

Keep Looking Up

Life Lessons from Doc Raun

BY JACKIE HALE

Much has been written about Dr. Alan Raun's accomplishments in the show ring and breeding shed. He's a UPHA and AHHS Hall of Famer and the recipient of more awards than you can tote in a wheelbarrow, but those aren't his greatest legacies. It's the people he's most proud of – those young trainers who practiced the art of horse and pony training under his watchful eye. With over 50+ years in the industry, he has forgotten more than most people will ever know, yet still has plenty of wisdom to share.

Like most people from his era, he grew up around horses and ponies and got a Shetland for his 6th birthday. Following WWII, where Raun served in the Infantry division, he applied to vet school. While awaiting acceptance, he took a job grooming at Merle White's Waterloo, Iowa stable and fell in love with the American Saddlebred. He considered getting into training horses, then was accepted at Iowa State University, where he met his wife of 67 years, Dotty.

Dr. Raun had a large animal (beef cattle and horse) practice for 25 years, but always kept a few horses. In 1961 he moved his practice to property near Des Moines that would eventually become Reedannland. "I thought I'd try to make a living in the breeding business," said Raun. "I told Dotty we'd give it three years and if it didn't work, I'd go back to work as a vet." In 1976, he sold his veterinary practice and started Reedannland. "After the first year, I didn't think I would make it," he remembered. "I studied the horse business and decided there were only three ways to make a living in this business: 1) have a lesson program 2) stand a popular stallion 3) buy and sell. I purchased Stonewall's Main Event, who was the #2 ranked stallion at the time, and syndicated him. There were 20 shares; we shared in the expenses and income. Everyone got money back and had free breedings for 9 years. It was an innovative idea that worked."



Alan and Dotty Raun recently celebrated their 67th wedding anniversary.



Dr. Raun's Words of Advice

During Raun's half-century in the industry, he has seen the highest of the highs, and the lowest of the lows. "I'm the oldest person around who's been in the business the longest," he began, "and we are in a situation that we need to change."

"There is too much secrecy in the Saddlebred Association," he stated. "You can't get to a horse's pedigree on the website unless you are a member. I think that is a poor design and is discouraging

to someone wanting to learn more about our breed. You also can't easily find out information like the number of foal registrations," he added. "We called recently and talked to three different people and never got the information we were looking for." Raun believes that there needs to be more transparency with information at the Registry and would like to see the ASHA work more closely with UPHA, "because the two organizations should have the same goals."

And speaking of the UPHA, Raun remembers when it was started by friends, Tom Moore and Chet Nichols. "The purpose was to help other trainers and benefit each other," he remembered. "They used to offer regional clinics in different areas of the country that were open to the public. One trainer might

show how to properly use a dumb jockey, another might demonstrate the right way to hook a pony." Raun would like to see more educational efforts by UPHA. "All good trainers share knowledge and want to help each other. They aren't worried about someone taking their job or stealing their clients. That is where UPHA could do more. They are doing a great job with programs like the Classics and offering scholarships, but not doing much to help each other."

Going back to the three ways to make money, Raun believes it all starts with breeding, and he has some thoughts about that too. "Transported semen has improved the quality of our horses, but allowing embryo transfers has polarized the industry," in his opinion. "The backyard/family breeder can't compete with



Doc Raun is still a regular on the rail and in the ring at horse shows.



Kelly Freeman and her daughter, Katie, with Dotty and Doc Raun, who are Katie's "other set of grandparents"



Glenn T. Werry is one of many young trainers who studied at the University of Reedannland.



Family comes first for the Rauns and they still make the horses a family affair. Kate Raun with her father, Jaime Medina and Kelly Freeman.

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the high-dollar breeder who can afford to get multiple embryos from one mare. I was on the board and in favor of allowing embryo transfers initially, and my friend, Carter Cox, was adamantly opposed to it. Now I think he was right." Raun cited the Thoroughbred industry as the only one that does not allow transported semen or embryo transfers, "and they are the most successful."

Raun continues, "People would raise more foals if there was a market for yearlings and two-year-olds." He hopes that UPHA can help with that as well. "Trainers don't want to work young horses anymore. Most of them want to buy a finished horse and go to the horse show." He would like to see UPHA encourage its professional members to suggest purchasing a prospect to their clients. "But the trainers have to have the knowledge they need to properly train it, and be willing to do the hard work. That is where UPHA training clinics will help." Like so many other major breeders, Reedannland's numbers have been reduced by half in the last few years. "We used to have 30+ foals a year. This year we had 16."

