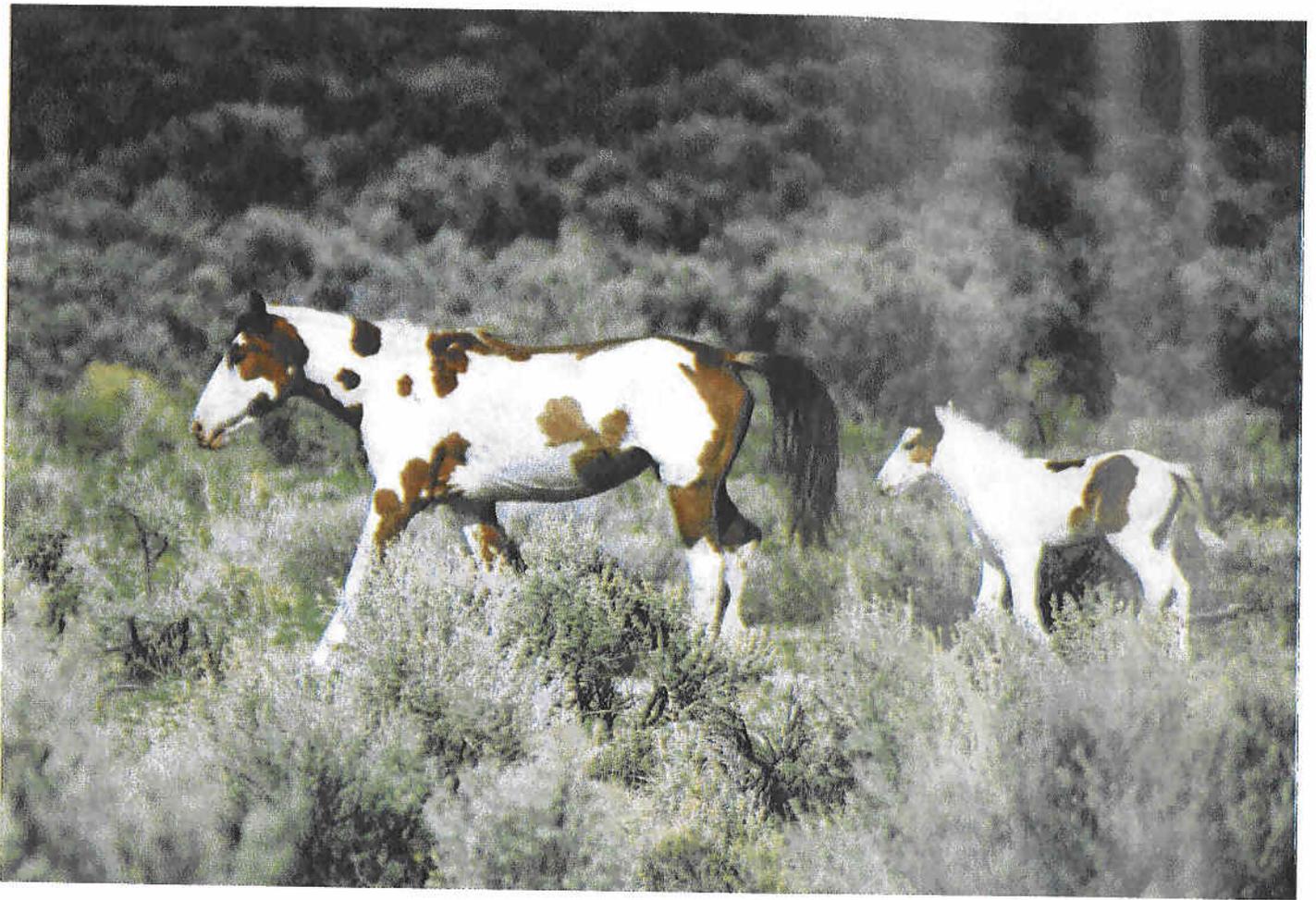
Head down, the colt follows an invisible path through the sea of silver sagebrush and yellow rabbit brush that stretches to the horizon in every direction. To his left, a red-tailed hawk is bumped from its overnight roost by unseen forces. The horse freezes mid-bite and cocks a fawn-hued ear to the east. Above, the raptor flaps lazily across a pale turquoise sky; below her, five horse heads rise as if on cue. Moving with the synchronicity of a single organism, the herd turns to watch several riders approaching. Our young stallion stares intently. His mind is curious and unafraid, but his muscles have already been saturated in adrenaline by the fight or flight response. In the moment his razor sharp senses chemically prick the panic receptors in his brain, the dun has already reeled away. A cloud of suede-colored dust flares around the galloping horses, obscuring them from view. They have escaped; centuries of evolution have triumphed again. Except, centuries of evolution never prepared wild horses for predators called helicopters.

