

Be your horse's leader and friend and he will want to be with you.

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN!

TURNING THE TABLES ON YOUR HORSE!

By Pat Parelli

"Why do you call your horse General Lee?" I once asked one of my students.

"Because he was one of the greatest military strategists of all time, and this horse has got more strategies for not getting caught than any other horse I've ever owned!" came the reply.

The easiest way to teach your horse to be hard to catch is to only visit him when you want something and, believe

it or not, by putting tension on his lead rope whenever you have a halter on him.

If you want your horse to think 'GREAT' when he sees you coming you need to change his opinion about YOU. Become his leader, become his friend, be entertaining, interesting, educational and someone he WANTS to be around.

PLAYING THE CATCHING GAME

If your horse runs away from you (even in the stable!) and doesn't want to be haltered, the first thing you need to do is to teach him how to catch you. Go and sit in his field or turnout area (a stable might be a bit dangerous, depending on the horse) with a good book and WAIT. All day if you have to. You won't! Your horse is going to get really curious . . . what is she doing? Why is she there? What is she up to? And he's going to come in for a look. Don't reach out to him. But when he nudges you, you can stroke him.

So he's learned that you're actually quite interesting. Non-threatening and you've got his attention finally!

Do that for a few days and see how that changes your relationship with your horse.

If your horse plays the 'I'm going to keep walking away from you and hope you get tired' game, you need a counter strategy. Horses respond to comfort and discomfort. How do we give them discomfort – put the pressure on. How do we give them comfort? Take the pressure off. So when he starts walking away from you, you put the pressure on. Scale the pressure to his fright and flight reality – if he's really sensitive, you might just slap your leg with the rope; if he's less sensitive, swing the rope and if he's really stubborn give him a flick on the rump – and instead of just walking away from you, he will start to run. As soon as he stops or turns to look at you, you stand still and quiet and energy down. If you approach him then, and he still moves away, put the pressure on again. Just keep going (don't get mad, bad or dangerous to know! Just be patient, persistent and consistent) until eventually HE will get tired and will have worked out the game. And you will see his ears lock onto you, his head go down and he'll lick his lips and you'll be able to approach and put the halter on him.

IF HE'S NOT THAT BAD . . .

If he just likes to lead you a bit of a merry chase, but he's not quite as bad as the scenario above – or even if he's getting better, but he's not quite there yet - you can play a much milder version of the game. He takes a step, you do too. He stops, you stop. He moves on, you're right there with him. He stops, you stop. He's going to start looking at you quizzically...what IS she doing? What new game is this? What are the rules? How do I make her stop? You'll notice that each time you will get a bit closer to the horse. When you stop, put your hand out for him to nuzzle. Pretty soon he will be waiting for YOU to move and then you can halter him.



Linda plays 'Friendly' with the babies.



Linda Parelli plays 'The Friendly Game'.

STOP BEING A PREDATOR!

Now you're starting to really change the way he thinks about you. He's interested. He's learning, and you're challenging his beliefs about you. Now you can really prove to him that you're NOT a predator (you might look like one, act like one and smell like one, but really you're not!)

You can 'buddy up' to him just as his friend in the field would, by rubbing him all over; scratching the hard to get at bits and smoothing and soothing his coat, mane and tail. Your aim is to be able to touch him absolutely everywhere. At first there are going to be spots he doesn't like and he'll swish his tail, put his ears back, cock a leg and/or move away. Don't worry about it. Let him drift on the line until he's comfortable again. Go back to an area he likes you touching, and slowly work your way back to the sensitive spot. You are desensitising him...showing him that you are friend not foe. That you can be trusted. (And if he thinks that every time you want to halter him he's going to get an all over body rub, pretty soon he's going to be easy to catch!).

START BEING A FRIEND!

Now rub him all over his body with either the end of the rope (if it's long enough) or a different lead rope. Then he's not wary or scared of the lead rope

