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Protecting Animals: Film Monitoring



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Hollywood Hoofbeats: Trails Blazed Across the Silver Screen

by **Petrine Day Mitchum with Audrey Pavia**
BowTie Press (Fall 2005 publication)

Equine actors finally receive their due in Petrine Day Mitchum's new book *Hollywood Hoofbeats: Trails Blazed Across the Silver Screen*. Chock-full of handsome illustrations and movie stills, Mitchum takes readers on a wild ride through the history of horses in Hollywood, covering westerns, epics, comedies, family films, and more.

"It's been a burr under my saddle, if I can use a riding term, that when people think of horses in Hollywood they don't think any further than the westerns," Mitchum says. "The real story starts in the silent era and goes through to today, and it's a much richer and more interesting history than people realize."

While originally conceived as a documentary film to show that movie horses today receive far better treatment than their predecessors, the project's scope soon shifted. "When I started researching the very early days, and the silent cowboy stars like William S. Hart, who had such a great relationship with his horse...I got so swept away in the history and the details that I wanted to do a very different kind of film," Mitchum explains. Eventually, she realized a book format was a better fit for the wealth of fascinating nuggets she had mined during nearly five years of research.

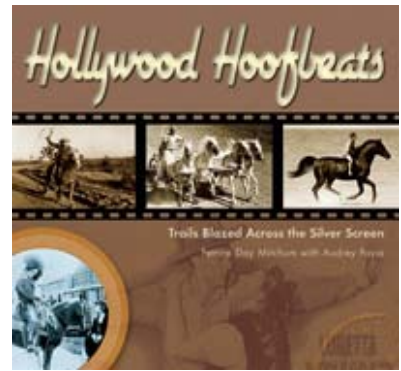
Throughout chapter four -- "Unsung Horse Heroes and Humane Advances" -- Mitchum speaks at length about the American Humane Association's Film & Television Unit, as well as about social attitudes toward animals during the early days of filmmaking. "Part of the reason I wanted to write the book," says Mitchum, "was to bring public awareness of course to the horses, but also to the work of American Humane."

The book mentions the highly publicized equine fatalities in the 1939 film *Jesse James* that led American Humane to take the reins as the expert in animal actor oversight. The author also discusses the common-but-cruel Running W device used at the time on galloping horses to create spectacular somersault falls. According to the book, "Wires attached to



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Lights! Camera! Giddy-Up!

Los Angeles—November 10, 2005



Petrine Mitchum, Rory Flynn, and Karen Rosa. Photo courtesy Maria Ventura,

the horse's forelegs were threaded through a ring on the cinch and secured to buried dead weights. When the horse ran to the end of the wires, his forelegs were yanked out from under him." American Humane banned such inhumane practices and encouraged filmmakers to use trained stunt horses, instead. As this excerpt reveals:

In the early 1940s, American Humane's certified safety representatives were often a nuisance for directors eager for dramatic action, but with vigilance came a new breed of performer, the specially trained stunt horse. Blessed with marvelous reflexes, the trained falling horse is the most prized of the specialty performers. Famous falling horses such as Cocaine, Coco, Hot Rod, Gypsy, Tadpole and the Jerry Brown Falling Horse commanded top salaries befitting star athletes of their day.



In chapter after chapter, Mitchum tells the stories of these and scores of other noteworthy horses, uncovering little-known facts such as how many different Triggers Roy Rogers owned, and exactly how television star Mr. Ed "talked." *Hollywood Hoofbeats* also covers the cowboys, the actors, the trainers, and the men who ran the huge stables that once supplied horses to Hollywood.

Actor Robert Mitchum, the author's late father, rode some of the most famous horses in the movie business throughout his illustrious career. But his daughter says that even though he liked owning horses, she rarely saw her dad ride for pleasure. Petrine Mitchum -- herself an accomplished rider -- admits she got hooked when she was put on her first horse at age two. "I used to beg my mother to take me to the Pickwick stables in Burbank. Little did I know that that was the neighborhood where many of the great movie stables were, and where Fury and Mr. Ed lived!"

Though she learned many interesting things during her exhaustive research, she says, "I think the most surprising thing is that what we call "horse whispering" has been around for a very long time --longer than the film business! The great trainers who worked with the horses of yesteryear accomplished amazing behaviors that required not only great empathy and understanding of the equine psyche, but patience and time that unfortunately are in short supply today."

As an organization, one of American Humane's key tenets is the importance of the human-animal bond. *Hollywood Hoofbeats* is, in many ways, a celebration of that. "Horses are also a healing animal," Mitchum says. "The positive bond that can be achieved between a human and a horse can be transformative, at least for the human! Many of us yearn for this type of bond, and watching horses in film is one way of fantasizing about this."

Not surprisingly, everyone the author approached for information about this unique subject was extremely cooperative. "The Hollywood horse trainers might have been a bit skeptical -- you know, 'who's this woman coming out of no where' -- but once they realized that I was serious, and that I was truly

Autry National Center

To celebrate the publication of Petrine Day Mitchum's new book, *Hollywood Hoofbeats: Trails Blazed Across the Silver Screen*, BowTie Press held a special book signing at the Autry National Center in Los Angeles, CA on November 10, 2005. Mitchum dedicated a chapter in her new book to the important work of the American Humane Association's Film and Television Unit, the only organization authorized to present the coveted "No Animals Were Harmed"® End Credit to films who follow its strict Guidelines for the Safe Use of Animals in Filmed Media.

During the reception following the book signing, Karen Rosa, Director of the American Humane Association's Film & Television Unit, presented the Humane Voice Award to horse trainer Corky Randall. A second-generation Hollywood horse trainer, Randall worked on numerous high profile productions, including the Disney series *Zorro* from 1957 to 1959, *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*, and *The Black Stallion*. Randall even came out of semi-retirement in 1998 to coordinate the livestock for *The Mask of Zorro* with Antonio Banderas. Randall was presented with the award in recognition of his lifelong dedication to humane training methods.

Accepting the award on Randall's behalf was Rory Flynn, daughter of legendary actor Errol Flynn. This was especially fitting since Flynn was the first actor in Hollywood to call attention to the plight of movie animals following the needless deaths of horses during the filming of *Charge of the Light Brigade*. Rosa also provided insight into the role of horses in entertainment, noting that horses are still the most at-risk animal on movie sets due to their unique and varied role in history, e.g., transportation, battle, agriculture, racing, and more.

trying to write an honest, and sort of loving story, then they opened up to me and were incredibly helpful.”

In the end, Mitchum was granted complete entrée into this world, and along the way she learned a few things about her famous father, his steeds, and the esteem in which stuntmen and colleagues held him. “It really was wonderful to hear how much people loved and respected him,” she says. “And it made me realize that with my background, I was the perfect person to do this book.”

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Running horses image in banner courtesy of Clifford Oliver

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