



TDN MOVIE REVIEW: BUCK

By Nicole Mattei-Lince

Back in the day when we were too short to reach the cookie jar, and attempting to drive our parent's car was futile (you could either reach the pedals or see over the dashboard, but not both), we also had this propensity to find horses magical. As we age, the mystical quality of the horse seems to fade. We discover the business of horse management and leave the fairy tale infatuation behind. Now Hollywood would like to remind us of that equine wonder, and 2011's *Buck* (PG) is the film that is doing so.



Directed by Cindy Meehl, *Buck* is the story of Buck Brannaman and his unique touch with horses. Avid

movie-goers may recall such horsemen as the inspiration behind Robert Redford's 1998 *The Horse Whisperer* (PG-13), and 'Bob' will tell you himself that Brannaman was much more than just the inspiration behind the film; he was a vital part of its production and overall success. However, Robert Redford's tale is not a historical account of Buck's life, and for that Cindy Meehl offers us the untold story of the soft-spoken man who has become known as "the horse whisperer."

One part documentary and one part homage to horsemanship, *Buck* follows Brannaman during a small span of his 40-week national horsemanship clinic tour. Traveling from Bend, Oregon, to Lexington, Kentucky, we learn that Buck Brannaman isn't just teaching people how to work with horses, but teaching the people a little something about themselves as well.

The son of a heavy-handed man, Buck wasn't dealt ideal cards as a boy; he and his elder brother, the youngest trick ropers in America, were routinely beaten. The unfortunate circumstances of his past, though, led him to the success he has found today, and to the understanding he has formed with horses.

Buck's methods are highly debated, as they contest the traditional method of "breaking" horses in lieu of a term Buck refers to as "starting" horses. But what could be seen as controversial is instead portrayed in a very open-minded manner. Meehl gives the audience a feel for Buck's methods without preaching that all horsemen convert from their own tried-and-true ways.

Visually, the documentary can best be described through the words of Buck. "It's a dance. Everything you do with a horse is a dance." Meehl's

cinematography echoes that philosophy as the film establishes a serene visual poetry between horse and human. Buck reminds us that patience and even-temperedness is a horseman's lock and key, and who we are as people can often be discovered through the relationship we have with our horses.

Already an Audience Award Winner at the Sundance Film Festival, *Buck* rekindles the magic behind the horse-human relationship for followers of Brannaman's horsemanship practices, as well as those that remain loyal to their own training techniques. Holding short-term viewings at select theaters, *Buck* is one film to look up and mark on your calendar before it moves on to the next locale. *For more on Buck*, go to www.buckthefilm.com.



Cindy Meehl & Buck Brannaman