Rotors chop the peace and quiet of the high desert, pushing the helicopters relentlessly forward. These aerial metal cowboys pursue the herd with the same expertise and studied strategy of the earth-bound buckaroos they are partnered with. The pursuers collaborate with the skill of a wolf pack, until this small band of mustangs is outmaneuvered and exhausted. From the backs of his brothers, lassos are flung toward the dun. It has been generations since his bloodlines felt the stiff sting of a rope, and he's not going to submit easily. These cowboys aren't here to hurt him, though; they're here to save him. Unless this herd, and hundreds like it, can be rounded up, adopted out and eventually gentled, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will be forced to manage America's burgeoning wild horse populations by other means, perhaps even culling.

The mustangs' presence in the West is a true homecoming. The first horse emerged on the North American continent some 50 million years ago in the form of a small creature known as *Hyracotherium*. By 4 million years ago, evolution had produced the modern *Equus*. A few million years later, these first modern horses unknowingly ensured the species' survival when they traversed the then-present land bridges to what is now Eurasia. As the prehistoric horses moved westward, mankind was moving east using the same land bridges. The first North Americans lived among wild horses, woolly mammoths, cave bears, camels, antelope and other megafauna. With the exception of the antelope, all of them, including the horse, became extinct a few thousand years after the arrival of this wholly new and deadly predator, modern man. It was only the repository of horses in the Old World that ultimately allowed the hoofbeats of mustangs to reverberate again in their ancestral homeland.







The horses that accompanied Spanish explorers to North America in the 16th century were the product of thousands of years of selective breeding for traits of use to man. The Spaniards brought quality breeding stock on their ships, including the regal Andalusian, among others. A few hundred years after the Spaniard's arrival, their feral horses were recreating a scene not seen for ten thousand years, wild horses on the western plains. "Mustang" is derived from the Spanish *mesteño*, meaning lacking ownership. For a time, the horse was the ultimate symbol of wealth, prestige and power. These advantages were recognized by Native American plains tribes who became expert breeders, handlers and riders; the iconic Appaloosa was produced by the Nez Perce. By the 19th century, the western states' wild horse population numbered in the millions. Seen as a consumable resource by some and a nuisance by others, "mustangers" rounded up uncountable animals, first for the US and British military and later for dog food; many others were killed where they stood.

The BLM estimates there are currently 36,000 wild horses roaming the west, a number that exceeds biologists target for a sustainable population. In optimal conditions, the horses can double their population every 4 years!