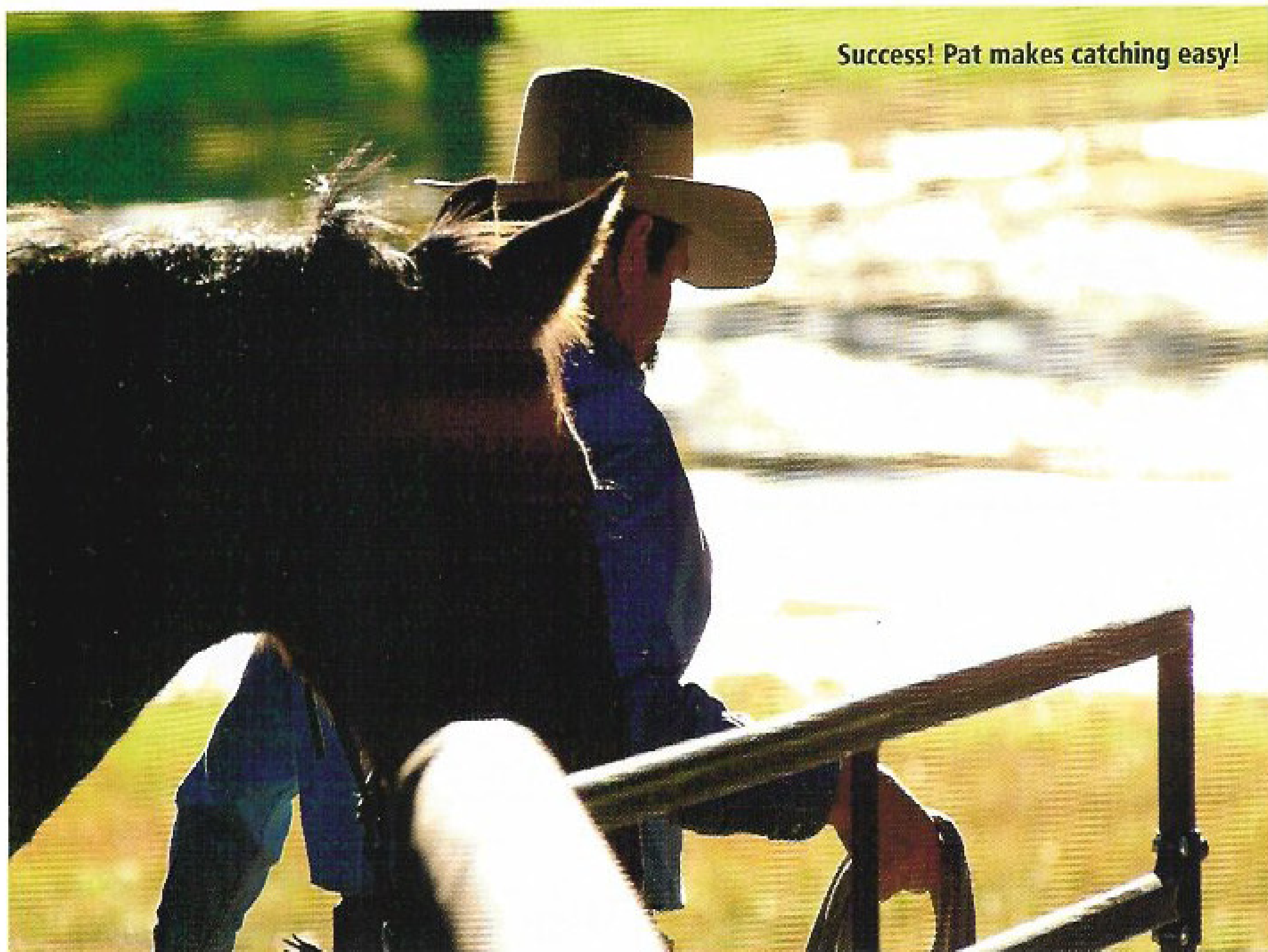
either. You're aiming for the point where you can walk up to him in the biggest of fields, rub him all over with the halter and lead rope and then put it on him – easy!

Next, try tossing the rope with rhythm over different parts of his body until he can stand relaxed without it bothering him. Then rub him all over again with the rope. Make sure you can do both sides. If he gets worried, just smile, keep going and try to keep slack in the rope so he can move around until he settles down.

Now stand at the end of your lead rope, face your horse and make a game out of distance and approach. All horses survive by accurately reading the body language of the predators that live in their environment (there's no point smiling at a horse if you're mad as hell with him – he'll know the truth!). Horses also pay great attention to 'distance and approach' so they can read a predator's intention.

See how many ways (walk fast, skip, hop, jump, etc) angles and speeds you can approach your horse from without him flinching or moving then rub him all over with the rope again. This procedure is called habituation through progressive desensitisation - or 'The Friendly Game.'

Play with your horse like this every time for seven sessions in a row.



Success! Pat makes catching easy!

Do not skip these tasks until you know your horse has got the concept.

Remember, your horse has to fight the flight instincts given to him by Mother Nature. He is programmed to flee from a predator and anything he perceives as danger. Don't blame him, try to understand that he is only acting out of a strong sense of self-preservation. And remember that changing the way he feels about you, whether he trusts you, whether he acknowledges you as his leader, will change EVERYTHING you do together. This is the foundation stone upon which everything else rests.

So 'take the time it takes, so it takes less time'.

All images by Coco.

If you dream of a revolutionary relationship with YOUR horse, or just want to learn how to have more savvy with horses in general, call 0800 023 4813, email uk@parelli.com for your free 'What is Parelli?' DVD or go to www.parelli.com

Parelli Game 1: The Friendly Game

This game proves to your horse you will not act like a predator, that you are friendly and can be trusted. You need to gain his confidence and be able to touch him with a friendly 'feel' everywhere on his body. Any area where he is defensive tells you of his skepticism about you. By using approach and retreat, get to where you gain permission to touch every place on his body without forcing him to accept it. You can then advance to tossing ropes, plastic bags, coats, anything you can think of to get him braver, more confident and less skeptical. Be sure the horse is on a slack rope, not being held tight or tied up.

Keys to Friendly Game: smile, relaxation, rhythm, approach and retreat, desensitisation.