

# Colt Breaking Waggoner

*A time-honored plan gets colts ready to work  
on the historic AQHA Ranching Heritage  
Breeder ranch. Part 1 of a two-part series*

**Article and photos by  
Larri Jo Starkey**

IT'S A LOT OF WORK TO BREAK ONE COLT.

But to break 75 colts a year, you need a plan.

At the W.T. Waggoner Ranch, that plan starts in January, says the ranch's horse division manager, Trace Cribbs, when each 2-year-old on the ranch is started and ridden for 30 days. At the end of that 30 days – and frequently in between – the colts will be videotaped under saddle and their futures assessed.

"Our No. 1 customer is us," Trace says, meaning that horses are broke with the idea that they'll either be in a Waggoner cowboy's all-gelding remuda, in a show string or in the broodmare band. If a horse isn't temperamentally or physically suited for one of those jobs, it doesn't get to be a part of the future gene pool.

"We can overlook different learning curve

rates, but with time and breeding wisely, we see higher percentages in horses that are easier to train."

The ranch is looking for good movers with natural tail sets. The horses need to be low-headed and natural stoppers.

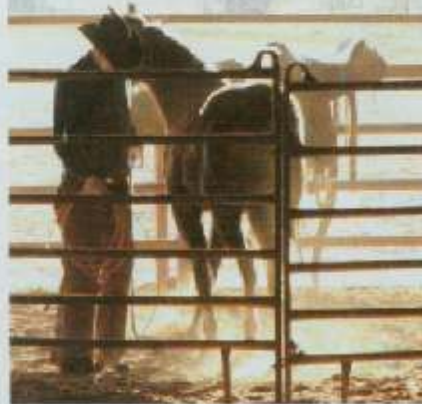
"We categorize horses as either pushers or goers," Trace says, adding that the ranch needs some of both. "A pusher you have to bump to make go early on. They think about stopping and usually will have a big stop. They are ready to listen to training early and seem to learn faster. A goer has a big motor and needs a little more riding to get calm and ready to listen."

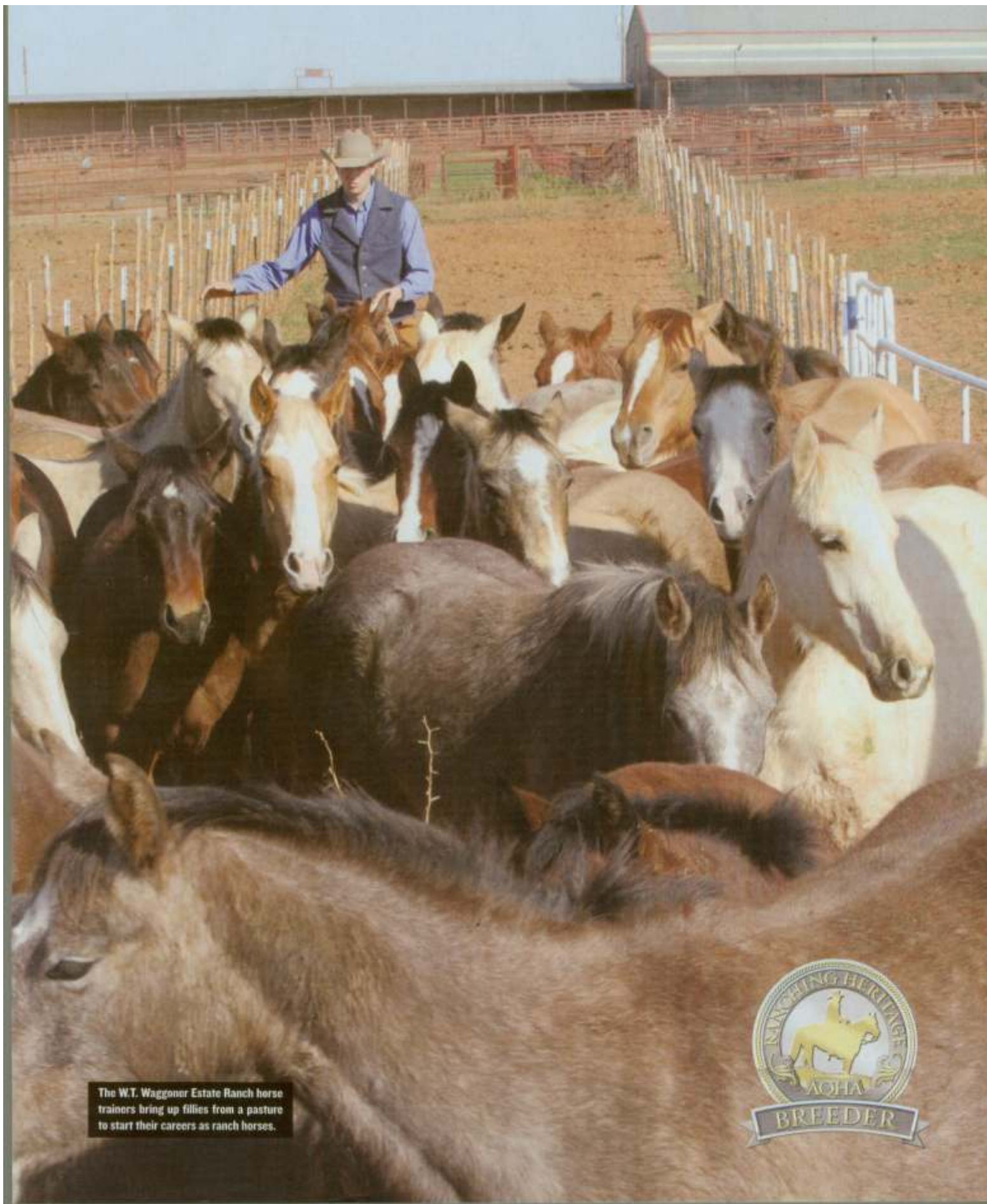
Finding and training good colt starters is just as difficult as training the colts, Trace says, and just as important.



