

From Starting Colts To The Winner's Circle

by Joyce Loomis Kernek



DAVID ERNEST STINSON: Not Living By The Clock

Every horse has a backstory. The ones that reach the winner's circle are written about in the news and on social media. Usually, these stories feature the winning rider and the pedigree of the horse. We don't always get the opportunity, however, to read about the history of the horse from birth to the winner's circle. But if you dig and research, you will discover a man who pops up in the background stories of many of these winners. This man is Dave Stinson.

Dave was born in Deer Lodge, Montana, on March 27, 1958. Although both his father and his mother came from a ranch background, neither were involved with horses. Even so, his father, who worked in a phosphate mine, and his mother were both supportive of Dave, who grew up wanting to be around any and all livestock.

Dave became involved in the 4H program and showed his animals in the Powell County Fair. He was on a horse every chance he could get. He says he learned a lot in his early years from the school of hard knocks.

His grandfather David Dixon, whom Dave was named after, also supported him and influenced him in his horse endeavors. Mr. Dixon was a rancher when he was younger and had worked with draft horses. He also delivered mail from Ovando, Montana, to Drummond, Montana, with teams of horses.

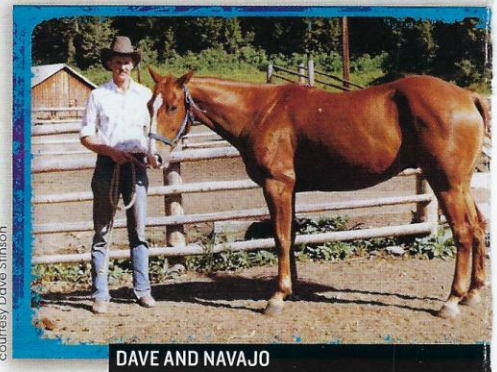
In his teenage years, Stinson broke three horses. The first horse he ever bought was named Smokey. Dave broke him at the Deer Lodge Fairgrounds with the help of his

grandfather. On the weekends, the saddle club would put on O-Mok-Sees, games that are similar to play days or gymkhanas. They looked fun and challenging to Dave, so he started Smokey on barrels and poles. Smokey was a grade horse with a willing, honest attitude and a big heart. It wasn't long until Dave and Smokey were ready to compete in the O-Mok-See.

In a very short time, Dave and Smokey were winning. One of the individuals who noticed them was Karen Leibee. After a short time observing them, she approached Dave to see if she could acquire Smokey for her daughter Bernadette. Bernadette was riding in Junior Rodeos and needed a pole and barrel horse. Karen and her husband Jack had a sorrel grade gelding named Crow that had been used on their ranch, and Jack had also team roped off the horse. They made a deal, traded horses, and soon Dave was working with Jack and Karen. While Bernadette was winning on Smokey, Jack taught Dave how to rope. Dave joined a roping club at the fairgrounds where he roped two days a week. He attributes this time of learning how to team rope and handle cattle as a turning point in his life. It prepared him for the next step in his journey, which was an opportunity to work on a cattle ranch.

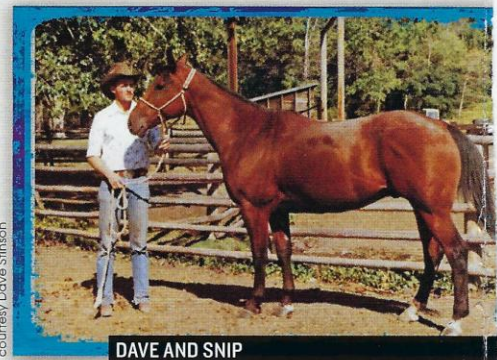
In his early 20's, Dave roped with Roxie Kurtz Tew, and she helped him get a job with the Rock Creek Cattle Company. Her step-father, Howard Robbins, was a respected horseman and the cow boss of Rock Creek Cattle Company, and he became a big influence

Dave in his younger days



DAVE AND NAVAJO

courtesy Dave Stinson



DAVE AND SNIP

courtesy Dave Stinson

on Dave. His new job was on a big ranch with 3,000 mother cows, yearling heifers, and steers. He worked as a ranch cowboy for Rock Creek Cattle Company for the next five years.

During this time, he started to ride more outside horses. Karen Leibee would find and buy horses and Dave would train them. It was a good partnership because Dave had lots of use for the horses on the ranch. He pointed out that ranch riding helped make a lot of good, solid horses.

Jack and Karen Leibee followed Dave's grandfather and became his next mentors in the horse business. He was having a great time riding horses every day and began to think that he might be able to make his living in the horse business. He had always believed there was a kinder approach to starting colts, and he wanted to train horses to be the type that other people could ride and get along with.

