

## **On The Cart With Compton: Troy Compton's Exclusive Interview With Ted Turner**

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**TC: Two words to describe Ted Turner: legendary horseman. Ted, welcome to "On The Cart".**

TT: Thank you, sir.

**TC: In my opinion, you're one of the most idolized and imitated people in our industry. Who did you idolize growing up? Who were your role models?**

TT: Well, I really didn't idolize anyone in particular. I will say that I watched the people who were very good at what they did. Jerry Wells, Tommy Manion. They were people who carried themselves with a lot of class and substance and just personified who they are, what they are. I watched them. I never really worked for anybody. I just watched and tried to learn and apply common sense to what I do. Seventy five percent of what we do is common sense. You know Jerry, Tommy, people like that who were very well thought of in the industry.

**TC: Did you grow up in Oklahoma City?**

TT: No, I was born in Ardmore, Oklahoma. I went to high school in Oklahoma City.

**TC: So you grew up in a horse family?**

TT: No. I always wanted to do it. It was just something that I wanted to do. Nobody in my family had horses. It was a lifelong dream. But you know, when you're 18 to 20 years old, you never know what you want to do, but the horses were what I loved. I bought a couple of horses and I was hooked...got started in the Apps. I just had to do it. And I still love it, just like I did then.

**TC: Why Apps?**

TT: Joe Edge had me showing Apps and then we switched over.

**TC: Why did you get out of Apps?**

TT: The Apps have always been a deal where the rules change according to circumstance. Quarter Horses have a set of rules you live and die by. You can go to an App show and if they want to change the rules, they can change them right there. They will stop the show and change them right there. You don't do that in Quarter Horses.

So then we went and bought Conclusive, paid \$2 million from Jerry. I negotiated the deal in Sulphur, Oklahoma. We bought Conclusive for \$2 million, we had him at the ranch, got to collect him one time and then he got EPM and we had to put him to sleep. We had 125 mares standing there to be bred to him! And then we went on a hunt to find another horse later in the year and we got on a plane and went to four different places. We ended up in Michigan and bought Mister (Mr Conclusion).

**TC: Over the years has it gotten easier to pick out the good horses?**

TT: No, it's actually gotten harder because our breeding is gone. I don't think our breeding is nearly what it used to be because Mr Conclusion is gone. It's hard. I've got orders for five horses right now and I don't know where to go to fill them.

**TC: Your style changed the way people presented horses. The way you showed them. You were the first guy who I analyzed how he stood with the horse and how he presented himself in pictures. Where did all that come from?**

TT: That's just me. You always try to present your horse and yourself to the best of your ability. Whatever it

takes to make sure that horse looks its best is what you do. It doesn't matter if it's reining, cutting, whatever. You do whatever it takes to make that individual and yourself to look the best that you can.



**TC: What are the biggest keys to your success?**

TT: Being hands on and loving what I do. I don't do the brushing (laughing)...I can't brush. I've done it too long. But I enjoy working my horses and I feed my own horses...every day at the same time. And when I go to the horse shows, I don't go there to socialize. You want to find me? Come to my stalls. If I'm not showing, I'll be around my stalls. It's a business and it needs to be treated like a business. A lot of guys go to the horse show and take their golf clubs and go golf. No. No thank you. That's not what people are paying me to do. We can go out to eat when we're not at the horse shows. But when we're horse showing, it's serious.

**TC: What's the biggest mistake you see people making today in the show pen?**

TT: Hmm. Good question. Not taking enough pride in what they do. They just go out there and expect to win. You have to work for it if you're going to win. You've got to want it more than anybody. I can take an average horse and out-fit 90% of the people and go beat your ass. And when you walk in that pen you walk in there like it's the best one you've ever touched. And when you're through, be courteous to the people around you, and to the judges because you're going to show to them again. Throwing that lead shank down and stomping, that don't get it. Tommy Manion was the master of that. End of story.

**TC: I would like you to list in order the top 5 most important attributes a halter horse must have to win.**

TT: First of all for me they've got to be pretty, correct, balanced, eye appeal and charisma.

**TC: What's the first thing you see with pretty?**

TT: I go on first impression. When judges come to me and ask me "How do I do this?" I tell them to go on their first impression. 90% of the time, you're going to be right on your first impression. Just that pretty look, that Mister Conclusion look. I don't know how to describe them. They just have that look to them. Just like a vehicle, a pretty woman walking down the street, they just have that class.

