

# An inside look into horsemanship with Hannah Selleck

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Hannah Selleck is notably one of the top riders in the United States and has been showing since, the young, age of 10. Growing up in Southern California and has always had a deep connection and love for horses. She operates her own business, [Descanso Farm](#), and is also the trainer and show rider for Burgundy Farms. Hannah also serves as an ambassador with [Brooke USA](#). A foundation that works to improve the welfare of working horses, donkeys, mules and the people they serve throughout Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Monty Roberts, known as the "Man Who Listens to Horses," is also an official Global Ambassador for Brooke. He has made it his lifelong mission to leave the world a better place for horses and people. I had the opportunity to learn more about her recent experience with Brooke USA and [Monty Roberts](#) at one of his "Join Up" Sessions.

## What did you learn from this session with Monty?

In my "Join Up" session with [Monty](#) I learned to be more aware of my body language toward the horse and to be more attentive and aware of the body language the horse is communicating to me.

Monty emphasized "stroking" instead of "patting" the horse when rewarding it and paying attention to signs such as the horse stretching and dropping their head down when they are relaxed. Monty also noted to be aware of the free hand that wasn't holding the rope and driving the horse – making sure that it was held in close to your body so the horse wasn't confused or frightened by it. This was something I had never considered and made me think more about seeing things through the horse's eyes.

## How will you apply this lesson to your current training method/routine in competition or with [Descanso Farm](#)?

I work a lot with the young horses we've bred, and the more foals that we've had, the more I've progressively started working them into my training program from an earlier age. I like learning new techniques that I can incorporate into that program.

As one example, if a horse doesn't want to be caught in the turnout or simply won't let you put on the halter on in the stall, Monty believes in 'not catching the horse, letting the horse catch you.' Rather than trying to chase down the horse or turning to something like food or treats to draw him in, Monty replicates a lot of what I learned in my Join Up session. Utilizing your body language, you enter the pasture or stall passively, keeping your hands quiet and averting your eyes from making direct eye contact with the horse. If he moves away from you, you send him even further away by fixing your directly on his – which is a dominate 'go away' type of body language. When he comes closer, you remain passive, until he comes to you. This is something that I'm definitely curious to try with our horses, and I'll definitely be more aware of my body language around my horses in general.



## What are some of the signs that a horse is trying to tell you something and how important is this in your training and riding style?

Just like we can use our body language and movements to convey different things to our horses, our horses use their body language and movements to convey things to us. Whether that's pinned ears showing anger, a hind leg





that is cocked and resting when the horse is relaxed, or something like a quivering when you touch its back, exhibiting pain.

To be a good horseman or woman in any discipline, I think it's important to be able to read and understand what your horse is trying to tell you. That includes recognizing if the horse is in any sort of pain or discomfort, what kind of mood the horse is in, and under saddle, how he's reacting to your hands, the bit, your body cues, and what you're asking him to do.

**With your experience as a professional in the industry, what do you think are the top three communication lessons that children (beginners) should learn to be capable horse people?**

Working with Burgundy Farms the past year I have spent quite a bit of time coaching up and coming juniors. First, and most importantly, young riders need to learn to communicate and that it is valuable for them to alert a coach if they feel something is not right whether it be in a lesson or in a warm up ring. Sometimes what the rider is feeling is not always instantly apparent to a coach on the ground. When young riders learn how to calmly stop and ask a coach to take a closer look at their horse if they are feeling an unsoundness or an agitation the rider may be able to avoid injury to both the horse and potentially themselves. Second, is that riders need to be calm at all times. A child that can express themselves in a cool thoughtful tone will always be heard. This goes for riding too as a horse is much more likely to understand the aids of a quiet and focused rider.



Lastly, it's important for young riders to set goals and talk about them with their trainer and support group before they get to a show. It is good practice to enter each circuit or string of events with a set of intentions. I always suggest that these goals include both Desires, such as winning of a medal or moving up to a higher division, and Objectives, such as working on sitting up taller or being to the ring earlier for course walks. It is important that young riders have objectives that they can control so that they can be rewarded not only for performance but for effort!

**In learning communication with a horse, how have you applied this to your everyday life?**

One of the biggest things that I've learned in communicating with horses – both from my short session with Monty and throughout my career – is the importance of patience. No matter what you're trying to accomplish in the saddle or on the ground, you have to have an extreme amount of patience working with horses – especially as you're bringing along young horses. That's something that I try to practice and apply to my time with my horses and to everything that I do in life.



Today, Selleck competes in both the hunter and jumper rings for Meredith Heman's [Burgundy Farms](#) of Petaluma, CA, while also showing her own horses and operating [Descanso Farm](#), her boutique breeding operation based in California and focused on producing top quality sport horses within the U.S. Selleck has earned numerous top ten finishes in international show jumping competition, including a win in the \$38,000 CSI2\* Canadian Pacific Grand Prix at the 2015 [Longines Masters](#) of Los Angeles aboard her top horse, the Oldenburg mare, [Barla](#). In addition to pursuing equestrian success, Selleck is passionate about making a difference and serves as an ambassador for [Brooke USA](#), a charity dedicated to improving the welfare of horses, donkeys, and mules in the developing world.

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