

Story and photography by KATE BRADLEY BYARS

*Utah horseman Brady Weaver pulls tools from his experience as a racehorse jockey and reined cow horse trainer to build quality barrel prospects.*



STORM CLOUDS CIRCLE BRADY WEAVER'S FACILITY IN ENTERPRISE, UTAH, THREATENING TO BRING A HEAVY DOWNPOUR. The moisture is welcomed, though it may dampen Weaver's plans for training that day. No matter, as the experienced horseman can always take to the Bureau of Land Management public lands just a quarter-mile from his house, and that is just what he does with one of his barrel-bred 2-year-olds.

Riding out of the arena, on land large enough to allow Weaver to let his mount stretch out for long periods of time in a straight line, is integral to his training program.

"Barrel horses have to be able to guide. A lot of barrel horses I get [to work with] are out of balance," Weaver said. "Riders hang on their faces, and after awhile, the horse will lean in or push away. It's not balanced anymore. If you can take that horse out and teach it to travel straight like an old cowboy's horse where the legs are underneath them, they're traveling relaxed, a lot of those problems go away."

The professional-jockey-turned-cow-horse-trainer is highly sought after to start some of the industry's top prospects. The foundation Weaver lays on a young barrel horse lies on the same fundamentals he uses for reined cow horses—physical fitness, mental strength and allowing the horse to find the right path on its own.

It may have taken a couple decades for Weaver to realize that his racetrack background left him well-suited for riding today's barrel horse bloodlines, but he's OK with that. His years riding Quarter Horse racehorses, training cutting, reining and reined cow horses only increased his equine knowledge so that he better understands the horse underneath his saddle.

### FAST LEARNER

Growing up in southeast Idaho, Weaver was a regular figure on the local racetracks. He started as a stall cleaner, then moved to galloping horses. Soon, an 18-year-old Weaver was headed to the hub of Quarter Horse racing at Los Alamitos in California to work and live with longtime trainer Blane Schvaneveldt.





# Straight for SUCCESS

## Training Feature

“He was the best [trainer]—he was King Kong—and had Refrigerator at that time,” Weaver recalled.

In his career, the legendary racehorse Refrigerator amassed more than \$2 million in earnings and was inducted into the American Quarter Horse Association Hall of Fame.

“I’d gallop Refrigerator,” Weaver said. “That had to be 1992 or 1993. I remember the first time Blane put me on Refrigerator, he told me if I fell off and let that horse run around without a rider, he’d kill me. Refrigerator always felt good and would hop and buck. You had to stick him. It was fun working with those kinds of horses.”

While it was apparent Weaver’s size and superb ability to stick a horse would carry him far on the racetrack, he set his sights on a different way of life, one more conducive to having a wife and family. He headed back to Idaho to start colts with his father. He took the lessons learned from the track with him, lessons like obtaining optimum physical fitness for a horse and how to care for a running horse’s legs.

“Racing came really natural for me, and I won some big races in that part of the country. But I decided for me, it was a tough way to live,” Weaver said. “It came

easy for me—I wasn’t scared of those horses, and there was so much money to be made, but it wasn’t for a family guy, which was what I wanted. I went back home to Blackfoot, Idaho, and was riding a lot of colts, race colts, in the winter.”

A neighbor suggested Weaver take his son’s place working for California cutting horse trainer John McDonald. Weaver jumped at the chance. He dove head-first into learning the cutting industry and the Californio vaquero traditions. In addition to learning from McDonald, Weaver had none other than famed reined cow horse trainer and old-school vaquero Tony Amaral providing insight.

To this day, Weaver is still finding stories Amaral told him while the two ate dinner were lessons in disguise.

“He would tell me about riding in spade bits, and I had no idea what he was talking about,” Weaver said. “I was so young, so green that I didn’t understand a lot of what he was telling me at the time. I’ll ride around now and think, ‘You know, that’s what Tony was talking about.’ I didn’t think to ask why to a lot of his teaching, and I wish I had done that.”

