

Training cutting horses is one of the many facets of Louisiana Tech's horse program.

Looking toward the future. Students at Louisiana Tech prepare themselves for employment after graduation.

*by Helena Biasatti*

**W**ork experience. With it, a college graduate can open doors. Without it, he usually keeps knocking on them.

The horse program at Louisiana Tech gives experience, as it incorporates on-the-job training. Students learn to handle horses — correctly and safely. And when they graduate? They are in demand because they do have something to sell: knowledge and the ability to perform.

At the Louisiana Tech Stallion Station, the large work force is organized similarly to what would be found in the workaday world. "Students are assigned various supervisory positions, such as mare barn manager, maintenance foreman, feed foreman and trainer," explained Dr. Jim McCall, director of the equine unit. "Each supervisor has a student labor crew for which he is responsible, including settling disputes and hiring and firing. These students get invaluable training in real-life situations, in addition to the classroom and laboratory experience."

However, Tech's equine curriculum is not an equitation-type program. "We are instructing students to train and manage horses," McCall said. "If a person just wants to ride horses, that in itself is not a good enough reason for him to be going to a college which offers a bachelor of science degree. He needs to go someplace where they teach horse riding. A person doesn't need a Ph.D. to instruct horse riding. He doesn't need to take history, chemistry and botany. Higher education and vocation are the reasons why Tech is here. The two fit together as a unit."

"I don't think a university is meant to be like following Socrates around just to get smart," he continued. "It's here for the practical reason of preparing people for a vocation once they've graduated. Parents and students should look at col-

lege as a way to a better life through education and job offers. College also should provide an opportunity for students to use their education so as to make a living doing what they enjoy most."

But a student who wants to work with horses shouldn't be discouraged if he doesn't have a horse background. It is not a prerequisite for entrance into the program. "I had a student who had only been on a horse once in his life, and never touched another," McCall said. "He signed up to take a horse course because he liked horses. I guess he read 'Black Beauty' or something like that. But he liked horses a lot, and there was not a kid who worked harder. He was almost cast out from his family because of it, too. They told him he couldn't make a living with horses, and some other people told him that since he had never been around them, he didn't have a leg to stand on. But his persistence and stubbornness prevailed. He just

AUGUST 1982



lowered his head and ran at 'em. That boy is now manager of a top-notch Thoroughbred breeding farm. Although it took him about eight years to get there, without an education it would have taken him at least 20."

It pays to have an education. McCall has found that several horse operations are requesting individuals who have college degrees. "I get calls all the time," he said. "Since horses have become such a big business, several owners are searching for people who are not only educated, but who can get along with customers and other personnel. When they look at someone they want to hire, they often ask themselves, 'Can this person handle my clientele? Is he responsible? Can he handle money, books and keep records? Does he know how to fill out a breeder's report? Can he handle the paperwork, and is he going to represent my entire operation well?'"

It's happening, folks. There is a vast assortment of opportunities available for college graduates who know about horses. "Sure, there are good horsemen who grew up in the business who don't have degrees and they certainly may be qualified for particular jobs," McCall asserted. "But we are experiencing that the person with a degree is usually the one who is selected for a management position, whether it be on a breeding farm, racetrack or for a breed association."

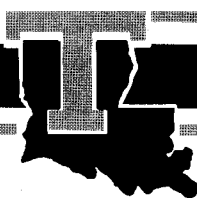
But not all jobs are alike. Some require more business experience and others, for instance, may involve maintaining a cattle operation as well. "That is why I encourage all of my students to take as many animal science courses as they can, even though they're given options in horses. For instance, I still think it's important for students to take 'meats' (a course on identifying and grading different cuts of meat). An employer could ask them something about cattle, and often they do. They ought to know the answers."

"Our goal at Louisiana Tech," McCall pointed out, "is

# EDUCATION PAYS AT LOUISIANA TECH

to produce graduates with well-rounded academic backgrounds in livestock production, along with specialized skills required for managing a breeding and/or training operation. They should also know about such fields as art and science, and have a good command of the English language. People usually attend college to get an education, and they should leave there with one."