**TC: Over the years, the one thing that separates your horses, in my opinion, is that they have that athletic look to them. You were really the first person to win the big titles who had big horses that looked like you could ride. You never went for the bulk. Has it been tough sticking to your guns?**

TT: Yes because I'm going to go back to Mister. He put that look on them. You looked like you could get on him and ride. I remember when we went to buy Mister, Chris Manion was with us. She and Joe (Edge) were together then. All she could say was "Joe please let me ride him," because he looked like you could go do something. And it took three years for people to see it because I was reserve twice with him before he finally won it.

**TC: Is it an ongoing battle with athleticism vs. bulk or has everybody come together?**

TT: What we did after Mister, and I'm not running any bloodlines down, we got to breeding such heavy horses we bred the feet and legs off of them. We bred the heels off of them. You get these 1400 pound horses with these little tiny feet and legs and they couldn't stand up. We've kind of gotten away from that. We're gaining but we've also lost a little bit of our quality because of the stud deal. There has not been a dominant horse and there will never be another horse come along like Mr Conclusion, he just dominated.

**TC: That leads me into the next question. What is the best horse you've ever shown?**

TT: Ugh! I'm not going to say there's just one. There's two or three.

**TC: Okay, then give me the best mare.**

TT: There's two. Elusive Essence and Causin Confusion.

**TC: Stud?**

TT: Mr Conclusion and Mr Elusive.

**TC: Gelding?**

TT: Red Sonny Rebel. He was the most eye appealing horse I ever saw. In 1982, the first year I went to the World Show, I saw Red Sonny Rebel walk in the pen and I bought him from Greg Whalen before he walked out of the pen for \$50,000. I won the World with him the next year.

Oh and the one standing out in my pasture, Cant Stop Styling. He's still out there in my pasture he's twenty one years old.

**TC: Who is the best horse you've had nothing to do with outside your barn?**

TT: That's a hard question. I can't pick one. That one kind of threw me for a loop.

**TC: Tell me about 1991 when you showed Diversified in the aged stallions at the World Show? That was as crazy a halter class as I've ever seen. The crowd was going nuts the whole time. What was that like?**

TT: That was probably the most fun I've ever had. Diversified had won the World as a 2 year old in the western pleasure and as a 3 year old and an aged stallion in the halter and Jim Fuller had Noble Tradition who had never been beat. Carol Rose had bought part of Diversified that year and everywhere we went I had to get on and ride him. He was 16.1 (laughing). Damn he was hard to get on, especially if you had tight jeans on! That was something Momma Rose had me do. But that class was a lot of fun. The stands were as packed as they have ever been. Jim and I stood at that back gate daring each other to go down into that pen. And they were getting ready to shut that pen, I promise ya'. I think it's the most fun a crowd has ever had. Every time one of the judges would get on either horse, the place went wild. It was too bad that one horse had to lose but it was a thrill.

**TC: Two horses at the top of their game?**

TT: Two great, great horses. They almost shut the gate on us. That's why we have to go in order now, that's one of the reasons. We stood back there forever. Finally I ran down there and he came in behind me. It's a shame that one horse had to lose...Diversified won.

**TC: Ted, you've won 66 AQHA World Championships. That's more than anyone else...ever. Which World Championship sticks out the most for you?**

TT: Mr Conclusion would be one of them and Mr Elusive would be the other. Those two studs.

**TC: Why?**

TT: When we showed Mr Conclusion we were looking for an athlete that would show halter. Joe (Edge) had worked so hard promoting him and we won with five firsts. That was pretty cool. Mr Elusive, I owed him and he was Grand at the Congress and then we won the World and that meant a lot to us. That was one of the horses that I went and bought myself and made myself. That was pretty cool.

**TC: In my opinion you are one of the top horsemen of all time. In fact, I did an article a year or so back that asked me to list my influences and I had you listed right at the top.**

TT: I saw that.

**TC: Where do you think you rank?**

TT: I don't ever think about stuff like that. I really don't. I never look at it like that. I have been very successful and very fortunate. I hope people think of me that way, but I do my deal and go on. When a class is over, it's over. I never even put myself in that category. Jerry (Wells) was a legend. He will probably be the greatest legend because he did the racing and everything else. He will probably be the biggest legend to ever go down and probably deservingly so. He was a great horseman.

**TC: Do guys like Jerry drive you?**

TT: You just want to be the best at what you do. Just like Tommy (Manion) switched to cutting and now he's very successful in the cutting. Look at Jody (Galyean) and what he's done, look at what his family has done, his kids. Everybody's looking at you to screw up every minute you do something. You gotta do it cleaner and

better.