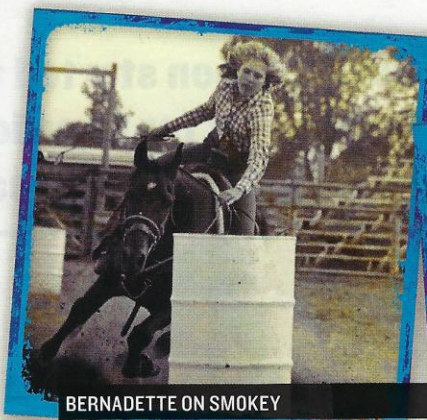
He was building his foundation as a horse trainer while having fun spending hours in the saddle.

Dave met T.J. Viotor when she bought a horse he had for sale for her mother-in-law, Eleanor Viotor. They liked the horse and asked if he wanted to work for the Rocking Chair Ranch as a ranch hand and he accepted. The Viotor family ranch was a cow-calf operation, but they also raised and trained horses. Dave and T.J. had reined cow horses, while Dave's brother Bill and his wife Carolyn had calf roping, team roping, and barrel horses. Dave worked for the ranch and trained horses on the side.

The Viotor ranch gave Dave the opportunity to attend horse training clinics put on by Ray Hunt, Doug Williamson, and Jim Simpson. Dave had always sought a kind approach to training horses, and what he learned at these clinics was invaluable. He was adding to his techniques while riding with successful people. Those clinics became the basis of what he still uses in his training today.

Dave Stinson then met George Williamson, who was very successful in the barrel horse industry. Dave was interested in learning more about training barrel horses and, in the fall of 1989, moved to Blanchard, Oklahoma, to go into business with George. Dave would break the colts and put the handle on them while George would do the barrel work. During this time, Dave learned from George how to start colts on barrels. He hauled horses to jackpots around Oklahoma, and had the opportunity to watch trainers such as Carol Goostree, Mary Burger, Joyce Loomis-Kerneck, and Kim Thomas. He studied them all and was constantly adding to his skills by observing, learning, and applying new knowledge.

After five years, he moved farther south to Aubrey, Texas, where he leased a training facility where he continues to train horses to this day. Dave has developed techniques that quickly caught the attention of breeders, hobbyists, and many barrel racers in the professional field.

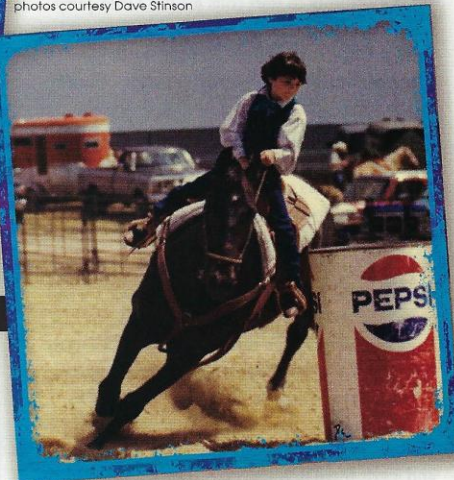


BERNADETTE ON SMOKEY

The first horse Dave ever purchased and trained was Smokey, shown above turning the barrels with Bernadette Leibee. Dave traded Smokey to Bernadette's mother, Karen, and father, Jack, in exchange for a ranch/team roping horse, and then Jack taught Dave how to rope and handle cattle.

WENDYWAGNER AND SMOKEY

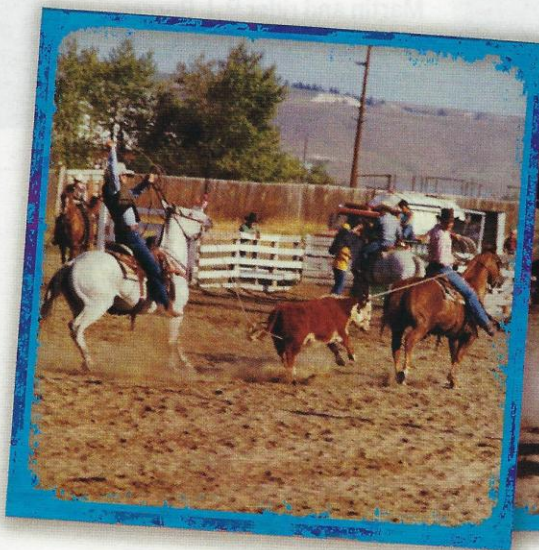
photos courtesy Dave Stinson



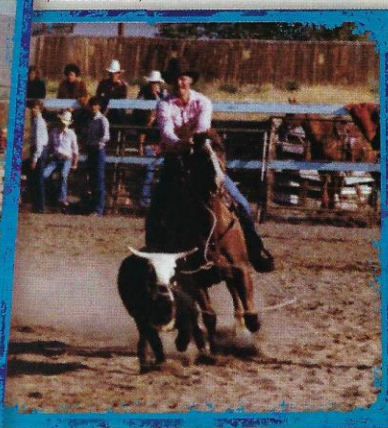
Smokey went on to carry many other riders to barrel victories after Bernadette, including Wendy Wagner (above).