He added, "Confidence and self-esteem are also im-



portant tools, as are communication skills. Students should be able to talk freely and intelligently about a vast array of off-the-cuff topics, not just horses alone."

McCall explained that employers often seek someone who has, in particular, knowledge of animal psychology and anatomy. "When dealing directly with a horse, the person should know what's happening from the inside out. He needs to be aware of symptoms and expressions which surface on the outside, and relate these to what's possibly happening on the inside. We teach our students to think effectively, make decisions quickly and deal with situations individually."

Much of the instruction given in the equine program is formulated by hands-on experience. Students are taught to infuse, palpate and breed mares, collect semen and administer medications. They are exposed to various breeding and training methods, and can then apply that information to the operation of the school's horse facility.

"We run this just like a business," McCall said. "We have roughly 40 acres, handle about a hundred horses and stand five stallions to the public. The major difference in our program from those at most universities is that we are self-supportive. We are not funded by




# EDUCATION PAYS AT LOUISIANA TECH

the state, and the university does not allocate us a budget and tell us how much we are allowed to spend.

"Our students understand that the stallion station operates just as a horseman would operate month to month. If we are doing well," he explained, "then I can pay the students who work at the horse center. If we are not, I can't. The students soon learn the importance of good management. The cost of feed, vet bills, vaccines and deworming are taken seriously. They also realize that there are some lean months from time to time, but since we've started the program, we've never had a month where we couldn't meet the payments. We

realize that for us to stay in business, we have to stay within the limits of what we bring in. What we make is what we've got."

The students who work at the stallion station are paid salaries. They are allowed a 20-hour week and receive minimum wages. "They never turn in as many hours as they work," McCall commented. "Most of them work 30 to 40 hours a week. They work seven days a week, no holidays, no Easter break and no spring break. If they choose to go home, they have to do it on a buddy system. They swap out with another student. I assure you that if you come here at six in the



Students are responsible for caring for the horses assigned to them.

Jim and Lynda McCall came back home from Maryland two years ago to construct a horse program at Louisiana Tech.

morning and at eight at night, you'll find them working. Most of the time we try to pay each student on a merit basis. If they work hard and do their chores, we try to give them a raise. If they don't work, they don't get paid."

Many of the students who are employed by the stallion station are working their way through school. "I have some that don't need to," the equine director surmised, "but they feel pretty proud of the fact that they can. We are a big family here, or more like a big fraternity. If we can't work together and get along, we won't make it. The good thing is, though, we do have a good time and we are making it."

The university's horse program has come a long way in its first two years of existence. McCall said, "When I first got here, the university only had one horse production class and that was taught in the summer. There was not a stallion station, either. The area where the stallion station is now located was part of the dairy. There were no stalls and stocks, just a big open hay barn, and the entire place was surrounded by four strands of barb wire."

"It was my job," he mentioned, "to see how a horse program could survive without funding. The college didn't have mares to speak of — maybe 10 to 12 — and half of those had positive Coggins. After looking around the state, it was decided that the best way for us to make money was in stallions. There weren't any Thoroughbreds standing in the area and very few Quarter Horses. By standing stallions, we didn't have to worry about foals being born and waiting a year to sell them. We didn't have to worry about training colts, either. The fact of the matter was that the school didn't have the money to go out and buy horses, train and resell them. And there weren't any students who knew how to train horses at this time."

