



Aaron Ralston

Riding out his dreams.

By Honi Roberts

AARON RALSTON WAS RAISED ON HIS FAMILY'S CATTLE RANCH ON Colorado's Western Slope, not far from where he and his wife, Meg, and their sons, Parker, 5, and Coulter, 3, make their home today.

A self-described introvert, he stepped into the international spotlight at the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany, where he and Smart Paul Olena earned the high reining score for the gold-medal-winning Team USA and took home the individual bronze. He hasn't let much grass grow under his boots since.

"When I qualified for Aachen, I didn't fully realize what it meant," he says smiling. "Driving home, it sunk in: I wasn't just competing for myself anymore – I was going to Europe to represent my country!

"It's hard to describe the experience: the rock-star attention we got and the enthusiasm of the Europeans; the quality of the horses and the grand seriousness of it all. Even today, when I see pictures of Dell, Tim, Matt and myself on the medal stand, it's surreal. The bronze was just icing on the cake!"

Meg purchased Smart Paul Olena (Smart Chic Olena-Paula Tari by Tari Glo) in 2003, and in 2004, the couple rode him to two AQHA reserve world championships, Meg in amateur reining and Aaron in senior reining. The next year, the eye-catching red roan stallion and Meg were AQHA world champions in amateur reining, and Aaron rode him to the prestigious National Western Invitational Freestyle Championship. Then Aaron and Smart Paul Olena won the Denver United States Equestrian Team Qualifier, and the rest is history.

Since Aachen, the couple has opened a facility in Silt, Colorado, and Aaron has continued his career as competitor and clinician, and founded Cow Horse Productions, with friend Brad Zanin.

"It's a dream come true," the trainer says. "Our show, 'The Ride With

Aaron Ralston' on RFD-TV, showcases the skills, values and traditions of the working ranch cowboy; all of the things my parents taught me and that still define me today. The show was Brad's idea – I thought we were just daydreaming – but here we are two years later, with great viewers and fewer retakes!"

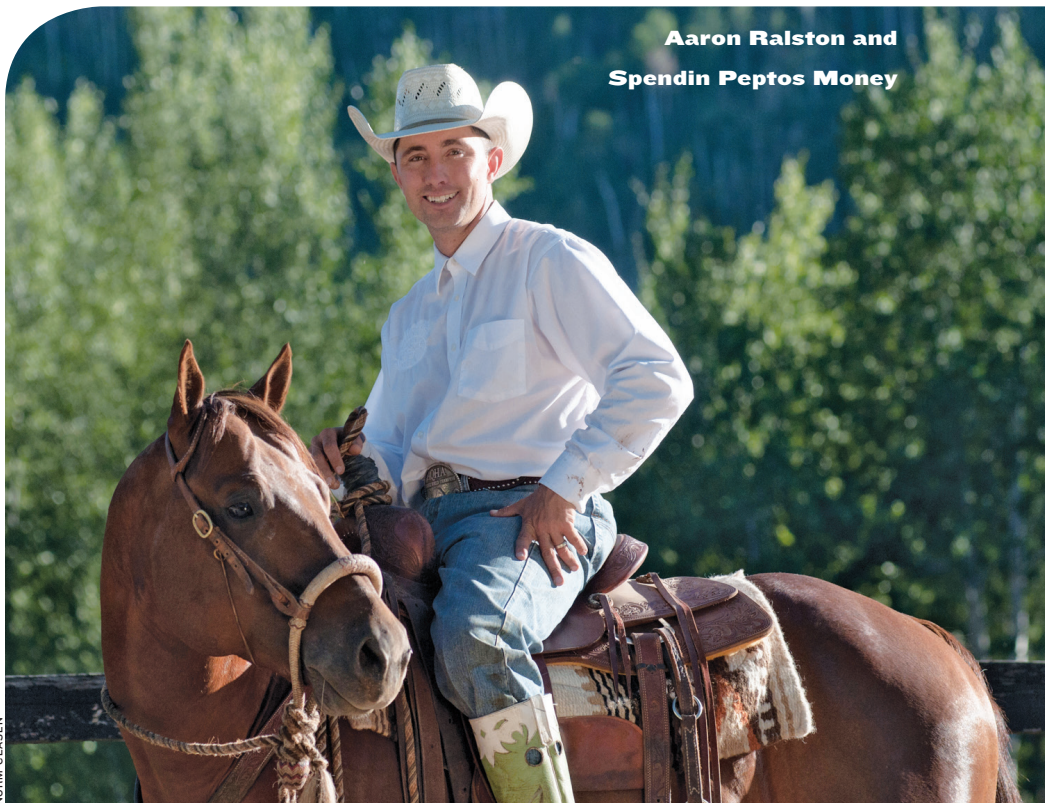
Aaron's on-camera experience made him a natural choice as NBC's reining commentator for the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, the first on U.S. soil, where he also gave clinics and a freestyle reining exhibition.

"It was impressive to see how NBC orchestrates a production like that," he says.

Did anything humorous happen during the live coverage?