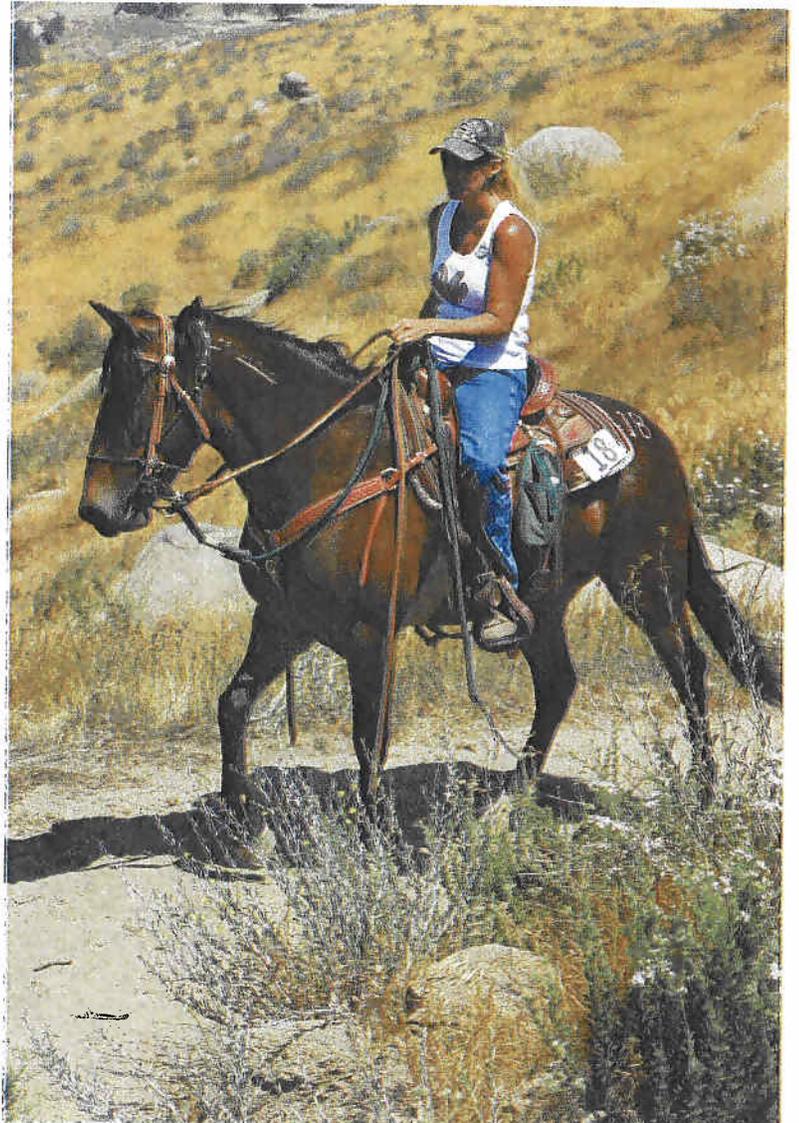


American Mustangs

Extremely hardy and strong, mustangs out compete both domestic livestock and wild game animals in overlapping territories. In 1971, Congress passed the Wild Horse and Burro Act, which makes it the BLM's responsibility to protect, manage and control the West's wild horses. They've done an admirable job, but with essentially no natural predators, the horses are proliferating and dispersing farther every year. The concerns of ranchers and private landowners must be addressed as the competition for grazing land intensifies. There is no easy answer.

Days have passed and our dun is in a corral, behind the six-foot tall fences the BLM requires of adoptive mustang owners. The young stud has been gelded, freeze branded and vaccinated. A horsewoman has selected him for a mustang training competition, perhaps because his zebra-striped legs and dark dorsal line betray the pure Spanish blood that flowed in his ancestors' veins. In the weeks since his capture, abundant hay, fresh water and benevolent care have begun to re-establish the bond between horse and human that preceded the mustangs' descent into feral life hundreds of years ago. Jani Mari Zigray-Cochran makes her living training horses like this one. And she does it well. Cayuse, a wild gelding she entered in the 2009 Oregon Extreme Mustang Makeover returned the highest auction bid, an impressive \$5,000 after less than 100 days of training. Jani grew up on a ranch, started riding at 5 and still works moving cattle. She's passionate about educating horse owners and prospective owners on the joys and challenges of gentling, training and riding wild mustangs.

Like many people, Jani considers mustangs to be superior trail-riding and working horses, with almost preternatural senses. In fact, their senses are very natural, the result of evolutionary pressures that eliminated the less observant of the herd. "You don't deal with horses nervously bolting over a creek or spooking at a log when you ride mustangs," Jani says, "To them, these kinds of trail "challenges" have always just been a part of everyday life." During the process of "finishing" a mustang, she often takes it to a working ranch, where the pair gathers cattle on the open range. "The mustangs are amazing at finding cattle in the bushes," she says. "You just can't get that same experience with arena work."



American Mustangs



"At first, they don't want to be touched at all," Jani explains, "but after awhile their curiosity gets the better of them. I always let them come to me. I don't chase after them."

The trick to gentling mustangs? Time and patience. "At first, they don't want to be touched at all," Jani explains, "but after awhile their curiosity gets the better of them. I always let them come to me. I don't chase after them." Except for the Mustang Makeover events, where the contest is judged in part on advanced training results in just three months, Jani lets the horse set the pace. Once trust is established, basic husbandry like brushing and haltering is the next goal. It is during this stage that inexperienced owners may encounter their first problem.

"Their animal is getting really tame and the owner is thrilled they've gentled a wild horse and may forget that mutual respect is required in mustang society." A newly chummy horse may suddenly become aggressive and nip, bite or strike. Correction is necessary. "I'm absolutely not talking about abusing your horse, but these horses have always had a leader and now that horse is gone. Their new "herd" needs a leader. If you don't step assertively into that position, they will." The good news? Mustangs seem to have an advanced social intelligence. "If they're behaving inappropriately, I get after them and immediately they're polite again. It's a very consistent response. And it's a must, otherwise it can escalate into a dangerous situation. And people are paying me to deliver a safe horse."

Jani is in high demand for delivering safe, solidly broke mustangs, but she's just as eager to share her information and expertise. She encourages owners to bond with their newly adopted mustangs, and create a partnership that can't be duplicated in the equine world. Yet the transition from tame to saddle-trained is best handled by a professional trainer or wrangler, or by extremely experienced and confident horsewomen, hopefully with expert guidance.

Once a cowgirl understands the challenges, commitment, and ultimate satisfaction that are the gifts of a wild-caught mustang, and has met the qualifications required by the Bureau of Land Management, there are a variety of events offering horses for adoption. Whether it's a traditional BLM event, an Extreme Mustang Makeover auction, or a locally organized "rehoming" effort, the smartest strategy is to find an experienced friend or mustang trainer to accompany you. The horses are usually delivered to the adoption site a few days prior and it's a good idea to spend some time observing the group dynamics and individual animal's temperaments.