**TC: Is that hard to be in the public eye?**

TT: No. I enjoy it. But I'm not a high pressure person. I just do my deal. A lot of people think I'm stuck up, but I'm not. I just do my deal and go on. Take care of my business.

**TC: You're not much of a socializer. Do you think people feel shunned because you're so serious about what you're doing?**

TT: Like I said, I go to the horse show not to see all my friends. I go there to take care of business. I have great customers and a lot of great friends and they all understand how it is. If they want to come and do something when we're not at the horse shows that's a different deal but I'm serious about what I do.

**TC: Okay, let's change gears. Horse abuse is a hot topic right now. How do you think it's going to impact us (the trainers)?**

TT: I don't really know. In the halter horse world, we really don't have that much abuse. You gotta use your head with what you're doing. We all have horses, studs maybe, who are stupid or ignorant that need to be hobbled, need to be disciplined at home but you don't need to go to an extreme where it's going to cause a problem.

**TC: You talked about how people put you under a microscope because of your success just waiting for you to mess up, is this going to amplify that?**

TT: Well it's going to put everybody on alert. It's going to get all of the associations involved and something is going to have to happen to appease everybody.

**TC: This deal is going to get big.**

TT: AQHA will have to do something.

**TC: AQHA has got to start making a stronger stand on policing it. They've got to. We've got to start policing ourselves and this is going to have to boil down to that.**

TT: And then they make someone a professional horseman so they can go around and spy on everyone? They can't put people who you make a living with, judges and then...

**TC: (interrupts) That's another thing I wanted to ask you. Why haven't you gotten your judges card?**

TT: Hmmmm...if I show a lot, it's hard to go judge. And I show a lot. But I tell you what has happened in the horse business, as far as judges, is we get people who are not horsemen to go judge horses. Book smart people. That's why there's so much controversy in our judging. We don't have horsemen who do this on a daily basis.

The AQHA needs to do a better job with our judges. I don't know what the answer is to that. I really don't. At the World Show, when somebody is so blatant that even when the flies on the horse's back know it's that bad, they ought to be sent home right then. It would only take once or twice. They need accountability. Just like in the cutting. If you have four 70's and one 80, the 80 gets called in and if you don't have a good reason, you're gone. You go home. But AQHA's stand is "We don't want to embarrass anybody." And until they do embarrass somebody, judges are going to do what they want, when they want.

**TC: What's going on in the halter horse economy?**

TT: Well I think it's the same as in the riding deal. If you've got a great one, it doesn't matter what it costs. Somebody will buy it. But if you don't have a great one and you can't be competitive at the big shows, nobody is going to buy it anymore.

**TC: You used to hit it as hard as anybody. Are you in a different mode now?**

TT: No. I'm going. I can't wait to leave for the Sun Country.

**TC: You don't get burned out?**

TT: No! I love it. I'm getting to live my dream. When I start my clinics off, I tell everybody that I can't wait to get up every morning and go to the barn because that's what I love to do.

**TC: Are you shocked at your success?**

TT: Yeah. But you got to do it better than everybody else. You have to present yourself better than everybody else. They expect you to come with one when you walk in that pen.

**TC: where are you at with your health condition right now?**

TT: I'm cancer free still. I had a check up the 22nd of December and I was still cancer free. I get my bladder tested every 90 days and my kidney once a year.

**TC: What exactly did you have?**

TT: I had a spot like a cauliflower in my bladder. And they went in surgically and removed it. I had a place on my kidney and they took a third of my kidney.



**TC: Did it scare the hell out of you?**

TT: Yeah. But what are you gonna do? I had a lot of support. A lot of good friends. You know I never got really scared. There's so much technology now. The worst thing was that they didn't put a catheter in me and I came home and I plugged up. I couldn't urinate. 800 cc's in my bladder and I couldn't get it to go anywhere. So I had to go back to the hospital in the middle of the night and I was fine. The other deal they took a part of my kidney. We had specialists who were really really good.

This is funny. We're in the hospital, I'm on the operating table and somebody keeps calling Dar and telling her I'm doing well. Finally Dar asks "Who is this?" and it's Tiina Volmer. She's one of the nurses. I knew she was a nurse, but I didn't know where. We were at Baylor in Plano. Small world. I saw her in Florida and said "Well, you've seen me inside and out!" (Laughs)

When they took the staples and the tube out I started walking three miles a day from the barn to Terry's (Bradshaw) house and back. I got my strength back. That was October 13th and then I showed at the World Show a few weeks later.

**TC: Have you changed anything in your lifestyle?**

TT: Nope. I don't drink or smoke. Never have.