"There is still a good market for a finished three-year-old," Raun added, "and a good one will sell for top dollar." But what do

you do with the ones that don't make the cut? "I used to get calls from people asking if we had a nice western prospect and my answer would be 'I hope not!'" Raun laughed. Today his two daughters both show in the western division and he has changed his tune. "What other sport can you do your whole life? I'm 89 years old, have Parkinson's disease, and I can still drive a horse or a pony!" Not every foal is going to make a top three or five gaited horse, and not everyone can ride one of those anyway. Raun has come to realize the importance of promoting the ASB across all disciplines and making use of as many horses in our declining industry as possible. "We've also developed a good relationship with several Amishmen in our area and we sell those horses that aren't going to make show horses, for whatever reason, to them." He continued, "There is too much talk about horses being 'companion animals'. Companion animals are ones you keep in the house. Horses are livestock. People need to realize that."

Raun has seen horse shows change, too. "Back in the day, horse shows were more of a spectator sport. Nowadays there are more ways for people to spend their leisure dollars and it has become a participant sport. We

used to have shows almost every weekend all over Iowa," he remembers. "Now shows are week-long and I think that is a mistake. Most professional people with families can't get off work that long. We've also added too many classes and the result is too many one and two horse classes." He thinks we need to consolidate the show schedule and have three-day shows. "We'd be better off."

Another way Raun has seen times change is in the public perception of our sport. He believes that some of the practices that the ASBs and Hackneys have 'always done' need to change, like cutting tails. "No one has cut more tails than I have," he proclaimed. "But I think we are turning potential customers away by continuing that practice." Raun admits that there is nothing prettier to him than a finished walk/trot or gaited horse with its tail up over its back. "But they aren't all going to make that," he said. "And not everyone knows how to care for and maintain a cut tail." He thinks a better practice would be to wait until after the 2-year-old year and determine what the horse is going to be before considering whether to cut its tail or not. The greater percentage will likely be pleasure horses, or might find a place in the sport horse industry, where a cut tail is not desired.



Dr. Raun's Protege

Reedannland has been home to over 40 young trainers who have cut their teeth in the ASB and Hackney worlds. "I'm proud of each and every one of them," said Raun, "and I learned as much from them as they did from me." Raun thinks what benefitted them the most was him allowing them to work nice horses. "Most people start out as someone's assistant," he explained, "and they work the young horses and second string. If a prospect looks nice, the head trainer will take it away." Not so at Reedannland. You start it and you finish it.

Bob Brison

Bob Brison's first job was at Reedannland over 35 years ago. He recalls, "You had to be 18 years old to work for Doc and I was only 17. I had a friend who worked there and he told me about an opening and said, 'Go ahead and apply and tell them you are 18, they won't check,' so I did and I got the job. Several months later, Doc came up to me with a piece of paper in his hand and said, 'You lied to me. You told me you were 18.' I just knew I was going to get fired for not telling him the truth and I apologized and was begging for my job when he said 'All this time you could have been showing as a juvenile!'"

Brison continues, "It was a great first job because not only was he a great teacher of training horses, he taught you how to do so much more." Like floating teeth. "I mentioned to him one day that I had a few colts that I thought needed their teeth done and he pointed out the floats, gave me a bit of instruction, and let me do it. Same way with giving IV shots and everything else you need to know how to do as a trainer. He would guide you a little bit, but he'd expect you to do the job."

Raun also taught Brison about managing your resources and being frugal. Bob remembers, "He asked me one day if there was anything I needed and I said 'Yeah we need some cotton, baby powder and shoe string'. Doc said he was headed into town and he'd be right back with those things. He returned with a tiny brown bag that contained one cotton ball, a travel size baby powder and a pair of shoe-strings. He handed me the bag and, looking

back over his shoulder said, 'Now be sure to share that with the others!' Lesson learned.

Liz Kinney

Liz Kinney was another young trainer who got her start at Reedannland, serving two stints there. She tells us,

"About 25 years ago I was hired to train a string of 11 head of horses and ponies at Reedannland. No grooms to help, just me. Because Dr. Raun's time was split between managing the extensive breeding operation and training his own string, I was left pretty much to my own devices. Out of necessity I learned to train unbroke colts to stand still while I mounted or hitched them to the cart for their first time. It was a lot of work for one person, but I was determined to prove myself.

"What I relished most was our drive time to and from horse shows. Away from phones and distractions was when Dr. Raun and I had time to share 'learning moments' from our own training and show experiences. Our discussions often expanded into more serious thoughts on how to improve the perception of American Saddlebreds and ways to de-mystify the training process. During one such truck talk we decided to make simple and straightforward videos for amateurs wanting to train their own horses. In a distant time long before YouTube or RFDTV, we produced two step-by-step videos demonstrating the basics of Saddlebred training. The first video demonstrated the use of training devices and the second video showed the steps involved in gaiting a horse.

