



★★★★ RIMFIRE: THE BARREL RACING MORGAN HORSE, by Ellen Feld. 206 pages, paperback, Willow Bend Publishing (www.willowbendpublishing.com), 2009, \$9.95.

Young fans of Ellen Feld's Morgan Horse Series will not be disappointed with the newest installment, *Rimfire*. As with the previous books in the series, the story follows the adventures of Heather Richardson and her friends at Gallant Morgans. In this book, Heather convinces her friend Nicholas to purchase a barrel racer named Rimfire, a horse she wishes she could have herself. As time goes on, both kids get swept up in the exciting sport of barrel racing, but things get heated when Heather competes on Rimfire without telling her friend.

As with all the books in the Morgan Horse Series, this one is a pure delight to read. Feld weaves life lessons, horse sense, and a hefty dose of barrel racing information into the exciting plot. The end result is a book that's both highly entertaining and subtly educational. Feld cleverly crafts chapters that paint a clear picture in the reader's mind, and she is able to capture the dialogue of young horse lovers perfectly. Jeanne Mellin's illustrations are sparse in *Rimfire*, but they follow the same classy style of the other books in the series.

BOTTOM LINE: Young horse lovers will get lost in this story of friendship, horse sense, and adventure!

★★★ A SEARCH FOR COLLECTION: SCIENCE AND ART IN RIDING, by Paul Belasik. 160 pages, hardcover, Trafalgar Square Books (www.horseandriderbooks.com), 2009, \$36.95.

Paul Belasik is internationally known as a dressage trainer and clinician, and with this book, he has undertaken a unique task: to test the classical notions of collection in a scientific fashion. This book presents the findings of this experiment, which can affect the way we fundamentally think about collection and training.

This is by no means a typical training guide. In fact, as you read the first chapter, you might wonder if Belasik is going to mention dressage or collection at all. Later, he goes on to discuss the subject of riding in a way that envelops philosophy, equine behavior, and especially science. As I read it, I was left feeling that some parts were thoroughly thought-provoking and eloquent, while other parts rambled in a self-absorbed way. Those who like to explore the more scientific and academic side of training and equitation will find this book to be a breath of fresh air, shedding new light on the topic of collection (and more); those who want a practical, straightforward explanation of collection will want their money back. One final criticism for me is the lack of pictures. There are numerous opportunities for photos or diagrams to augment the text, but the entire book has only eight photos total.

BOTTOM LINE: A+ for originality, but a C for accessibility.

★★★★ THE MYSTERY STALLION, by Sharon Siamon. 123 pages, paperback, Walrus Books (www.whitecap.ca), 2009, \$8.95.

Sharon Siamon has made a name for herself internationally as a successful author, and her newest

series is expected to be another big hit with young horse lovers. The plot of *The Mystery Stallion*, the first installment of Siamon's new Wild Horse Creek Series, takes place in the rugged Arizona desert. Twin sisters Sophie and Liv find themselves in the midst of an unanticipated adventure when their grandparents' stallion is mysteriously injured and the rest of the herd goes missing.

This tween-friendly book is action-packed and fast-moving. But it isn't just a mystery; rather, it also follows a personal journey for the girls, who grow and learn life lessons as the plot develops. In this way the book may reflect the readers' own life experiences, continually shaping them as they mature. The dynamic duo of twin protagonists also provides a unique perspective, as the characters work together but also find their own identities as the story unfolds. The end result is a book that will appeal to young readers on a number of levels, and will even be an entertaining read for mom and dad, if they're so inclined.

BOTTOM LINE: Young riders will love getting lost in the plot and the character development.

★★★★ THE MODERN HORSEMAN'S COUNTDOWN TO BROKE, by Sean Patrick. 256 pages, flapped paperback, Trafalgar Square Books (www.horseandriderbooks.com), 2009, \$29.95.

No, this book is not about counting your last few dollars until you're broke. Rather, the goal of this book is to simplify, and clarify,

the training process. Patrick recognizes that with so many books, DVDs, and websites out there giving you training guidance, it can be hard to get a clear answer on exactly what to do. This book is intended to shed light on the exact steps to take when training a horse for any discipline, in a straightforward and easy-to-digest manner. The idea is not just to train the horse, but to train the horseman.

This guide literally counts down, New Year's Eve style, from training steps 33 to 1. Before getting into the countdown, Patrick answers common training questions and lays the groundwork of his philosophy. Although he emphasizes fairness to the horse and compassionate leadership on the part of the rider, Patrick does not refer to himself as a natural horseman. Lesson 33 begins with "Initial Movement in the Round Pen," and Lesson 1 finishes up with "Flying Lead Changes," so that gives you an idea of the scope of this book. The book is superbly organized and includes 288 color photos to illustrate exactly what you should be doing in the training process. For a training guide, this is a huge benefit. Each of the 33 lessons includes several steps, clearly explained, with extra guidance and advice given in case you run into problems. It's presented in a very matter-of-fact style, with crystal clear directions that you can directly translate into your own training with your horse.

BOTTOM LINE: Patrick cuts through the fat and serves a dose of no-nonsense training guidance.

KEY: ★★★★★ = Best in Show ★★★★★ = Excellent ★★★ = Good ★★ = Fair ★ = Poor