



EQUINE VIP *talks with* Manuela Stefan

by Susan Ashbrooke

Manuela Stefan is a lifestyle and equine photographer who travels the world to capture the spirit of the horse. Her 'Graceful Horses' collection came to life as a result of her strong connection with the spirit of the horse. Manuela hopes her images will touch hearts as a visual tribute to the horse's power, grace and splendor. Manuela also participates in "Polo for Heart" a fundraising event which has brought international Polo players to Toronto, Canada for 34 years. Ms. Stefan donates fine equine art pieces to help the charity raise over \$5 million for Canada's Heart and Stroke Foundation.

You have traveled the world photographing horses in nature and beautiful surroundings. A great job! You obviously have a connection to horses. Do you look for a horse with personality and spirit as subjects?

MS: I would not say I look for anything in particular as far as a horse's personality is concerned. I usually am inspired by my desire to capture the animal's spirit as it is: wild and free, regardless of circumstances. Even if normally confined, I try to arrange for a run where all horses have a chance to manifest their inner beauty in an explosive way. And so far, the results have been fantastic. Sometimes it is almost as if they know of my intention and they do their best to help. I have had many moments when I could not really tell whether or not a shot turned out, just to be blown away later while looking at it on my computer's screen. To my surprise, there were horses who made intense eye contact and looked like they were thrilled to be there and perform in front of my lens. I may be subjective, but I have also had comments from others saying similar things. They too felt the horses looked content and some even seemed to smile!

There is a certain feeling of joy a running horse exudes. Because this is what they really love to do. And they seem to be grateful to us whenever we offer them the possibility.

Of course, I have had a few chances to get closer to one horse in particular and appreciate its character further. An example that stands out is of a Romanian stallion from the Carpathian mountains who adored playing in the snow in front of my camera. His colours truly came out and he put on a display of gracious moves that took my breath away. I had to remind myself to click once in a while.

Can you offer a few professional photography tips to our readers so they can capture the brilliance of their own horse?

MS: I am certain horse owners know their four legged well, therefore the main prerequisite - a good connection with their animal - is already in place. A few other tips are:

- *Allow your horse to relax and have fun. Get them in a situation where they are at ease, happy. Try to stimulate their playful nature and have your camera ready. You may be able to catch that joyful light in your friend's eyes.*
- *If you have the possibility, let the horse run free. Get yourself a camera that allows for fast shutter speeds and shoot away. There is a high chance for the 'million dollar shot' to happen.*
- *Last but not least, have a lot of patience. Let go of expectations, just intend for a fun time spent together.*



To learn more about Manuela Stefan, visit her website, www.gracefulhorses.com. Stefan can also be found on Facebook, www.facebook.com/gracefulhorsesphotography.