McDonald was known for working with troubled horses and helping sort them out. Weaver found that he, too,



lacked the fear that caused a rider to stop trying to understand a horse and start forcing it to work.

“To me, I’d lost the why and how of a horse doing what it did. I wanted to know how to get them to change leads, work a cow and be flat in the bridle,” Weaver said. “I look back, and the good racehorse guys were good horsemen. They didn’t know how to roll a horse back, but they could fix a horse’s problem in the gate or on the track. You learn a little bit from everywhere.”

For eight years, Weaver learned from McDonald, Amaral and others in California before moving to Cave Creek, Arizona, where he rode with experienced Western performance trainers Randy Paul and Dell Hendricks, focusing on reining. He moved back to Idaho to work for a cutting horse trainer before settling in Enterprise, Utah, 12 years ago.



Above: Loose reins and soft hands guide Famous Because across the open land near Weaver’s home. He wants a horse alert but relaxed and willing to be guided.

Left: Hands-on horseman Weaver works daily with each young prospect, learning their attitude and idiosyncrasies to better understand how to work with each horse as an individual.



Weaver took the lessons he learned from great cutting and reining trainers to start his own reined cow horse program. But with few clients to start, he took on project-type horses that needed help, and many of them were barrel horses.

### DIFFERENT KIND OF JOCKEY

As he hung out his horse training shingle, Weaver built his business with the projects at hand, and that included starting off-the-track colts on the barrel pattern or working with problem barrel horses.

“People around Idaho and Utah, they’re big in barrel racing,” Weaver said. “I would start a horse like a cow horse, then start trotting around the barrels. People started coming to me with their barrel problems, and what I found was a lack of horsemanship.”

Years spent dealing with strong, hard-running, hot-blooded racehorses gave Weaver an edge when it came to riding a barrel horse. He says he learned to ride the hot horses or the ignorant ones that didn’t know better. In other words, Weaver could get along with just about any horse.

As his reputation for helping horses and riders grew, so did Weaver’s desire to

*Above:* Weaver started working with problematic barrel horses when he returned to Idaho after working the racetracks and spending time in California. Today, he creates barrel horses without problems using a slow-start program.

*Below:* Obstacles he finds riding out can make for great training sessions, including this water tank Weaver uses to guide Famous Because in large circles.



do more to help the horse. He found that people wanted a 30-day fix on their horse. Eventually, the horseman stopped taking on projects.

“I didn’t want to be the guy that rode a horse for 30 days—it wasn’t fair to the horse, and that doesn’t build a clientele. I stopped for a little bit and instead started a few of my own [barrel prospects],” Weaver said. “Everything I had I planned to run myself [at futurities], but once people saw them when I would time-only run at a barrel race, they sold. You can’t run those horses until December before the futurity year, not for money. They’d ask what the horse was and then have me price it. I couldn’t keep a horse to run, because I sold them.”

Soon, Weaver had more cow horse prospects than running-breds in his barn. He achieved success at National Reined Cow Horse Association premier events, like the NRCHA Stallion Stakes, and focused his program on that discipline. But, he couldn’t outrun the barrel horses.

### BUILDING BLOCKS

On a tall, lanky sorrel mare with a broad blaze, Weaver looks every bit a jockey. The mare stretches her head and neck forward in a ground-covering long trot up the slope of the mountains bordering Weaver’s facility. Ears forward, the mare looked calm and ready to ride.

## Training Feature



The length of time allows him to put a solid start on a young horse so that when it is asked to lope the pattern or add speed, the horse is ready. But running is the last thing on Weaver's mind 45 days into starting Jones' mare. First, Famous Because needs to learn to ride straight.

Weaver utilizes dirt roads and BLM Public Lands near his home to put miles on a young horse, teaching it to ride out on a loose rein.

"I'll ride down dirt roads, over trees, across a gully, just keep moving straight."