Jake Bellinger's first task with a colt is getting the halter on.

Small round pens in three corners of a big arena give each trainer room to work quietly with each colt.





The W.T. Waggoner Estate Ranch horse trainers bring up fillies from a pasture to start their careers as ranch horses.



"The colt-starting job is key to successful evaluation of the horses," he says. "Trainers here are typically athletic, take direction, don't show fear to the colt and are soft with their hands. Currently, we have three full-time horse trainers plus a part-time colt-breaker who works from his home. It's a lot of work to get that many horses evaluated in a short period of time, and we don't want to make a mistake because every horse develops differently."

Ben Baldus, Garret Cooper and Jake Bellinger were all born north of the Mason-Dixon line – Ben is from Michigan, Garret is from Pennsylvania and Jake is from Oregon – but they moved south for the warmer climate and the chance to work on the historic Waggoner Ranch. Each trainer has a personal style that has been melded into the tradition of the AQHA-Pfizer Best Remuda Award-winning ranch.

On a cool February morning, the *Journal* got to watch the three Waggoner horse trainers put halters on 2-year-olds for their day's work at the ranch's horse headquarters near Electra, Texas.

In the large covered pen, three small round pens have been set into the corners. Each trainer has a gentle horse saddled in the round pen that will be used for everything from ponying to providing stable companionship for the younger horses.

First the trainers use ropes to simulate the feel of a cinch around 2-year-old bellies and backs, then the saddle pads and saddles are added. All three trainers finish this part of the process about the same time, then the three colts are turned out into the big arena. From the broke horses' backs, the trainers use flags to stimulate the colts into going forward. It's a brisk day, and some of the horses choose to express themselves by bucking, but the continued emphasis on

forward convinces the horses to move forward instead of up. They also get reassurance that wearing a saddle is OK, even at faster gaits.

From there, each colt returns to the round pen and gets a rider. One of the horses is more advanced, and the trainer moves him to the big arena for a short lesson on steering.

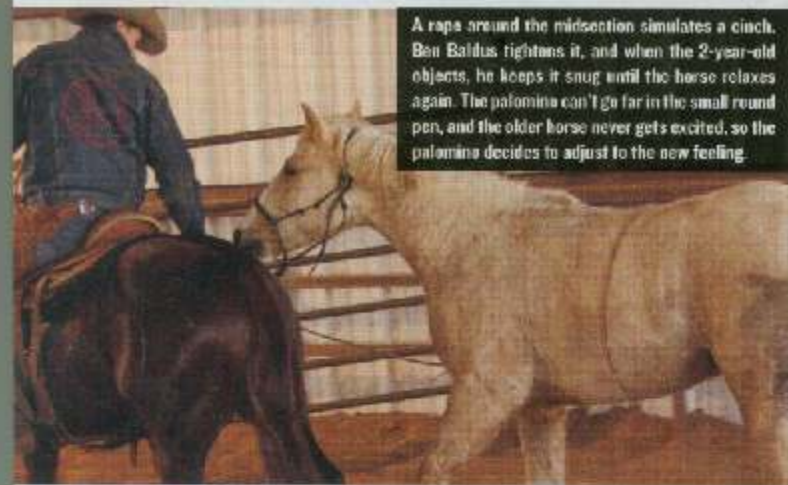
After about 45 minutes of work total – from rope cinches to being ridden – the colts are unsaddled and tied to a rail, where they will learn patience while other horses are worked.

Next up is a group that's ready to be ridden outside on the vast ranges of the Waggoner Ranch. The process is the same: The horses are saddled, encouraged to lope with those saddles on, and then the riders climb aboard for an outdoor excursion.