**TC: Let's change gears and talk about your new deal. How did Turner-Bradshaw start?**

TT: Terry and I have been good friends for 5-6 years. We talked about doing something for years. Finally we got together and he said "I want to show, I'll build the facility, we'll partner up and let's have some fun." Nothing changes, I still take outside horses. He would like to sell CK Kid, I am out of partnerships on all of my studs, and just have the best individuals we can get. He had a ball at the World Show. We had camera crews there at 6 in the morning before he ever got there. It was good. They ran a deal on Fox for two minutes, that's \$2 Million worth of advertising for AQHA.

**TC: It's great to see him getting more involved.**

TT: He wants his own show string. He wants to be like Rita (Crundwell)! Not to that extent but he loves the horses. He's also scared of them. You wouldn't think that somebody that big that was Super Bowl MVP...but he's scared of them. But every day for 30 days before he showed at the World Show he was in the barn twice a day setting his horse up, walking, tracking.

**TC: What's he like to coach?**

TT: He's easy, he's a good guy. He's just like he is on tv.

**TC: Does he get serious being around you?**

TT: Oh...some, but he's not a serious person. (Laughs) He's just a truly unique individual. He wants to have fun and be accepted in the horse business. He's lost \$11 Million in the horse business.

**TC: This place is beautiful. Is Terry around here much?**

TT: Four days a week. He loves it. He wants to be a part of it. He loves to come down here to the office, he likes the fireplace when it's cold. He likes to come in and look at his horses. Now he doesn't have to get in the car and drive down to Aubrey to see his horses. He loves to be around his horses.

**TC: What's the best thing about being here?**

TT: I love being out here by myself. There's a lot of peace of mind. There are three big lakes here to fish. It's like I'm almost back home. I like the privacy. It's pretty cool.

**TC: Are there any drawbacks?**

TT: No. None.

**TC: So life is good for Ted Turner?**

TT: Life is GREAT for Ted Turner. Not good...GREAT!

**TC: How do you want to be remembered?**

TT: A guy who did the best he could at what he did. Pretty simple.

**TC: Where you think you're at on that?**

TT: I don't know.

**TC: You're happy where you're at?**

TT: Yes, sir. Very much so. It's kind of a come back this year. I'm going to try to kick some ass this year. I'm on a mission. I have a lot of things to prove to myself and everybody else this year. I'm motivated again big time.

**TC: What's fueling that?**

TT: We don't need to go there. Just the last couple years have been down years for me and I want to reestablish myself. The only way to do that is to work harder. You can sit around and feel sorry for yourself, but that's not going to do any good. You got to go out there and prove to everybody that you can do it. That's why I'm ready to get back on the road showing horses. I've got great customers and they furnish me with some great horses and I just want to go show horses.

**TC: Today's conversation reminds me of conversations we used to have 20 years ago.**

TT: I'm a little older and I learned a lot about myself this last year with the cancer. Everybody panicked and I didn't. It will make you stop and think. You always think it won't happen to me. Yeah right! I know myself body-wise. The day I had a little blood in my urine I knew something was wrong.

**TC: Do you think you're as sharp as you've ever been?**

TT: I'm getting sharper again. Last two years haven't been great personally, last couple years I've had some ups and downs and my health issues but I'm back on my game.

**TC: What doesn't kill you will make you stronger?**

TT: I hope so. I've had a great support system.

**TC: Do you have more endearing friendships than you've ever had in your life?**

TT: By far. People I didn't even know cared.

**TC: Who are some of the biggest people in your support team?**

TT: Debbie Arber, my kids, my grandkids, Terry (Bradshaw), Carl and Pam McBeath, Vern Habighorst, Jim Snow...the list goes on and on. I have at least 15 people call me every day to check on me right now. Every day. Jason Smith, Julie Smith, all of them call. It has been a tough 30 days but I'm over it now. I'm on the mend but it has been a tough 30 days.

**TC: Do you have personal goals for a total number of World Championships?**

TT: What's the number when I quit? When I see that I'm no longer at the top of my game is when I'll quit. There's no numbers. I'd like to say 80-90 World Championships. I don't know how long. It depends on my health and a lot of things. But when I see me slipping, I'm done. I'll walk. I don't want to be remembered as being there and sliding down the totem pole.

**TC: Where are you going to walk to?**

TT: That's a good question. I have no idea. I love this. I just crave it.

**TC: Well, Ted, that's it from me. Do you have anything else?**

TT: Nope. I encourage anyone to come see us anytime. Exit 5 off I35. Head East and you'll run right into us. We'd love to have you.