So McCall went out and tried to round up the best

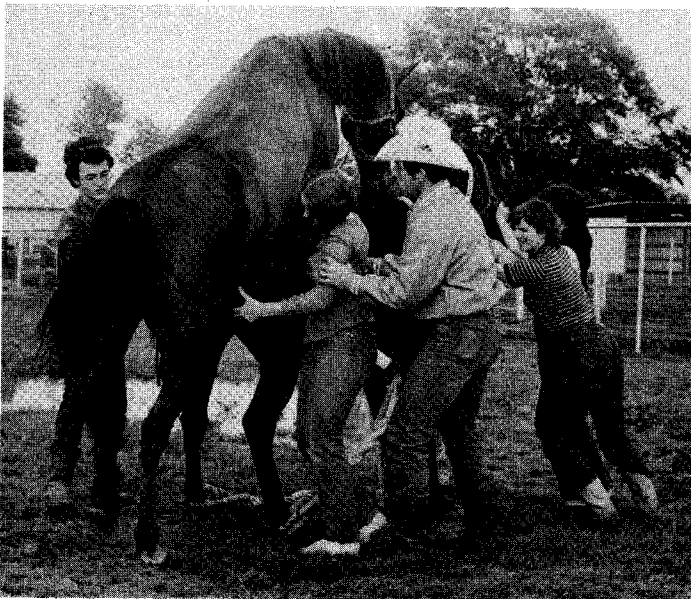
stallions he could find. Tech already had one stallion — a Thoroughbred, Strong Diplomat, who was later sold. But he was never booked to any outside mares. "I put together a band of four others: Thoroughbreds Spike, Mr. Zip Zip Zip and Waitinginthewings, and Quarter Horse O'Quinn's Bar by Three Bars (TB). Just recently the university got Badger Lynx, and he's now in training for the 1982 NCHA Cutting Horse Futurity."

The horse program opened its gates in July of 1980, and all the horses were kept at the cow farm while stalls were being built at the dairy farm. "We soon had 16 prefab pipe stalls and a stallion barn," McCall explained. "And I began teaching three courses before the breeding season began: two introductory horse management classes and intermediate horse management."

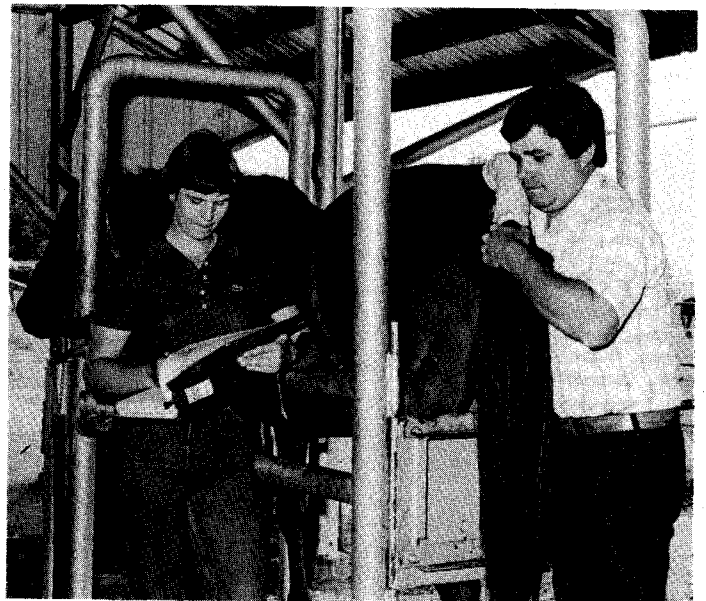
"I hired the students before we began receiving outside mares. We bred 102 mares that first year, and our stud fees ranged from \$250 to \$750. We were able to live off that money pretty much until last fall. We funded 80 percent of the costs ourselves. The university did give us some starting money, and there were quite a few donations from people who wanted to see a horse program at Tech."

Since the breeding season only lasts a few months, McCall decided to go ahead and train a few horses. "We needed some sort of off-season income," he said. "The training business boomed so fast, we hardly had enough room for the outside broodmares. We also added another staff member to help with the operation, Ted Parker."

The horses which the university received for training included racehorses and cutting horses. "We now have somewhere between 20 and 30 head in training, and we're making just as much from that as we are from breeding."



