

# PORTRAIT OF THE WEST



## ODIE WRIGHT

WORDS AND PHOTO BY LARRY TURNER.

"It's rare that I see a black cowboy these days," says 57-year-old Odie Wright. "When I do, it scares me." He laughs. "The white people I live around all look black to me."

Odie works for Cam and Jenny Curtiss' Rock Creek Ranch outside Klamath Falls, Ore. "He's a top hand, a fix-it-up man and a gentleman with a great sense of humor," says Cam. In ranch circles, Wright's known as a cowboy's cowboy who trains horses on the side.

"Though there are not many black horse trainers and breakers these days, there is a long tradition of them in American history," says Wright. He points out that African-Americans used to break a majority of the horses for the U.S. Cavalry. Wright trains a lot of problem horses and starts many young horses.

A lean 165-pound, 5'11" horseman, Wright started breaking horses at age 16 while working for the Two J Ranch in Planada, Calif. He raises Percherons, quarter horses and paints. His favorite horse,

Titan, is an 18-hand mix of these three breeds.

Father of eight, Wright also helped raise 15 problem boys.

"Over the years I've taken in these boys to help them get a better start in life," says Wright. "Ranch work has taught them to survive and to utilize basic life skills. Too much play and complacent time gets people in trouble. Problem horses are the same. It is not so much that you are breaking them as it is you are learning to get along with them. Problem horses just need to be ridden, to have someone pay attention to them. Problem kids just need to learn the value of hard work."

Wright values good friends, a special lady, his children and extended family, ranch work, and the simple life. "There is no greater freedom than to be horseback, doing what you love." ■

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