"There are certain things a commentator shouldn't do, and one is show favoritism. During Shawn Florida's great preliminary run, I started getting pumped up, until the director's voice in my earpiece said, 'Aaron – calm down!'"

**Aaron Ralston and
Spending Peptos Money**



NORM CLASEN

Read on to meet someone with boundless enthusiasm for cowboy traditions and the American Quarter Horse.

What qualities do you most admire in the American Quarter Horse? In my events – roping, reining, cow horse, cutting – your horse must have explosive speed, yet be able to relax and refocus. No breed does it like the Quarter Horse.

Tell us about your first Quarter Horse. He was a little gelding we called “Beans” – no idea what his registered name was. He wasn’t 1,000 pounds, but what he lacked in size, he more than made up for with heart. When I was in third grade, he carried me to win my first buckle in breakaway roping. To this day, he’s the best heading horse I’ve ever had.

Smart Paul Olena, aka “Paul,” was an amazing competitor for both you and your wife, Meg. What makes him so outstanding? His endless physical talent. I owe everything I’ve got to him. Paul’s known worldwide for the stopping style and ability that he was born with. I wish I could take more credit, but Meg and I just learned to stay out of his way! He won’t accept unfairness, so we took our time training him and he taught us a few things, too. Now, each spring, he’s turned out with mares and we get a couple of colts, but mostly he lives in a pasture with his girlfriend, enjoying retirement and marital bliss.

If you could spend a day with any legendary Quarter Horse, who would you choose? Poco Lena, because of the amazing impact her two foals, Doc O Lena and Dry Doc, had on our performance world. She batted .1000! I’ve heard great stories about her quirky, unique personality, and think it’d be fun to ride such a matriarch; maybe even work a cow.

What’s your fondest memory of the 2010 WEG? Riding in the freestyle reining exhibition bareback with a hackamore with Spendin Peptos Money and feeling the crowd’s enthusiasm was fantastic. It made me hungry to compete again. (The song was “Hooked on an Eight-Second Ride” by Chris LeDoux, and it was a bull riding theme.)

Did anything humorous happen at WEG? All week long, I’d ridden bareback and bridleless at clinics, and I planned to ride that way for the freestyle exhibition. But at the rehearsal, the bright lights and loud music spooked him, and he took off and ran out of the arena, which has no gate. Fortunately, I had a rope in hand, and slipped it over his head and went back inside. He ran off again! The third time was the charm, and we had a good ride, but I decided to ride the exhibition bareback, with a hackamore. I’ve been trying to forget that rehearsal but I just ran into a Colorado couple who were there, and had a lot of fun reminding me about it.

If you could invite any three people to join you for an evening around a campfire, who would you invite? Will Rogers, for wit; Buster Welch, for his stories about the champions he has trained; and either Mark Twain or Jimmy Buffet, for a little bit of the rebel agitator

What is your RFD-TV program all about? The name is a metaphor. Even top competitors can’t win every run, so if that’s all that matters to you, you’ll be miserable. The journey – The Ride – is about enjoying the process. I get to

interact with talented horse people, and help preserve ranch skills and traditions.

What are the three best books you’ve read lately? “The Hero with a Thousand Faces” by Joseph Campbell; “Animals in Translation” by Temple Grandin; and a biography of Mark Twain

We hear that the first printing of your book, “Ride Up,” sold out already. Congrats! What’s it about? I co-authored it with Dr. Edgell Pyles, a psychologist, minister and champion ranch horse versatility rider. Dr. Pyles is my life coach, and we put together a program to help organize and focus your path. You won’t read anything that says, “pull here” or “kick there.” Instead, there are essays on following your dreams, setting goals and giving horses time.

Who are your heroes in real life? My wife, Meg, who’s honest, hard-working and an amazing mother; and my parents, who still live on the ranch where I grew up

What’s your most treasured possession? A colt named Smart Little Paul, aka “Pete,” whose family are all horses who are important to me. He’s by Smart Paul Olena and out of the daughter of a mare I rode in high school rodeo, who is by Zans Parity, the first horse I won (National Reining Horse Association) money with. Pete might not ever win a world championship, but he’s special to me.

What do you splurge on? Coffee and boots

What achievement are you most proud of? Raising our kids, Parker and Coulter; we’re not done, but we’ve gotten them to this point alive, and that’s something!

Finish this: People would be surprised to know that I ... know how to clog.

My favorite horse event to watch: Cow horse competition

My favorite non-horse-related pastime: Writing

The skill that’s been toughest for me to master: Patience; I want everything to happen now.

I most dislike: Dishonesty or people who sacrifice horses for their ego

When I have a moment alone, I usually: Read

What advice would you give to someone seeking show-pen success? Find the right mentor, then find the right horse.

What’s your idea of perfect happiness? A friend told me that a day should be eight hours of work; eight hours of play; eight hours of sleep. If I can incorporate that into life with my wife and kids, then I’m happy. 🐾

Honi Roberts is a special contributor to The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment or suggest a topic for a Quarter Chat, write to aqhajrnl@aqha.org.