"Wanting to expand on our modest media expertise, along with fellow horseman Tom Moore, we obtained UPHA support for production of another video, this one on tail care.

But the topic became too controversial within the UPHA, and they pulled the plug. Upon hearing this, Dr. Raun, who is a subject matter expert by way of having performed hundreds of such tail surgeries, responded 'If our industry is embarrassed by our tail policy then we probably shouldn't be doing it.' To this day we continue to deliberate if tail surgery and tail sets are inhibiting the industry's growth.

"Over the years since our dashboard discussions, most of those topics are still relevant to both of us. While we may not have all the answers, one thing I'm certain of is that Dr. Raun continues to be forever optimistic about the American Saddlebred industry. I consider him not just my former employer, but my mentor and friend."

Kelly Freeman

Kelly Freeman was at Reedannland between 2000 and 2005. She shares her thoughts. "One of the important things I'd like to say about Doc is how family oriented he is. Family always came first. We were welcomed to Reedannland as part of the family. Funny story is Doc drove my daughter, Katie, to grade school about a mile up the road in the pony jog cart one day. They pulled up behind the buses and waited in line. Doc told Katie he'd pick her up at three with another pony, and he did, making all the other kids jealous.

"Everyone knows Doc's work ethic is above reproach. He taught us if you work hard and follow the steps you will be successful, not only in the horse business, but your personal life as well. (He was very, very strict about following the steps of training a horse.) He made you want to work hard to be a better person and to improve yourself. To this day,



At 89 years young, Doc is still driving horses and ponies.



Doc Raun still comes to work everyday and plays an active part in the daily operations of Reedannland. Demonstrating a good work ethic, he never asks anyone to do anything that he wouldn't do himself.

Reedannland

my daughter still thinks of Doc and Dotty as another set of grandparents."

Chris Gantley

Chris Gantley and Kenny Smith were at Reedannland at the same time. Gantley training the ponies and Smith working the horses. Gantley tells us, "In January of 1992, I told my parents that I wanted to pursue my dream of training Hackney ponies as a professional. I had been training ponies locally in and around Maysville, Ky, but wanted to expand my knowledge, so I took off driving to Reedannland. You can imagine that driving in the month of January from Kentucky to Iowa might end up being challenging, and sure enough I headed straight into a blizzard. I was a kid far away from home for the first time, so everyone in my family was making bets on how long I would stay. I think all bets were under a year. After arriving to Reedannland, Doc and Dotty made me feel like I was part of their family immediately. I couldn't have asked for more of a welcoming start.

"Still a newcomer to the operation, during my first horse show, my grandmother passed away. Doc gave me the news and told me 'I am taking you to the airport so you can make your Grandmother's funeral in Kentucky.' That meant a lot to me and still does, proving how important family was to him; always saying that 'family comes first'. Through the five years that I was there I was fortunate to experience his family's closeness and love for one another."

"I learned a lot about training and working hard when I was at Reedannland, but I also learned how to treat people. He never asked anybody at the barn to do something

that he wouldn't do himself. He is a great mentor and a special friend," said Gantley.

Kenny Smith

Raun always played an active role in the training operation and Kenny Smith remembers two funny Doc stories. "I was getting ready to ride a two year old that we had just broke to ride the day before. On this second day, the colt was being difficult to get on. So Doc says 'Hold on, we're going put an end to this right now!' Doc grabs a lead rope and holds the horse for me to get on. As soon as I threw my leg over him, the colt rears up, strikes Doc down to the ground, and throws me off on top of Doc. The second I gathered my senses, I realize I'm laying on top of Doc. I feel him shaking and I think he's having convulsions or dying. So I roll off of him, panicking, and Doc rolls over, face full of dirt, laughing hysterically and says 'Well, I guess he showed us!'

"Another time I had a colt that was being difficult to jog, so I said to Doc 'This colt just doesn't want to jog, maybe I will just not jog him for now and go back to it when he matures a little.' So Doc says 'Let me work him. He needs to get out of the arena, outside, and get comfortable with it. He'll be fine.' So they hook the colt and Doc takes him outside and after about an hour Doc walks in the end of the barn, horseless, dragging half the cart, missing his hat and he walks by me and says, 'I think your right, he doesn't want to jog.'"

