

Stable Owner Boards Blind Horses

Blind horses adapt to their circumstances and are able to lead quality lives, says Jessyka Harding, who “accidentally” got into the business of boarding blind horses after buying an Appaloosa gelding.

“We didn’t know Blink was almost blind until the vet told us two weeks after we got him,” she says, adding that they knew the former show horse’s vision had been affected after he chewed an electrical cord. They just didn’t know how severe it was.

Harding purchased Blink as a companion to another horse after she and her husband bought property in Cylon, Wis. They soon started Harmony Ranch, a boarding, training and riding business.

The horses were fenced in a small pasture at first, as the Hardings transformed the former cattle/hog farm to accommodate horses and add pastures. When access to another pasture opened up, Harding led Blink a couple times - up a hill, turning sharply, then going another 150 ft. on a walkway to a smaller pasture with a hay shelter.

“Blink figured it out pretty quickly. It’s really interesting how well they can function,” Harding says.

Early on Blink also proved blind horses can

hold their own in the pecking order of horses. Though usually a quiet horse, when pushed by other horses, Blink squeals and kicks. When Harding started boarding another blind horse, she observed that he didn’t let other horses get the best of him either.

“I don’t think horses are affected nearly as much as humans by blindness. They adjust quickly and seem to continue to live happily,” Harding says.

They are more cautious, moving slowly to get a drink of water and taking careful steps, for example. Blink has broken through the electrical tape fencing a few times but doesn’t go far because he doesn’t know where he is.

With training, blind horses can learn to be ridden again. Harding worked very slowly with Blink, as if she were breaking in a new horse. “A blind horse is more dependent on a rider’s clues. That actually helps you improve your horsemanship,” she points out.

Harding started welcoming other blind horses to board and/or train. It has become part of her mission through a Facebook group, Blind Without Boundaries.

For owners of blind horses, she offers a few tips:

- *Electric tape fencing is easier to see when



Blind horses are welcome at Harmony Ranch, a boarding, training and riding business in Wisconsin.

it’s been broken and won’t harm the horses.

- *Place feeders and waterers at the end of pastures rather than in the middle. Also, make sure there are no sharp objects around.

- *Work daily with a blind horse and allow it time to transition before any training.

- *Pay attention to herd dynamics and only put “low key” personality horses with blind horses.

- *Keep sighted horses with the blind horses

but, if possible, start with blind horses and add sighted horses later.

For more information about Harding’s services, check out her website and Facebook pages.

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His Custom-Designed Hats Always Fit Perfectly

Travis Hamblen’s Mobile Hat Lounge is like a food truck. But instead of feeding the body, his services “honor the art of the hat” - specifically western hats. He hauls his 24-ft. trailer to places his customers like to gather - rodeos, breweries, fairs, horse shows and auction sales, for example.

That makes it convenient for customers to have an old hat cleaned off, refitted or “recreated”, or buy a new American Hat Company hat, and have Hamblen custom fit and trim it. It may also be the first time the hat buyer discovers the true shape of his or her head with a strange looking device.

Hamblen used a conformateur when he worked for a hat company for four years and purchased one for himself when he opened his business in January (2020).

The first conformateurs were made in the 19th Century for hat makers and are used by today’s hat makers.

“I’m not a hat maker, but I provide stock hats with a custom fit,” Hamblen says.

The conformateur comes in two parts. It has 45 fingers and a spring system that locks in place with wing nuts and plastic knobs on a person’s head to get the actual size and shape of the head. The inside part fits inside a hat to shape the hat. Some only require steaming to get the shape, and customers can get their hats back quickly. But others require wood blocks to be carved and take more time. When necessary to achieve the perfect fit, Hamblen tears the hat down and starts from scratch.

The device is helpful for fitting new and old hats.

“I’ve done hats that are 40 to 50 years old,” Hamblen says. Many of his customers are women. Often they bring in their father’s or grandfather’s old hat and want it shaped and trimmed with an updated look to make the hat their own.

Hat cleaning and hat trimming services start at about \$125. New hats start at \$300. While much of Hamblen’s work comes through his online business, and social media, he is looking for venues to travel to around Colorado and adjacent states with his Mobile Hat Lounge.

He wants to share his passion for agriculture and the western world with anyone who loves hats - from cowboys to hipsters to businessmen.



Hat maker Travis Hamblen uses a conformateur (above) to determine the shape of the customer’s head and ensure a perfect fit.



“Not a lot of places service hats with custom fitting. I want to be where the people need me to be,” he says. “We are a family owned business. I have 10 and 13-year-old sons and my parents are partners. Our business is based on relationships and a steamer is where they are built.”

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Over the years Keith Ferrell has built several historic horse-drawn wagons, including this Butterfield Overland Mail Stagecoach.

Historic Wagons Rebuilt With Passion For Accuracy

Ask Keith Ferrell about one of the vintage wagons he’s restored and you’ll get a lesson about its historical significance to the U.S.

For example, his 1860’s chuckwagon is only stocked with items that would have been available at the time - things like canned milk and canned apples. The 1878 U.S. Army Cavalry Escort Wagon he is currently working on has the original seat, complete with an attachment for a shovel underneath. Thanks to his in-depth research, Ferrell knew exactly what to look for when he purchased the seat and shovel at two separate auctions recently.

He began accumulating pieces 40 years ago for his antique fleet, which includes an 1860’s horse-drawn dump truck and a Butterfield Overland Mail Stagecoach. Ferrell’s love for old West history began when the 70-year-old was a kid watching Roy Rogers and Sky King on television. While his excavation business made him a good living, he loved competing in cowboy-style Single Actions Shooting Society (SASS) events. That led to meeting Roy Rogers and later buying his ranch.

Ferrell attends auctions and sales to find parts for his historic pieces. Besides the horse-drawn equipment, he has Dodge Power Wagons that were first used during WWII and some tractors, including a 1928 McCormick-Deering.

He’s given more than 1,000 people free rides in his stagecoach at public events. His collection is stored safely in buildings on



Photo shows front-end loader setting stagecoach cabin in place on one of Ferrell’s latest creations.

his New Castle, Ind., farm, and he enjoys talking to people interested in history or his collection.

Another project in the works is creating a Pony Express setup that educates people how it was an important tie for the nation between Missouri and California for 18 mos. before telegraph lines were put in place in October 1861.

“Research is the greatest thing,” he says. “If someone’s not researching and doing this, we would forget our past.”

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