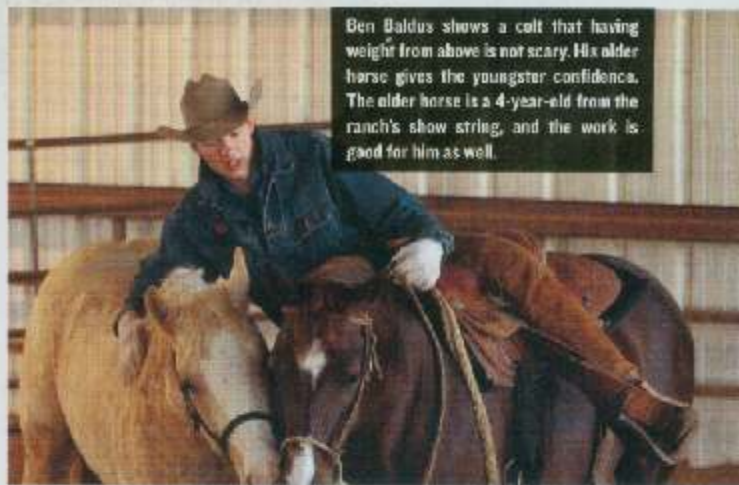
The sun is bright as the young horses trot toward their destination – a large water tank about a couple of miles away through a mesquite-filled pasture. The natural obstacles, the lack of power steering and the natural imbalance of a horse just learning to carry a rider means it's a wobble-wobble sort of journey, but the riders sit quietly and encourage the horses to move forward. And they do. After 30 days of this daily riding, the horses will be turned out until the next phase of their journey: being picked for a remuda.

"Each year, the horses teach us something new about them or about ourselves," Trice says. "It's interesting, humbling and exciting all at the same time." ■

*Larri Jo Starkey is an editor for The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to lstarkey@aqha.org. Watch for the March issue of the Journal to see the second part of this series. You can learn more about the W.T. Waggoner Estate Ranch in the book "Best Remudas" or online at [www.waggonerranch.com](http://www.waggonerranch.com).*



A rope around the midsection simulates a cinch. Ben Baldus tightens it, and when the 2-year-old objects, he keeps it snug until the horse relaxes again. The palomino can't go far in the small round pen, and the older horse never gets excited, so the palomino decides to adjust to the new feeling.



Ben Baldus shows a colt that having weight from above is not scary. His older horse gives the youngster confidence. The older horse is a 4-year-old from the ranch's show string, and the work is good for him as well.



Using flags, the trainers encourage the colts to move out as a group. The small herd helps give the colts confidence.



After Jake Bellinger's colt is saddled and bridled, he loops the reins around the neck. He'll turn the colt loose in the big arena to adjust to the saddle and the feeling of movement with it on.



In Waggoner vernacular, all colts are called "brons" until they prove themselves on the ranch, but this colt is taking the word a little seriously. Within 30 minutes, though, he'll be quietly carrying a rider.



A group of more advanced horses is saddled for an outdoor excursion. The first trick is to remind the horse how the bridle works, then the gate will be opened and all three horses will head outdoors. Again, the group setting gives each colt extra confidence.



After the three horses have reached their destination, they take a drink as a reward and are encouraged to walk in the water. These horses were born on the ranch and are familiar with the terrain and drinking from the water tank. What's new is the rider on each one.



From the first, the colts are asked to traverse the same sort of terrain they'll be encountering as ranch horses, and they're rewarded with pats whenever they accomplish a hard task. Later in the afternoon, the trainers work with the show horses. The Waggoner Ranch competes in high-level reining competition, with Dainty Little Step placing first in 2012 in the open Level I National Reining Horse Association Derby and Cowtown Classic. After her time in the spotlight, Dainty Little Step is most likely to return to the ranch's broodmare band.



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*Cat Man Do*

2005 gray stallion • LTE \$20,278  
(High Brow Cat x Some Kinda Playgirl by Freckles Playboy)  
Multiple Aged Event Finalist  
**Sire:** High Brow Cat #1 Cutting Sire with offspring earning \$52.5 Million  
His dam is earner of \$80,363, producer of offspring earning \$614,852, and one of Equi-Stat's All-Time Leading Cutting Producers

**NOMINATED TO NCHA SUPER STAKES**  
**2013 Stud Fee:** \$2,000 includes chute fee  
Shipped Semen • HERDA: Hrd/N



*Purrfect Timing*

2006 sorrel stallion  
**Sire:** High Brow Cat #1 Cutting Sire with offspring earning \$52.5 Million  
**Dam:** One Time Soon is sired by Smart Little Lena, and she is out of Uno Princess, LTE \$41,223, an NCHA Futurity Open Champion. One Time Soon is producer of 13 offspring earning \$813,287 including One Time Pepto (LTE \$331,097, 2005 NCHA Super Stakes Open Champion and sire of the 2010 NCHA Futurity Champion).

**NOMINATED TO NCHA SUPER STAKES**  
**2013 Stud Fee:** \$1,500 includes chute fee • HERDA: N/N

## Greyt Whiz



2002 gray stallion • LTE \$1,693  
5th, 2008 AQHA World Show  
Performance Halter Stallion  
(Topsail Whiz x Easter Cabin by Easter Gentleman) Sired by Topsail Whiz earner of \$57,178, and NRHA's only \$8 Million Sire.



## DOUBLE MY WHISKEY

2003 bay stallion  
Split 4th, NRHA Derby Intern Open  
(Paddys Irish Whiskey x Miss Double Tuck by Poco King Tuck)  
LTE \$11,742 NRHA • 22 AQHA pts. AQHA Performance ROM  
Sired by Paddys Irish Whiskey, ranked in the top 25 by Equi-Stat in 2011 for 10-Year All Industry (cutting/reining) Sires.



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