

# A Conversation With Andrew Coates

**Established cutting trainer and showman tackling a new career path by specializing in 2-year-old prospects.** By Mark Thompson • Photos by Ted Petit

**F**rom the late 1990s through 2008, native Australian Andrew Coates, who lives and works with his wife, Nicole, in Esparto, Calif., earned \$600,000 as a cutting horse rider while making finals in Fort Worth and many other locations and winning several titles.

He also started and trained several horses that his top training clients, including Hall of Fame cutter Sandy Bonelli and National Football League Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Montana, guided to many finals and championships at limited-age cutting events.

Last year, Coates, 34, and his wife, who have been married 11 years, welcomed a new addition, their now 1-year-old son, Talon. Two years ago, partly because he wanted to

spend more time at home and partly because he sensed a need for the service, Coates decided to re-invent his training business by specializing in 2-year-old horses.

Coates still competes occasionally at limited-age cuttings with horses that he and his wife co-own. He guided their 3-year-old mare, Dualnlorris San Reba, to an eighth-place finish in the Futurity Open finals at the El Rancho Futurity on Sept. 20. For the most part, though, since early 2009, Coates has remained close to home while starting 2-year-olds destined to travel and compete with other top trainers.

*Quarter Horse News* discussed the career change with Coates at the El Rancho event.

## Why did you decide to start training 2-year-old prospects full time?

I'd been thinking for several years that it would be cool. I'd been showing for several years and had some decent success in Fort Worth and at a high level. I knew what it took to get a horse competitive at that level, and at all levels. I thought it would be neat to use that experience and the knowledge I'd gained and use it to train 2-year-olds.

## Do you miss competing at the major cutting events?

I love showing horses and I'll continue showing them on a limited basis, but I really enjoy staying home and I really enjoy riding 2-year-olds. It was always difficult when I was on the road showing. I didn't have the time to do the things I wanted to do with my 2-year-olds. It's hard to find someone you trust enough to ride them for you.

## Isn't starting the 2-year-olds typically a job for assistants or younger trainers?

Just like everybody, I worked for several trainers and I was very blessed to work for some really good ones. As a young, impressionable assistant trainer, though, I messed up my fair share of 2-year-olds, because I didn't have enough experience. I knew, but just like all assistant trainers, I wanted to impress the guys I was working for. I think a trap you fall into is you try too hard to do a good job and maybe you push it a little too much, and you don't really have the knowledge to do that.

## Do people underestimate the importance of starting their young horses well?

I think a lot of 2-year-olds kind of slip through the cracks. They get put aside because the 3-year-olds are so important and they're such a full-time job. It's hard to take the focus away from those horses and really focus on the 2-year-olds. Maybe one is a handful and you need to spend a little time on it. It might be a potentially very good horse, but if you don't have the knowledge or the experience, and especially the time, you don't get it trained.

I think having some years of training and showing older horses and feeling what a potentially really good horse feels like when it's trained helps. You realize that it takes a little more time and it's not going to happen overnight. You just have to be consistent and steady and do what's best for the horse to get it trained the right way.

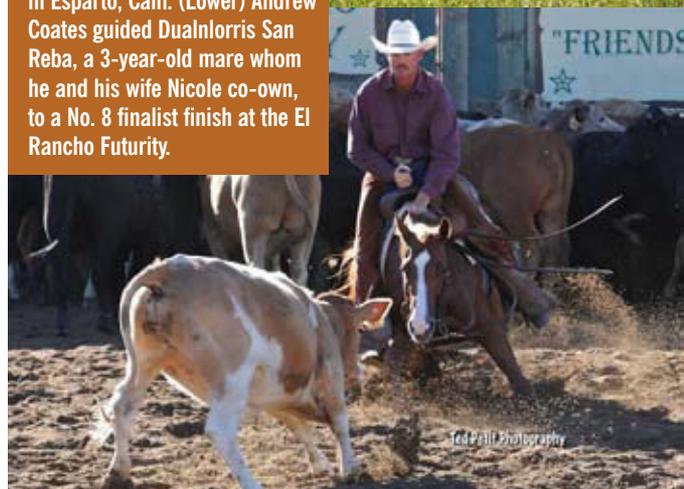
## Do trainers you competed with in the past trust you not to "keep" a hot prospect they send you as a 2-year-old, if it develops into a potentially big winner?

An important part of the whole thing is those guys know, and I've made sure they know, that if they send them to me, they get those horses back. I don't show horses for a living any more. The only ones I show are the ones that Nicole and I own and every once in a while, one owned by one of my longtime customers. I will also catch-ride horses, primarily in Fort Worth at the Triple Crown events.

**Now that you are not traveling much, is your life as a**



(Upper) Nicole and Andrew Coates, at Southern Cross Ranch in Esparto, Calif. (Lower) Andrew Coates guided Dualnlorris San Reba, a 3-year-old mare whom he and his wife Nicole co-own, to a No. 8 finalist finish at the El Rancho Futurity.



## trainer a lot easier?

Six in the morning until 5 in the afternoon is a normal day. Riding 2-year-olds is not easy. I'm a little leaner now than I was two years ago. I can tell you that. But it's fun. The thing I really love is what I can feel in those horses. I can say, 'This one has what it takes.' They are few and far between. It might be one in 10. But it's cool to be able to feel it.

## How long does it take to determine if a 2-year-old has good, or poor, potential?

In 90 days, the really good ones tell you. You know early if they are great and you know if they are not going to make it. It's the ones in the middle that take a little more time and are harder to evaluate. Maybe they are a little immature and just need more time to develop before you know how good they are. The good ones and the bad ones weed themselves out early.

## Did you have a role model as you considered your career switch?

Not really. I have a great respect for guys that train 2-year-olds for a living, but I guess I don't really know of anyone that showed horses for a period of time, did well, and then just stepped back and rode 2-year-olds. Everybody either said I was crazy or I wasn't going to do it. It's taken about two years for people to realize that I'm serious, that I'm not kidding around, that this is what I do. I'm committed to it and I love it.

For more information on Andrew Coates' 2-year-old training operation, check out his website at [southerncrossranchonline.biz](http://southerncrossranchonline.biz). ■