▶ Using large bushes, Weaver asks Famous Because to guide around and between the bushes without breaking stride and keeping forward motion.

Famous Because is a typical 2-year-old prospect Weaver rides for a select few barrel horse breeders. The mare is by JB Proud N Famous and out of Ruby Faysema and has the pedigree to run. Angie Jones of Joseph, Utah, bred Famous Because and owns the mare's sire, JB Proud N Famous. Jones sends horses to Weaver to ensure they receive a solid start.

"Without a great foundation, you have nothing to build on," Jones said. "You can't have an incredible finished product if you don't start it the right way. We like to sell horses that last—ones with the mind, body and heart to run. All levels of riders want a fun, broke horse with a solid foundation you can always fall back on."

Jones gears her young horses toward futurities when they are ready to run. She is one of Weaver's repeat clients, and one that is willing to leave her horse for the required six months to a year in order for Weaver to put on a solid foundation.

"What kills all horse events? Speed. Whether it's a rundown, going down the fence or running barrels, that is where the problems happen—with speed. When you have a foundation, you can go back and start again," Weaver said. "The mind and mental game is a big part of barrel futurities. The ones that are high and fractious, you can't advance them far enough along to have them in winning form at that young age."





I want them to move straight, on a loose rein, relaxed and at a long trot,” Weaver said. “When I have one ready to stay at the trot—not wanting to break to a lope—I’ll start guiding around a tree. And for me, it is guiding, not shortening them up to turn the tree. Most people go out and hang on a horse. I want a totally loose rein. These horses need to be in a relaxed mental state to train on them.”

To do that, he puts the mare in the position to use her feet. Up the hill, across a gully, around a mesquite bush and around water tanks, the young horse learns to be guided while moving forward. Riding out is essential to Weaver’s program, as is having a horse that is willingly guided.

“I’ve been on [Famous Because] a month and a half,” Weaver said. “Before I start circling barrels, I want her to learn to place her feet, to have balance and to let me guide her.”

When he can guide a young horse around a water tank or tree, he starts asking the horse to place its feet tighter for

Above: With large telephone poles laid in an “X,” Weaver rides into each X section and gently pulls a rein to turn the horse. The horse’s natural inclination not to step over the large pole helps them learn to rock back and turn on their hindquarters.

Below: In Enterprise, Utah, Brady Weaver trains winning cow horses and starts outstanding barrel futurity prospects.



a turn. It can take a few months before Weaver shows a young horse the barrels or starts making tight turns.

Instead, he lets the horse figure out how to use its body to turn without him hauling it around. To preempt a horse from hanging on his hand in a circle, Weaver uses obstacles, like a pole, bush or water tank. One element he uses is an X-style pole configuration made with telephone pole-width beams.

“She’s going to hang on me if I don’t use something to help me have some feel. I want to place a horse where I want to place them and not drag me around by their nose,” Weaver said. “Most of these barrel horses are big and don’t have all their motor skills like a young cow horse. The pole drill is a way to have logs on the ground that helps teach forward motion, moving their feet and gets them thinking. They stay between your legs and drive up because they don’t want to step over that log.”

Weaver knows that it takes time to work with a prospect, especially one bred to run. He draws on his experience with running-bred horses to keep his cool even when things aren’t going as planned.

“I let some things go with a lanky, big barrel horse. I have to say, ‘Hey, it takes time.’ You can’t rush a mare like this big filly. You’ll cripple her in her mind,” Weaver said. “Slowly teach her to place her feet when you guide her around. In a week or so of this pole drill, she’ll lope around without me having to mug [pull] her around. It will be easy. It is repetition and being patient.”

As they say, slow and steady wins the race. With a proper start and a strong foundation, Weaver is prepping top barrel prospects to not only win the futurity race but to continue on for years of competition as a sane, reliable mount.

For more on Brady Weaver’s training program, visit [weaverperformancehorses.com](http://weaverperformancehorses.com).

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