Dave trains each horse by what they are showing him – not by the calendar.

After learning to rope, Dave joined a club where he roped several days a week. He notes that this time was a turning point in his life that taught him to handle cattle and prepared him for an opportunity to work on a cattle ranch.

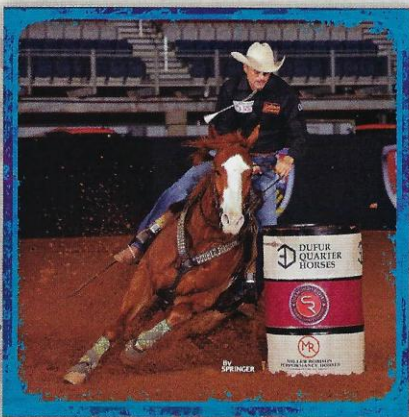


photos courtesy Dave Stinson



After Dave moved to Aubrey, Texas, he had the opportunity to start colts for Jud Little, Jerry and Betty Wells, Charlie Cole, Jason Martin, Mary Burger, Charmayne James, Sissy Novack, Kim Thomas, Mark Bugni, Candy Pratt, myself, and many others. He competed himself and had success there, but his main desire and greatest satisfaction was to train a horse that could go on and achieve success for others and have a long career. He loved working with people who appreciated a good horse. His horses have been found in the winner's circle in every kind of barrel race from the National Finals Rodeo to the AQHA World Championships and even local rodeos and jackpots.

Dave has trained a variety of horses, but mostly Quarter Horses and Paints. Ray Hunt taught him how to start and handle hot and sensitive horses. Dave usually gets the colts in the spring of their two-year-old year. He puts two to three months on them and sends them home to take a break. He gets them back later and puts more handle on them, so they will be ready to start on barrels at the start of their three-year-old year. He has also put handle on a lot of horses right off the track. He believes in working horses with a calm manner and with assertiveness – not aggressive ways, but ways that produce confidence in their mind. Smooth transitions are a must because he believes that most green horses buck when making transitions from walk to trot and trot to lope. All horses that have never been ridden begin in the round pen for a week or two. After this period of training, he then teaches them how to lunge. Typically, Dave lunges all the colts to take the edge off and put them into a learning frame of mind. After a couple of weeks, he takes the horses to an arena and, when comfortable riding in an arena, he heads to the pasture to ride. Dave trains each horse by what they are showing him – not by the calendar. He never gets in a hurry. Dave has lunge lines of varying lengths and lunges the horses in a halter



Kenneth Springer Photo

Among many others, Dave started horses for Mark Bugni including JL Fourtame, who together scored multiple championships and a BB Barrel Futurity Year End Championship Title.

Dave Stinson started two AQHA World Champions for Charlie Cole & Jason Martin of Highpoint Performance Horses.



Montgomery Photographics, Inc.

Above: Kristin Weaver Brown aboard Rods Last Ladybug with Jason Martin (left, green shirt), Charlie Cole (holding buckle), and friends and family, after winning the 2004 AQHA World Champion Junior Barrel Title.

Right: Charlie Cole, Jason Martin and rider P.J. Burger after winning the 2011 AQHA World Champion Senior Barrel Title with Rockette Ta Fame.



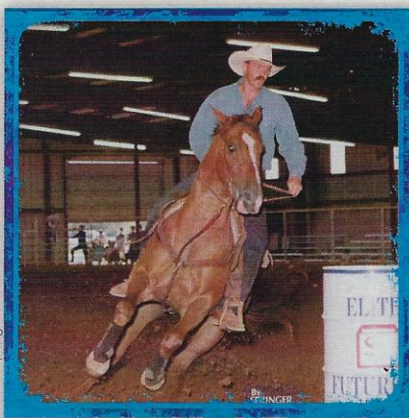
Montgomery Photographics, Inc.

and with a saddle – a valuable training technique he learned on his own. He starts out lunging them on shorter ropes. If the colt is not accepting the saddle, he lengthens the lunge line gradually up to 20 feet.

