



By Bob Goddard  
Equine Humorist & Published Author

Thanks to an article in a certain horse publication that shall remain nameless, my daughter, Jamie, has gotten this crazy notion about getting a mustang. And she doesn't mean a Ford.

"A mustang?" I raise my eyebrows. "Aren't they wild?"

"Yeah, the Bureau of Land Management has a program where you can adopt one pretty cheap."

"There's no such thing as a cheap horse, Jamie."

Besides, she's talking about a *wild* horse. I have images going through my brain of the *wild* horse bucking and rearing in the round pen. He kicks a couple of fence posts down and bashes the gate off its hinges. Handlers are flung through the air and onlookers scurry for cover. Then, the mighty horse busts loose like King Kong and in one final magnificent gesture of defiance rears up with his front legs flailing. He bolts, never to be seen again. *Hasta La Vista, cosa's te dos patas!*

"Aren't wild horses kinda dangerous?"

"That's what you said about Chilli," Jamie replies, nodding to her Thoroughbred as he munches on an apple.

"I never said he was wild – just fast. I said he'd bolt the first chance he got and we would never be able to catch him. But if you remember, I also said that he would probably just run in a huge four furlong circle and end up right back here, wondering how we got ahead of him like that."

Chilli nudges Jamie in the back of her shoulder for another apple. "See? You didn't have to worry in the first place."

"Yeah, Chilli turned out to be a pretty nice guy. But why do you want a mustang all of a sudden? Why can't you settle for a previously domesticated Quarter Horse or a nice Appaloosa like the other girls? If you want a challenge, why not just get a deranged pony?"

"Because mustangs are great horses. They're very intelligent and they can be trained to jump or do dressage or barrel racing. They can do anything domesticated horses can do. Of course they have to be gentled first."

"Gentled? You're making some of this up as you go along, aren't you?"

"It basically means to tame them. It's not something we can do by ourselves. In fact, you can't even let them in a pasture or any open space until they've been gentled – you'll never catch them again."

"Seems like a lot of trouble, Jamie. I'm still not sure why you would want to go through all this."

"Because mustangs make fantastic trail horses. They're very sure-footed and they have great endurance."

Jamie never uses the word "fantastic." I tilt my head like Dr. House when something occurs to him.

"Ah," I say, "Now it makes sense. They're conditioned to being on trails in the first place."

"That's right. Some mustangs are naturally gaited and they already know how to negotiate difficult terrain. They're very smooth."

"The four-wheeled drive of equines."

It's interesting, really. This is a case where nature clearly does a better job with horses than we do. It's not like there are freelancing hermit trainers roaming the great western lands instructing wild horses on what humans want. And I'm pretty sure you couldn't apply the "let nature do it" strategy to other disciplines. I'm guessing if you left a group of Warmbloods in a dressage arena and came back after a few years, they wouldn't be performing the *piaffe* or doing pirouettes. They would probably succeed in knocking down the judge's stand and perhaps gnaw on a few of the letters, but that's about all they'd accomplish.

Even domesticated horses can be destructive and wild.

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