

The Privilege of Photographing Horses

By Scott Trees

*T*here has never been a time in my life when horses were not involved in one fashion or another. I was born into a horse family, my mother had World Champion Saddlebreds and my brother showed Quarter Horses. I've shown them, owned them, loved them, and buried them. More than any one variable in my life, horses have been the one constant presence.

I didn't really set out to make horses the main subject of my camera. My goal as a young man was just to take pictures for a profession. Horses provided the opening to that dream, but I had no idea it would turn in to the career it eventually became. Because of horses, I have had the good fortune to travel the world and experience horses at a variety of levels: show horse, art object, beast of burden, and friend.



Certainly the show horse side provided the foundation of my photography business. Particularly in the 80's when the Arabian industry boomed. As the high fashion models of the horse breed, Arabians were perfect subjects for my artistic style in shooting.

Horses were not my only subjects, I did a fair amount of commercial work as well. In working with art directors, I learned that a picture needed to get attention if it was going to be used in an advertisement. I developed a belief that as an advertising photographer (who happened to specialize in horses) I wanted to take something you saw every day and show it to you in a way you hadn't seen it before. With horses that is not always an easy task, as there is a limit to what can be done, although I have always pushed the envelope whenever possible! I have done shots of horses in studios, in exotic locations and unusual situations.

While my photographic mainstay was the advertising aspect of photographing show horses, that provided an even greater opportunity to see and photograph horses in a variety of non-show environments. Those situations were actually the ones that I enjoyed most which was seeing horses be horses.

In the show world we tend to forget how horses exist outside the confines of a stall and a controlled environment. We also tend to overlook the fact that for the majority of horses in the world, life is not easy. In many situations the true meaning of horsepower is evident.

I have been in parts of the world, where the horse was, and still is, critical to the daily survival and subsistence of the people that own them. They are a vital source of transportation and commerce under a variety of circumstances.

In some cases their care is excellent. However for many, through no fault of the owners, a life of absolute poverty does not provide the most basic of care. It is hard to see for anyone that loves horses, but I am always amazed at how these beasts of burden seem to endure it all with a quiet dignity.

Another aspect that many in the show world tend to forget is the fact they are herd animals and quite social with a rich body language. Probably no other event that I cover illustrates this fact better than the annual Sombrero Photography workshop at the Sombrero Ranch in Craig, Colorado sponsored by the Equine Photographers Network. Its founder, Carien Schippers, gives me the privilege and opportunity to be the lead instructor during the entire week.



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Sombrero owns the largest private herd in North America. During the week of the workshop, we have access to over 100 horses that are utilized to create scenes for the workshop participants to photograph. The event ends with coverage of the Great American Horse Drive in which anywhere from 600 - 1200 horses are moved 62 miles over two days from their winter pastures to the spring ranch. Sombrero is a true working horse ranch in the tradition of the Western lifestyle.

This experience is like no other I have ever witnessed or been a part of. I did photograph large herds in Communist Russia and Poland, but nothing on a scale like this. To experience so many horses at one time interacting with one another in a sea of horse flesh is a remarkable experience. There is also a cacophony of sounds as horses move down the roads nickering and calling out for one another. Of all the events I have the privilege to photograph, I have to admit this is without a doubt my favorite.

Privilege is a key word here. I am one of the lucky people in this world who has been able to do something I truly enjoy.



Because of horses, I have traveled the world, experienced many different cultures and met a lot of interesting horses and people too. It has been a fascinating journey, and not a day goes by that I am not grateful for my lifetime association with this magnificent animal: The Horse.

Scott Trees is recognized internationally for his dramatic portrayals of horses. For over four decades he has traveled the world shooting for a variety of breeds and clients. In addition to his photography, he also provides video services, workshops, and is a sought after speaker. When not traveling he resides in Ft. Worth Texas. www.treemedia.com

