

Padre' and Wayfarer Farm

By Patti Gruber

When most people think of Dressage horses they think of big Warmbloods. As a Dressage Trainer, I think the same way but have always enjoyed the opportunity to work with different breeds. I am lucky to have a training stable full of Warmbloods, Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses and Andalusian and Ponies. Two years ago, I started thinking about a new Dressage partner. In June 2007, I received a phone call that would give me the answer I was looking for.

The call came from a veterinarian I work with. He had a Mustang stallion. Doc was studying the relationship of genetics in over-bred domestic breeds with the focus on determining whether leg problems could be eliminated by breeding domestic mares with his genetically pure Mustang stallion Padre'. Over the years, Doc spoke of the great personality and quiet nature of Padre' and his demeanor and personality that was always passed on to his offspring. I watched Padre' grow from a little 2-year-old to a bold and beautiful 7-year-old Dun. He had a natural ability and an undeniable presence. When the call came, I could not believe my ears. He was offering Padre' to me. I immediately said yes.



Padre' and Patti Brutis,
Dressage training.
Photo by Chuck Swan.

I wanted a new horse that could be competitive at upper levels. I was worried about my decision the whole month before I was able to pick my new partner up.

Padre' was sent to a Western trainer near the farm he had been living on. He got a thirty day introduction to adjusting to life in a stable with a regular work schedule instead of the life of leisure he had known. Previously, his days were spent roaming lush pastures.

The trainer had worked with many Mustangs before and he really understood their difference from domestic breeds. Since Padre' and his Western trainer were seven hours away, we spent the month on the phone talking about how well he was adapting to his new working life and his particular nuances.

He repeatedly told me that to be successful working with Padre' I had to earn his trust and respect him. It was the same for him; he had to trust and respect me. After the thirty days were up, and with the long drive behind me, I arrived late in the day at the Western trainer's farm leaving only time for me to say hello to Padre' and his trainer. Our first ride came on the second day in a round pen. As I climbed aboard Padre' and we marched off, I was amazed by the amount of power he had for a 15.1 h horse. With each gait the power increased and I began to realize his true athletic ability. The next morning, we headed for Padre's new home at Wayfarer Farm in Wauconda, Illinois to begin bonding and building trust.

After riding him 3 times the first week at home we went to our first clinic at the barn. We rode with a well respected German trainer. I was sure he had never seen a Mustang before. I did not tell him what kind of horse he was because I wanted him to judge and work with us based on Padre's ability and not his breed. By the end of the weekend, I finally told him that Padre' was a Mustang who came out of the wild near Palomino Valley in Nevada. The trainer recommended that I bring Padre' to a schooling show at his barn in 3 weeks.

Although I thought it was to soon, the German trainer thought that Padre' had enough natural talent that he could compete in Dressage and get good scores even though he had only been in Dressage training for one weekend. He was right and Padre' did better than I could ever have imagined. We entered two classes, Green as Grass 1 Horse. He finished first with a 67.647% and Green as Grass 4 Horse again placing first with a 64.5%. After both of our rides were over, the judge called us over to

fill her curiosity about what kind of horse he was; his background and training. Of course, she was surprised that he was a Mustang and that

he had only been in Dressage training for 3 weeks. At the end of the day, Padre' also won the High Point award for the division.

Since bringing Padre' home, I have grown to respect his intelligence and athletic ability. He and I have had the opportunity to ride in quite a few clinics since our first one. With each clinic, Padre' has shown the clinicians his intelligence, natural ability, bold movements and quiet disposition I love about him. Padre' is currently schooling second level and my hope is to have him competing at Sanctioned Shows and moving into the upper levels over the next couple of years. According to the clinicians we have worked with, Padre' has the natural talent to go as far up the levels as I want to take him.



Padre' showing what he can do.
Photo by Chuck Swan.

Outside of being a phenomenal training partner with the endurance to work for two hours without tiring, he also has a personality that most people wouldn't expect from a Mustang. Padre' is still a stallion and yet I turn him out with a group of 6 geldings in the summer. He also is a perfect gentleman going on the trail and working in the arena with mares in heat without showing any "stallion" traits.

Padre' also likes to express what he thinks of the task at hand under saddle. There are days when he is playful during rides and will buck at the canter with his hind end without missing a step with his front end. If I nag him too much with my spurs, he picks up a back foot on the side. He'd kick at my foot to tell me that he got the point. He also has his moments where he says he has had enough and will plant his feet, turn his head to look at me and snort in a way saying, "I have had enough and if you ask me one more time I am going to have to give you a non-playful buck". I try not to allow him to see my smile with pride about his intelligence. We always take a deep breath after that and move on to something else. I trust him to tell me how he is doing.



Padre' has taught Patti to be a better trainer with all her horses.
Photo by Chuck Swan.

Padre' has his funny moments, too, and makes me laugh. He still has his long hair and regal mentality. When it is raining, he will not go outside the barn. He peeks out the door, but refuses to go outside and get wet. Padre' also loves breakfast (and dinner) in bed. If grain is served in his ground feed pan while he is in the middle of a nap he will stay laying down as he eats. I am also quite sure that his domesticated menu is his favorite part of no longer being wild. He loves the usual fare of carrots and apples but also has developed a love for french fries, marshmallow peeps, jelly beans, peaches, bananas and ice cream. He has come to love his blankets in the winter and to get a nice bath with lots of suds in the summer.

Over the year and a half we have been working together, Padre' has presented me with challenges and victories. I cannot believe how much I have learned about working with all the horses I have in training simply by listening to Padre'. I am a better trainer because of him. Every Mustang is different depending on what herd management area they are from as they are built for their particular environment. I've learned they vary in height, color, and build. You must remember they are wild and have instinct that guides them in life. They view their people and other horses as part of their herd. Mustangs are not

a horse for everyone and to work with one successfully you must be patient, kind, and understand that the only way to build a successful partnership is building trust and listening to them. Padre' is the

most amazing Dressage partner I could have asked for. His presence, natural athletic ability, and personality are phenomenal. I am lucky to have many horses to train but the best part of each day is when I work with Padre'.

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