Equine lab supervisor Ted Parker, with hat, teaches a student how to collect semen.



Dr. William Green checks for a follicle, while mare barn manager Denise Robertson updates the mare's record.

## EDUCATION PAYS AT LOUISIANA TECH



Early each morning, two of the university's exercise riders condition and leg up some of the racehorses in training.

The training of racehorses nourished the financing so well that the program continued to expand further. Beginning in the fall of '82, Louisiana Tech will offer a B.S. degree in animal science with a specialty in racetrack management. The courses will include backstretch management, applied racetrack management and the administration of racing facilities.

"We have 12 horses in training right now that will be running at Louisiana Downs," explained Ted Parker, who supervises the racetrack program. "The track is only 60 miles away so we can haul horses back and forth pretty easily. We just had our first student graduate from the horse program here, and he is a licensed racetrack trainer. He has his own crew and exercise riders."

Parker, who is also a licensed trainer, continued, "We went through several girls to pick out the two that we have now. It takes a special person to go to school and get up early. They start breezing colts about six o'clock in the morning. One of our exercise riders graduated with a degree in math and then decided to join our program."

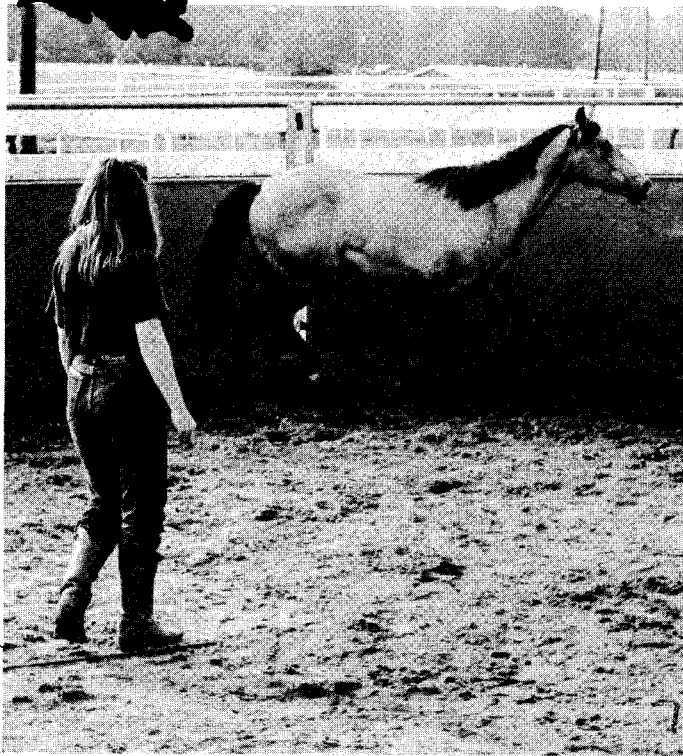
AUGUST 1982

The horses which run at the track are under the supervision of the university horse program, and Dave Nelson, the student who just graduated, is their trainer. Nelson commented during an early morning workout, "I only wish I could have started when I was a freshman."

"I noticed him (Nelson) working a few horses up in a milo field close by and decided to help him out," Parker said. "The first horse we sent to the track from our program won his first race. But you don't win them all."

"Dave is an example of a student who did a lot of changing while he was here," McCall said. "He was thinking about dropping out of school, and he also had a few problems which he had a hard time handling. Today he is in a high-level management position and has a good job. If you see one of those type of kids leave here, it makes up for some of the other failures."

When it comes to the placement of students, McCall usually has more jobs available than he has students to fill. "This is mainly due to the fact that we haven't been in operation long enough to have very many students. Right now we have a total of 40. I'd like to have 80. We



One of the methods of tackless training is to work a horse in a round pen using voice and body commands.

are growing so fast that I could use more help. We have 18 students on the payroll, and if business keeps going like it is, we could have 36 next year."

