

The "Best" of the "Best"

by Stephanie Yeh



"Valentine"

Valentine is the second mustang my husband and I have adopted. She came from a herd management area, (HMA) in WY and is grulla in color. She is now 5 years old.

We adopted her as a yearling eventually planning to re-sale her. Her color was so beautiful, we knew she would be easy to sell. Plans often change, as this one did.

I started Valentine under saddle when she was about 2 years old and she was a tough nut. She bucked, kicked, bit, ran away, and did basically everything a 2 year old could do to get into trouble.

With the help of my trainer, we were able to settle her down and get her gentled enough for trail rides. That's when the "plans" really changed. I was so in love with her athleticism, her willingness to try, her intelligence, and her spirit that I couldn't sell her.

The first mustang I adopted was great, too. He was such a gentle and loving horse, but lacked the athleticism of Valentine. I sold him to a good friend in Texas who wanted a really good solid trail horse.

Valentine I kept.



Stephanie Yeh and Valentine in "perfect form."

When Valentine was a 3 year old, I rode her as a turnback horse in cutting, used her in team sorting and penning, used her as a colt-starting horse and even asked her to pull a fence post or two out of the ground. She did it all. When Valentine turned 4, I started jumping her and boy could that girl jump! Fence heights were no problem for her and she quickly moved up from baby cross-rails to 2'6" and 2'9" jumps. She LOVES jumps.

Cows are really too quick for her to effectively chase. When a cow gets by her, she doesn't try to chase it anymore, she just kicks it as it goes by! Jumping is really her thing.

Valentine is 15.2 HH. She is a little larger than some mustangs and she has springs for back legs. Today, as a five-year-old, Valentine and I are showing regularly in the local hunter/jumper circuit and she has attracted quite a lot of attention.

She was a double Grand Champion in the local hunter/jumper club last year as well as Jumper Horse of the Year. This year she has been Champion at every show she's attended.

People always say to me, "What a cool horse! What kind is she?" I tell them, "She's an American Warmblood; a mustang!" They are sooooo amazed. I always have at least two or three people comment on what a wonderful and beautiful horse she is!

"Samantha"

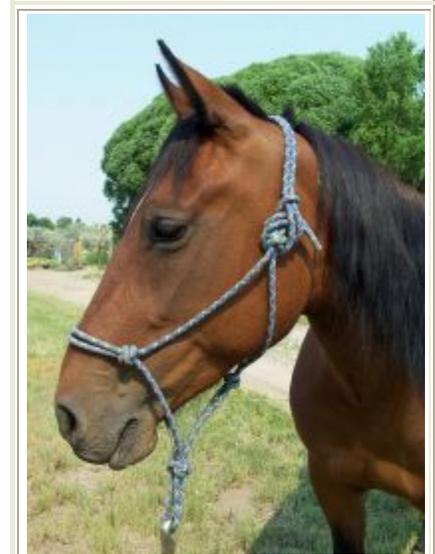
Samantha, is a 6 year old mustang mare, 14.1 HH, and also from Wyoming. We affectionately call her "Sammie Joe".

Sammie Joe was really an "oops" of sorts. We had planned on adopting another mustang, but an ungentled gelding. I wanted to start him and sell him as a trail horse.

I envisioned a solid-bodied gelding with a soft kind eye that would be easy for anyone to ride. The wild horse inmate program at the [Colorado Department of Corrections](#), where we adopted both Valentine and Sammie Joe, offer saddle-trained and ungentled horses to adopt.

At the adoption, we found a friend of ours that wanted to look at the saddle-trained horses. I had already looked through the Colorado Department of Corrections website, so I knew what was being offered. I really wasn't interested in any of them, but decided to just hang out and wait until they were finished looking.

My husband and our friend watched the saddle horses being shown with great interest. One bay in particular caught their attention. She was super-quick but also agile and had an intelligent face. My friend nudged me in the ribs and said, "How about that one?" I said, "Nah, too quick to be a trail horse." But the more I watched the bay horse the more I liked what I saw.



"Samantha" AKA "Sammie Joe".

The bay turned out to be a mare and I almost never get mares for resale horses. For whatever reason, geldings seem to be easier to sell. But, I couldn't take my eyes off her. I thought, "This horse might be the cow-horse I'm looking for." My husband and I walked over to the pens of the ungentled mustangs. But, the saddle-trained mustang mare remained at the top of my mind.

I asked to ride the mare and rode her around a semi-open but covered arena for a while. She was clearly started well but very quick. In fact, she was too quick to ride at a trot for long so I asked to ride her in a round pen. She was quick and agile, but a little out of control!

However, I was in love. There went the plans to adopt and gentle a gelding to resell as a trail horse! It turned out she had been adopted previously, but had gone back to the BLM after her rider fell off. Sammie Joe was the first saddle-trained mustang I ever adopted. I usually adopt wild yearlings.

When I got Sammie Joe home I noticed that she was quick and responsive, but also hyper-vigilant. She didn't like anything touching her and would bolt if something touched her on her back end or back legs. In fact, she took an unescorted 7-mile tour of our town when something touched her back legs. (I had been leading her).

She was a challenge on the ground as she would often bolt so fast and hard I couldn't hang on. But riding her was a dream. She placed second out of tons of teams at the second team-sort we attended. She had tons of "try" but plenty of spook, too. We started using her to break colts so she could get used to the flying reins and ropes. For the first year she remained quick but still a little out of control. Once she engaged in any activity, though, like penning or sorting, she was fine. I also used her as a turnback horse for cutting.

This year I finally got frustrated with her hypersensitivity to her surroundings and to me. She shifted from side-to-side or sped up or slowed down radically if I even wiggled in the saddle. So, I started jumping her. I figured the jumps would give her something to focus on. Sure enough, the jumps gave her a point of focus and she stopped "wiggling" all over the place. It turned out that Sammie Joe could jump the moon!

She's only pony-sized at 14.1 and doesn't move well enough to be a pony hunter, but she makes a fabulous pony jumper. After a mere 6 sessions over jumps she attended her first show and came in second after Valentine. At the next show she was Champion in her own right. Sammie Joe has more "try" over jumps than any horse I've ever ridden, despite her smaller size.

Now we are working on smoothness, lead changes, and, of course, bigger jumps. Eventually, when Sammie Joe has settled down some more and becomes a quieter ride, I will try her again in reining, working cows, and versatility ranch horse events.

I have adopted a total of four mustangs now, three wild yearlings and one saddle broke mare. I love them all. Two have moved on to other homes and now I just have Sammie Joe and Valentine. I would not trade either of them for the world. I believe that if you choose wisely you can find a mustang for any discipline.

Both Valentine and Sammie Joe are the perfect all-round horses. My original black mustang mare, Bella, is the best beginner trail horse I ever rode. The paint mare I adopted, also a yearling, taught me more about riding a bronc than any horse I've ridden before or since. She could string 26 bucks together in a row (yes, we counted) with no trouble!

I will never stop adopting mustangs at appropriate intervals. They have feet, bodies and minds that are as tough as steel and I could never ask for a better team player. It feels fabulous to be able to take part in the history of this nation by working with mustangs.

Thanks BLM and the inmate program at the Colorado Department of Corrections and everyone else that keeps the mustang heritage alive. I recommend mustangs to anyone that can handle them. It takes a special kind of training and it's so worth it!



"Sammie Joe" heading for town.