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EXTREME MUSTANG MAKEOVER

The concept is simple. Invite 100 horse trainers from all walks of life, both male and female, and give them this goal: Take a wild horse off the range and have it gentled and trained to ride in 90 days.



In 2006, Patti Colbert, Executive Director of The Mustang Heritage Foundation, created the Extreme Mustang Makeover Challenge. It's now one of the most popular and exciting events at Horse Expos and events around the country! Inspired by the success and popularity of television shows like "What Not to Wear" and "Extreme Home Makeover", Patti wondered, "Why not mustangs?" Patti imagined the "final reveal," as a recently wild mustang loping out into an arena, performing smooth figure eights, controlled, fast gallops and sliding stops, then navigating obstacles designed to simulate extreme trail riding. And she imagined this happening over and over again with multiple mustangs.

The concept is simple. Invite 100 horse trainers from all walks of life, both male and female, and give them this goal: Take a wild horse off the range and have it gentled and trained to ride in 90 days. Then all the horses and trainers come together to compete at the Extreme Mustang Makeover Challenge. Winning trainers receive a modest purse, all the mustangs are adopted auction-style, to the highest bidders, and the audience is treated to an exciting, awe-inspiring show!

Today, Extreme Mustang Makeovers are held all over the country and purses have grown into the tens of thousands. Divisions for youth trainers, yearling horses, and other special distinctions allow a broader swath of horsewomen and mustangs to compete. For trainers who prefer to stay out of the limelight, the Mustang Heritage Foundation offers a "Trainer Incentive Program" (TIP). The TIP offers a stipend of \$700 per horse to any qualified trainer who agrees to accept a wild horse, gentle and train it, and adopt it out within 90 days.

Between the Extreme Mustang Makeovers and the Trainer Incentive Program, Patti hopes to have 1,200 to 1,300 mustangs off the range, trained, and in good homes by the end of this year. Will it make enough of a difference? Patti is the first to acknowledge the serious challenges of equitable range management and successful control of wild horse populations. A collaboration of efforts will undoubtedly be needed. The Extreme Mustang Makeover is her contribution.

"It's so easy for people to complain anonymously, but how many people ever get up and do something about it? The nationwide Extreme Mustang Makeover Challenge, including all the events and programs, is run by five women. This program is 100% female owned and operated!" It's also a huge success. Extreme Mustang Makeover audiences are growing every year, pushing audience energy, auction prices and performance standards to new highs. Best of all, well-trained mustangs are leaving in the trailers of horsewomen who appreciate the advantages of riding a horse that was born free.

For information & upcoming events visit: www.extrememustmagmakeover.com

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“You’ll be able to identify the dominant horses and make an informed choice depending on your capabilities and objectives. I’ll watch sometimes for hours. If there’s a group of seven horses huddled in the corner and one walks over to the fence where I’m standing, that’s the horse I want.” The horse Jani wanted was a Kiger (pronounced “kee-ger”) Mustang. These wild horses, which were a fairly isolated sub-species, retain a purer concentration of old Spanish bloodlines. The Kiger horses retain an unusual suite of physical characteristics called the “dun factor.” The base body color must be dun, red dun, grulla (gunmetal grey) or buckskin. Dark dorsal stripes, zebra striping on the legs, fawn-colored ears “outlined” in a dark color, and a unique “cob-webbing” pattern on the face are some of the telltale signs. Kiger Mustangs also exhibit the fine muzzles, small bones and hooves, and distinctly hooked ear tips characteristic of the tarpan and oriental hotblood horses from which they are descended.

“What’s surprising about these wild horses,” Jani says, “is their temperament. Once gentled and trained, they seem to go to the other extreme. They tend to be very trusting and gentle and not overly spirited. Sometimes they’re a bit lazy!”

For our once-wild dun gelding, a day of being groomed, ridden, and then put in a warm barn with clean bedding must seem a world away from the unforgiving life he was born into. No wonder he’s a bit lazy! Perhaps he thinks he’s gone to some kind of luxury Mustang destination spa! For a cherished icon of the American West, let’s hope so. 🌻



Contact



Mustang Heritage Foundation

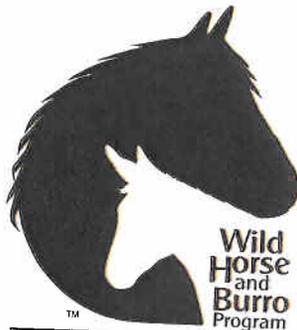
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