

Current Trends in the Horse Industry...The Hands-on Owner Returns! 🐾

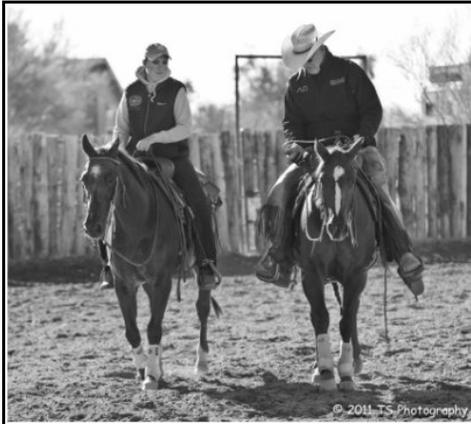
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Al Dunning - The Way I See It

Posted By Al Dunning, Monday, March 07, 2011

The economy seems to be making a slow comeback indicated by the rise of the stock market and retail sales. The housing market in Arizona is still in a depressed state and the unemployment rate remains at an all-time high. People have made big changes in the way they live and the way they spend their money, and this filters into every niche of business, including the horse industry. My view of the horse economy admittedly comes only from my current experiences, but seems to be the norm for many trainers.



In the past few years I've seen horse sales, the number of people participating in shows, and the amount of discretionary income spent in the industry decline. I thought that the high-end market for horses remained strong until the summer of 2010. After that time, our sales to new customers and the economic flow went south. The jobless rate in the horse industry has noticeably increased as we get calls daily from experienced trainers to grooms looking for jobs.

I have caught a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel in early 2011, and economic predictors say the end of 2012 will see an upturn in the economy. I have seen something interesting happening. The baby boomers have finally decided that it is time to

have fun and ride horses. They are coming back to the horse industry after raising children or tending to their careers. Many of these riders have been hands-off horse owners for many years. They may have had horses in training and paid entry fees at large aged events for the trainers to show. They now want to compete themselves. The NCHA and other major associations offer entry level classes for the amateur riders that allow this group to participate with fellow horsemen at the same level.

This trend has led to an increase in demand for that good, solid, trooper of a horse that amateur riders can learn and compete on. AQHA announced a major decline in stallion breeding reports the last few years, which means the supply is down while demand is headed up. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize a smart trainer should take care of these re-emerging hands-on riders and train horses that suit the weekend warrior. Showing at a local level is still major investment for owners, but they are doing it for pure love of the sport and to advance their lifestyle. If they are going to spend the money, many owners would rather spend a weekend showing themselves than write a big check for the trainer to go to a large event. Trainers must set their personal desires aside and open their eyes to the reality of what the industry is asking for.

The way I see it, the enthusiastic newcomer and the hands-on amateur are the foundation of our industry. Local level and weekend shows are drawing those that ride and show for pure enjoyment and personal fulfillment. Older, solid horses are going to be sought after and in demand. The horse industry will rebound, and I believe it will be stronger than ever. Change isn't a bad thing, and flexibility is the key to surviving these shaky economic times.

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