Dave has three go to bits that are his favorites – the Loomis Gag, Ring Snaffle, and Goostree Simplicity. He learned to use the Loomis Gag when working with Kim Thomas, and he learned a lot about bits from Carol Goostree. Dave also lets the horses he is training spend time saddled and tied to his Texas Turnarounds that is near his arena. This teaches the horse patience and prepares them to stand tied to the trailer.

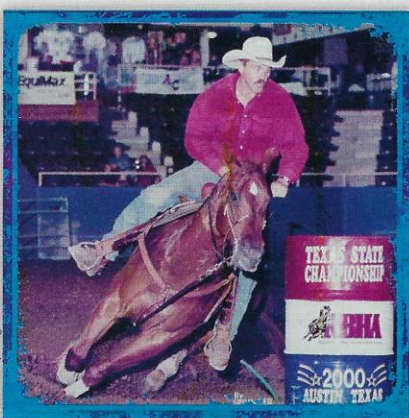
Dave's first horse, Smokey, went on to win for Bernadette Leibee and several other little girls after her. The horses he has started and trained have fulfilled his dream of training horses that have long lasting careers and that can be enjoyed by others. The saying "the young years last forever" has been proven by Dave Stinson's method - the proof is in these horses that have had great careers for their owners. Dave is still taking colts to start but has limited it to two per month, with more riding in their three-year-old year. His favorite part of life is not living by a clock. (S)

Kenneth Springer/Photo



Dave and Kitarend at the 1993 Cleburne, Texas Fall Futurity

Kenneth Springer/Photo



Dave and Florida Sunburst Red at the 2000 NBHA Texas State Championship

Through observation and hard work, Dave fulfilled his dreams of training horses that went on to be enjoyed by others. His method is proven in these horses that have had successful and long lasting careers for their owners.



© Lea Watson

Kim Thomas:

"In 1998, I was hired by Jud Little to train his futurity horses. I had moved to Oklahoma and was looking for someone to start my colts that I could ride behind successfully. Someone mentioned Dave Stinson. He was highly recommended. He was close enough that I could go watch him ride and check on the colts. It was the start of an amazing team and a wonderful friendship! I love the way he starts them in a gentle fashion and gains their trust while keeping respect. I can get on a horse he has started and immediately go on with them. He made my job so easy! Later when I went on my own and began doing clinics, Dave assisted me and taught horsemanship skills to students. We have had many success stories in our professional relationship. He is one of my oldest and dearest friends. He is a great horseman and an amazing individual." – Kim Thomas

Charlie Cole:

"I met Dave in 1998, I believe. I had just bought my first good barrel horse, Boomer. Dave would watch my runs and help me improve and was the one who first recognized Boomer's incredible talent. He broke and patterned Boomer's full sister, Boomette, and her foal, Rockette, who both won World Championships for me. Dave continues to break and start many of our two year olds. He has a great way with the colts, takes his time, and when he's done with them, anyone can take them and finish them on the pattern. He is still the person I go to when I am having an issue with a barrel horse or needing advice. He is honest and a great friend." – High Point Performance Horses owner Charlie Cole

Jason Martin:

"We met Dave in the late 1990s. We liked how his horses worked and we had mutual friends. We started sending some of our barrel prospects to him and loved the results we were getting. He takes his time and doesn't cut corners. He can be brutally honest, and that's a great quality in a horse trainer. He has become a great friend over the years and is someone whose opinion we really respect. We have had a lot of success with Dave on our team with a couple of World Champions. Dave was a part of our past, he is a part of our present, and will be a part of our future." – High Point Performance Horses owner Jason Martin

Joyce Loomis-Kerneck:

"George Kernek and I had a colt out of a Rare Bar mare (Slostartfastfinish) and by Runnerelse that we sold to our Brazilian friend, Thomas Souza. We agreed to manage him here in the United States. The colt was from a line of horses as sensitive and quick as a horse can be. There was never any question that Dave Stinson was the one who needed to start him. He had started several for us and we loved his quiet methods. Dave took him easy and instilled confidence in him as a two year old and then again in another session before we turned him over to Latricia Duke. The colt, Runnin Ricochet Bar, wound up winning \$157,000 for Thomas Souza, and he became the high-point money winning futurity horse in 2009. Thomas Souza was so impressed with Dave Stinson that he wanted him to come to Brazil to his ranch and teach a clinic on starting horses. Dave went to Brazil and did that clinic in 2014." – Joyce Loomis-Kerneck

Dave Stinson has preferred "go to" bits as well as lunge lines of varying lengths that are a big part of his training program and help him when starting horses, including hot or sensitive ones.



© Lea Watson

SPEEDHORSE, May 2017