One of the reasons the horse program is expanding is McCall's successes as a college instructor. "I've seen students make it in the real world, and I mean make it the hard way. One student went out and bought a share in a young race colt. The horse ran out at \$500,000 and was later syndicated. The student went out and bought him a 200-acre farm and turned it into a horse operation. I admit it took luck to get the horse and the money to get started. But if he's going to make money with what he's got, he's got to have some brains. Agree?"

"Another boy was a stall mucker, and now he's managing a breeding farm. When a student goes out and does well, it makes my job all worthwhile.

"A student can make it big, but it depends on what he wants," McCall said. "I tell each of them to decide what they want and be very specific about it. Don't say, 'I want to work with horses', or 'I want to own a horse farm.' Be specific and set your goal, then go out and get it. Students have to put forth the commitment.

"I have found that teaching students is a little like training horses," he said matter-of-factly. "The difference with training horses, however, is that when I train a horse, that's just one horse. When I train a student, what I taught him may affect a hundred or a thousand horses, depending on how many he rides in his lifetime.

McCall continued, "No two individuals are alike, whether it be horses or people. My theory is to teach

them the basics and as they progress, ask them for a little more. Then when the going gets tough in competition, ask them for all they've got.

"I push my students all the time. The more I push, the more they holler. But I tell them that I'm not pushing half as much as others will on the outside of this academic institution. I tell them that if they think I'm bad, just wait till you have to do this for a living."

McCall's wife, Lynda, added, "We have found that if you work a student hard, by the time he becomes a senior, he will know if this is the type of life he wants. If he doesn't, he'll drop out and change majors. Some of the students tell us, 'I thought I wanted to train horses, but if it requires this much work, I don't want to do it.' It just depends on how bad they want something, and how bad they want to work to get it."

Setting up the horse program at Tech has been a challenge for the McCalls. "We've had it for breakfast for so long that we dream about it at night," Lynda said. "We think about it and the students all the time."

She continued, "We have a one-to-one relationship with our students. This is what Jim and I like best about Tech. Here the classes aren't so big that you don't know the names of the students."

McCall said, "I know first names, last names and have probably met the students' parents several times. When a school grows and gets big, you lose that person-to-person contact. However, I don't think we are big enough, though, and I'd like to see more students here at the university. I'd like to be able to turn out 25 students a year. That's my goal."

Louisiana Tech is noted as an engineering school. "We are trying to get it known as a horse school, too," McCall said. "We probably have the largest ag department of any state school other than LSU (Louisiana State University). The total enrollment here is about 11,000. There are 400 students enrolled in agriculture and of those, 121 are animal science majors."

Presently the horse program at Tech graduates a student with a four-year degree in animal science, with emphasis on horses. "We are planning to add a master's program later on," McCall said. "But we do have some graduate students who are taking some of the horse courses. We also have programs or seminars set up periodically for the people in the community. Those are kept pretty general."

The horse courses taught for credit are structured in such a way that a student is nurtured along as he goes from basic information to advanced studies. "The first year, it's like giving him an appetizer. He takes all of his basics first," explained Dr. Reid McLellan Jr., department head for animal science.

"The following year we give him a salad. He takes animal science 211, which is the introduction to equine science. The course is a general survey of principles of horse management and husbandry, and includes anatomy, lamenesses, nutrition, health and reproduction."

Then the main course. "From those students who started at the introductory level, only 12 to 15 get to draw two horses for the summer-long behavior class.

These aren't necessarily the best riders, but individuals who have demonstrated the patience, tenacity and determination required for success. The training courses require a student to start with a weanling and keep him for six or seven months," McLellan said. "If the horse is a school-owned yearling, he is sold in our annual production sale. This is one of the ways that the horse program makes money."

McLellan continued, "Students are taught to halter break their foals and fit them out. They learn to longe them in the round pen, and gradually go through every phase of training with their foals."

