

# At the MOVIES

Many of us have dreamed of becoming a famous movie star...but have you ever considered what is involved in training those amazing 'movie horses' from our favourite films? Wayne McCormack is a professional 'movie wrangler' and stunt horse trainer, and along with his wife Amelia, runs 'Equine Films' on the South Island of New Zealand. He bred and started training his first foal (named 'Trigger'!) at the age of 13 and Wayne's movie credits include Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers and the Narnia series film Prince Caspian. HW recently caught up with Wayne while he was working on set in Auckland for the film 'Spartacus'.

**HW: How did you find your way into the area of movies and animal training?**

I was contacted to supply some horses and work as a wrangler on the 'Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers'. It was a real learning curve for not only myself but the whole horse department, as it was New Zealand's first large feature film that involved a large amount of horses! It was a lot of fun and I quickly realised there was a lot more potential to bring NZ 'equine film work' up to an

me a new insight on how to run a safe and effective horse department.

**HW: What were the first tricks/methods you learned to train with and did you have any 'bad' experiences when you were starting out?**

I watched American horse trainer Don Reynolds train the white Andalusian known as 'Shadowfax' for LOTR. I then used some of his methods and created my own and then later mixed them with other methods of the Spanish, Canadian and American horse trainers I had worked with. I now have a good understanding of teaching certain tricks but that is only a guideline. Every horse I have worked with has been different and I continue to learn from the horses I work with. They are as good a teacher as anyone!

I have not had any bad experiences because I always make sure that my horses are well prepped. Combine that with a great team of wranglers and you can be sure each day on set that it is safe for the horses, cast and crew.

best horses and equipment to reflect the work we do. That includes trailers and carriages imported from America, as well as horse imports from Holland, America and Australia to get the exact 'look' and temperament I require. I must also give a lot of credit to my incredibly talented wranglers, who are all fantastic horsemen/women.

**HW: Over the years, you must have worked with hundreds of horses - do you have some special animals that stand out in your mind?**

One of my most special horses was a Friesian gelding named Leroy, who is no longer with us. He was only five years old when we lost him overnight to colic. He just loved to be around people and gave everything 100%. His career was only just starting. He was broken to ride and harness and his liberty training was well underway and he had an amazing rear and was stunning to look at. He was a super gelding and simply irreplaceable.

Another special horse for me is a quarter horse gelding named Zeke who I have owned since a 2 year old. Every job we have ever had, he has always been enthusiastic about work and despite being 18 years old now, he shows no signs of slowing up. At home he is allowed to get away with cheeky behaviour (like digging in the wash bay and causing a racket) because we feel he has earned some privileges!

**HW: Where do you source your horses and what do you look for in a potential 'movie star' horse?**

I am always looking at horses for sale in NZ, Australia or America; whether I have a job coming up for them or not. The sort of horse I am looking for will seldom come

up for sale, so I have to snap them up when I can! This can simply be because I am looking for a particular 'look' to match another horse I have (eg. similar colour, height, build and markings) but then the horse has to tick all the other boxes too. Like mind, health, conformation and temperament. Ideally, all my horses should have a 'double' to share the workload. For example, the quiet easy-going horse is perfect for the cast scenes while a 'double' horse that is a bit more athletic, with a bit more gas, is ideal for the stunts and action work.

I have a couple of specialist breeds that I own - like the Andalusian and Friesian who look spectacular on camera - but the majority of my team are quarter horses. We also have two mules and I really enjoy working with them. Most of the team are stallions or geldings, as they spend so much time together working as a team; eating and travelling. I tend not to put a mare in amongst the 'boys', as that simply wouldn't be fair - even though I have worked with some great mares. We have also started breeding our own horses, as often you have got a pretty good idea of what you have got before you even start. Unfortunately, most older horses have problems that have been created by other people; so we have to fix those before starting to prep for a film.

**HW: Do some horses cope better than others with filming?**

A horse needs to have perfect manners while on the ground and being ridden - and that includes body control similar to that expected of your western performance or dressage horse. This could take months before you can bring in other 'film' elements - like smoke and wind machines, cranes, helicopters, fire, crowds, vehicles and anything else you can think of! Tarps and umbrellas for example...Horses cope with new things differently and as long as you use the element they see as 'danger' in a positive manner they WILL trust you and try anything for you.