Mark Wilson

Mark Wilson is another successful trainer who fine-tuned his trade at Reedannland. He shares "As a young boy growing up in the

horse business I remember always watching Doc and having great admiration for him not only as a trainer, but as a man. The way he carried himself and spoke to people always impressed me. He would always give the person he was speaking to his undivided attention. At the age of 19, Doc called and offered me a job training with him. I was thrilled that he would call me and all I kept thinking was how much I could learn from this man! I quickly accepted and moved to Iowa. Every day Doc would come to the barn happy which set the tone for the day. He always found the positive in situations even when things didn't look real bright. I quickly learned he is not only a great trainer, but an incredible man who gives 100% to everything he does. With that said, he expected that from all of his employees. He set high standards and he expected me to meet them or exceed them. I didn't see Doc as an employer but as a mentor, a father figure and my friend. He is a hard working, honest and humble family man that I have so much admiration for. I know that I can pick up the phone and call him and he would be willing to listen and give me sound advice. From the time I moved to the farm to this day, I feel blessed to have worked beside Doc. I will always appreciate him and Dotty for taking me in and treating me like I was family. With all this said, I will never be able to put into words what a remarkable man he is and how he has influenced my life. I love Doc and am fortunate to call him a friend."

Megan Thibo

Megan Thibo shared some memories from her time working with Raun. "I'll never forget my first day working at Reedannland because I

was so nervous. We were going to be breaking some two year olds to drive, which is definitely not my favorite thing to do. I figured I'd better get busy impressing Doc right off the bat, so I had myself all organized and ready to get behind whatever it might be. Little did I know that Doc was the one who was going to be impressing me. I think I said at least 10 times to everyone working, "All of us younger folk here, we can't let him get in the cart behind them". I just couldn't believe it when he climbed into the cart. Not with just the first one, but with every single colt!" I can only hope I'm that much of a go-getter when I'm his age.

"Soon thereafter, I missed my first Thanksgiving at home due to bad weather. Doc invited me over to their house to spend the holiday with his family. I was a little nervous because I was new and I didn't really know anyone at all. We had an amazing meal and lots of laughs. I've never felt more welcomed anywhere and was so blessed to meet such a kind family. I knew I had met friends for a lifetime. Doc inspired me every day and I am very fortunate to have had the chance to work for him."

Dan Flowers

Dan Flowers valued his time at Reedannland as well. "I learned some of my most valuable life lessons from Dr. Raun. First of all, he was always an innovator. Even though he had had a successful breeding program with Stonewall's Main Event, Phi Slama Jama and Talk of the Town, he kept looking for new opportunities to improve the

breeding program. He used Supreme Sultan bloodlines to maintain or improve overall quality, and sought out Wing Commander bloodlines to enhance racking ability.

"Second, he taught me the importance of persistence and grit. Even when he had health issues, he continued working and moving forward. This was inspiring to me and to many other people. I always will remember when he injured his knee and continued working for many months before he finally had surgery. Finally, he gave me an opportunity to help develop some outstanding young horses and those experiences gave me a foundation as a professional horseman, for which I always will be grateful."

Glenn T. Werry

Glenn T. Werry practiced under Doc Raun's careful tutelage and had this to say about his mentor. "When I first thought about going to work for a trainer for the experience, I asked my step father, Jim Koller, whom I should work for and he immediately said, "Dr. Raun." I asked him, 'why Dr. Raun?' and he said, 'because you will learn a heck a of lot more about life than you will training horses.' It was the best time of my life.

"During my time at Reedannland and over the years, whether walking in the fields or late evening phone calls, we have talked a lot of about life. I have enjoyed every minute of it. I have learned more about hard work, true genuine happiness and joy than anything I have ever done. Doc once told me about something his father once told him, he said "Glenn T., the best way to be successful

in no matter what you choose to do in life is work extremely hard, be completely honest, and trust God with all of your heart and soul. That doesn't mean everything will work the way you want it to; that means everything will work out the way it's supposed to." He finished that statement with one of his most famous lines, "keep looking up."

Doc's life, his relationship with God, his relationship with Dotty, his relationship with his family and his love of craft is truly inspiring. There aren't enough words to describe how I feel about him and the positive impact he has had on my life. I consider it an honor and privilege to call this man my friend."

Life Lessons

Raun celebrated his 89th birthday in June and has no plans to retire. "People retire so that they can do what they love to do. Well I love doing this, so why retire?" he says with a smile.

Family values, work ethic, honesty, professionalism, innovation: these are the "life lessons" that Dr. Alan Raun bestowed upon everyone who passed through his doors. He continues to be a leader and have a profound impact on the show horse industry through his actions and deeds.