The management courses are separate from the training courses. Animal science 320 — intermediate horse management — is a junior level class. It is an in-depth study of nutritional requirements and reproductive physiology of the horse. Advanced horse management covers such topics as horse sales, genetics, semen storage, biopsies, ration utilization and facilities.

As students advance, they can be assigned as assistant lab instructors at the stallion station. They are then faced with more complex senior level courses. Animal science 420 — horse behavior — discusses principles and procedures employed in tackless training of horses. And the foremost authorities for this technique are the McCalls. They have performed seminars nationwide on this very principle in training.

Tackless training involves talking to the horse and watching his expressions. Communication is the key. Students learn to manipulate the horse's behavior and ride without the use of a bit or saddle.

"We also have an intern program where students receive credit for working for an approved equine operation," McLellan explained. "I prefer that the senior students intern because they have sufficient knowledge and maturity."

"We have often found that the students who intern will be hired by the people they worked for, upon graduation. We run a 60 to 70 percent hiring rate for our internship program."

The horse program at Tech gives students a full-course meal, piece by piece. "We prepare each student so that he can go out into the world prepared and qualified to perform. He is ready for employment. But sometimes, I have to admit, it's hard to get students to leave. I feel we have to run some of them off."

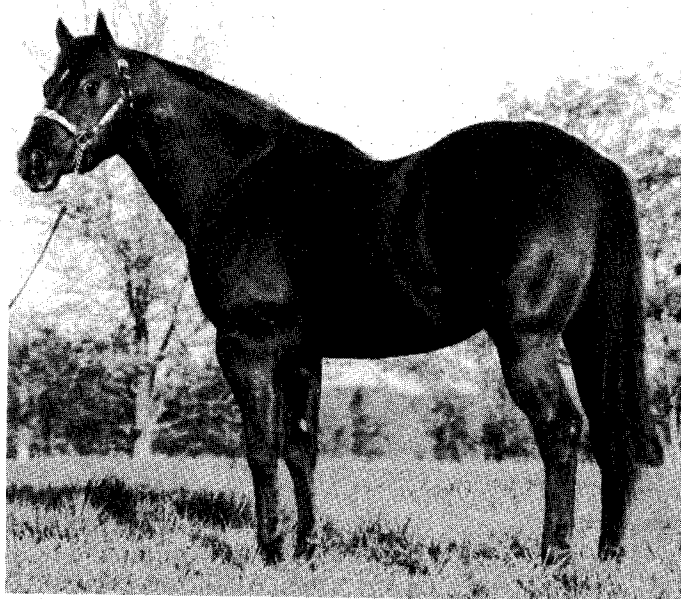
McLellan said he has students tell him that they don't know what they want. "I don't mind this," he explained. "If a student says to me, 'I want to be a cowboy but I'm not sure,' I tell him that this is a time in his life when he can discover what he wants. Someone may not want to be a veterinarian, he may want to be something else. We give students a chance to find out."

"Maybe there is a student interested in international agriculture. I advise him to take some Spanish and perhaps sign up for one of our tours to the Andes. So what if he takes an extra year to graduate because he doesn't have the required courses for a degree? At his age, the extra year is 1/20th of his life. It seems like an awful long time at that particular moment. But when he gets to be 35 or 36, the extra year is mean-

ingless. One more year wasn't so important after all.

"I encourage students not to pressure themselves," he said. "Often mom and dad have a lot to do with that. They tell their child, 'I want you to be a doctor or lawyer.' But maybe the student doesn't want to be a doctor or lawyer. We want students to establish confidence in their own ability. The key to success is that a person knows what he has to sell, and believes in himself."

"At Louisiana Tech, we give students a chance to find out what they want out of life. Then it is up to them to go out and get it, make something of themselves and give that extra effort in whatever they do. This university has a lot to offer." And that's why the door is always left open. □



One of the Quarter Horse stallions at the stallion station is O'Quinn's Bar. He is by Three Bars (TB) out of O'Quinn's Midget by King.