**HW: What is it that you love about working with horses?**

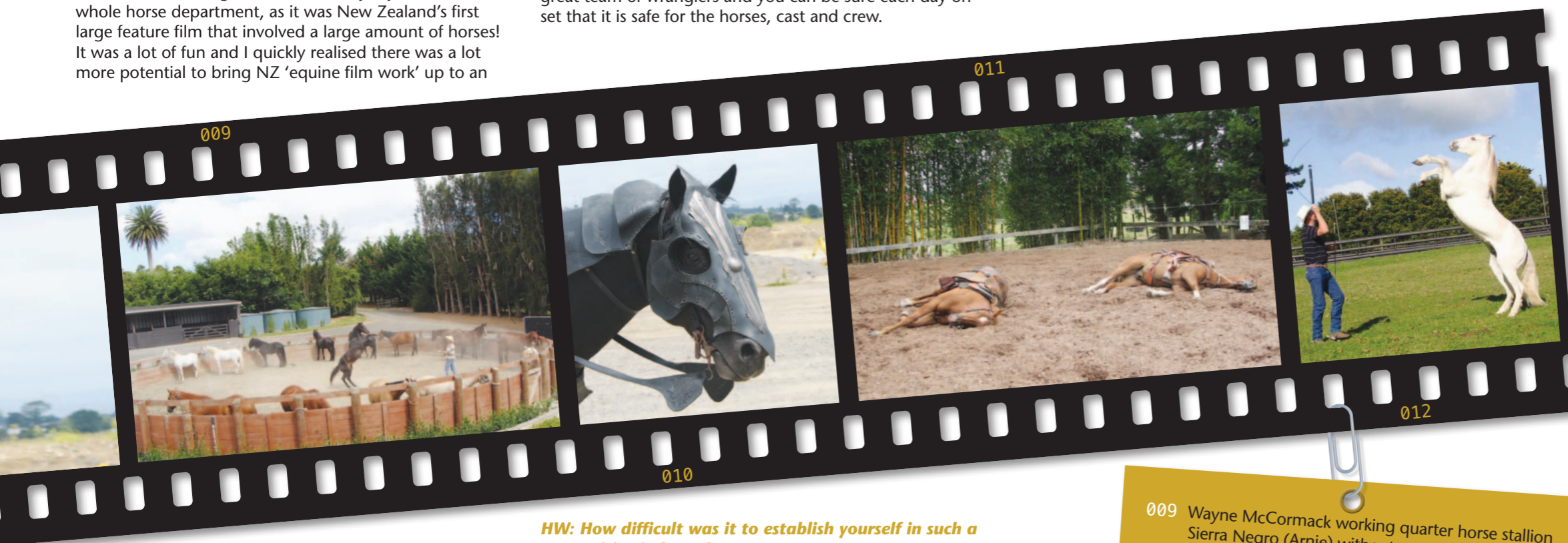
It is rewarding working with a horse that you have either bred or re-educated to perform in front of a crowd. Or onscreen, knowing that they are animals of flight; they can simply do what they wish! But they choose not to react because they have confidence and trust in you.

**HW: If you had any advice for our HW readers, what would it be?**

Horses must be respected at all times. They are an animal of flight and can be dangerous under certain circumstances. As horse owners, we love our horses and enjoy spending time with them. But we must not smother them with love. Their biggest reward is actually rest (release from pressure) and space.

**HW: What is the most difficult (Don't try this at home HW readers! Ed) 'movie horse trick' that you have had to teach a horse?**

I taught my Friesian gelding and a Friesian stallion to pull a carriage as a team on the movie Underworld 3: The Rise Of the Lycans. I had to teach them to rear in harness at exactly the same time and to reach their full height, before we cut to another shot of the horses galloping away into the night; still harnessed together. Rearing in harness and breaking away from a wagon is the last thing you want to train your good harness horses to do! But that's the movies for you!



international standard. So, I travelled to Canada to spend some time working with John Scott from 'John Scott Motion Pictures'. John is the biggest wrangler in North America. (John Scott and his head wrangler Lylle Edge also worked on LOTR and were hired to coordinate the large battle scenes). The time spent with John in Canada gave

**HW: How difficult was it to establish yourself in such a competitive industry?**

Equine film training is a competitive industry, but I have found that one job often leads to another. If you can come up with the goods, you work within your budget and you can work within the schedules given, you will be rewarded accordingly. The initial setup of 'Equine Films' as a business has been costly, but I wanted to select the

- 009 Wayne McCormack working quarter horse stallion Sierra Negro (Arnie) without any restraints.
- 010 Quarter horse stallion Sierra Negro (Arnie) in his armour for Underworld - Rise of the Lycans.
- 011 Quarter horse brothers Dude and Sneak learning to play 'dead.'
- 012 Wayne McCormack at work.