



SAM SAVITT SPEAKS

Story by Nancy Boyce

Paintings courtesy of the artist. Drawings are from Ups and Downs, by Suzanne Wilding and Sam Savitt, St. Martin's Press, N.Y., 1973.

"Painting horses," Sam Savitt says, "has been a love affair I've had going ever since I can remember."

Born in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. to a non-horsey family, Savitt studied at the Pratt Institute in New York, where, he recalls, "I drew horses all over my boards in Life class, despite the human models in front of the room. It was a strict school and I got excellent training there, but at the end I was called into the president's office because I hadn't completed all the courses. What had I been doing? I'd been in the library studying books on horse anatomy!"

After graduation, he hitchhiked through the southwest and worked on ranches gathering material on western horses, a particular love of his. Recently he returned west to the Pryor Mountains in Montana, where he did *Wild Horse Running*, his latest book. This is a fictionalized version of a true story about a gray mustang, Cloud.

After serving with the Army Engineers in Burma, Savitt returned to work as a commercial artist. "I drew for pulp magazines and comic books. It was good training in composition. And I joined the Art Student's League and went to night school."

Savitt says that Will James and Paul Brown among contemporary artists, and turn-of-the-century masters Lionel Edwards and Sir Alfred Munnings have influenced his work most. But Savitt's work has a special quality all its own.



It is lively. Most of it shows the horse in action, jumping, bucking, galloping, mane flowing, nostrils wide. Even when a mare and foal are pictured quietly grazing or drinking from a stream, one expects them to dash away at a full gallop. Savitt uses a shorthand style and broad fluid strokes of the brush. He paints the horse romantically, ideally, without flaws.

His work has taken him to equestrian events all over the world. One commission, for example, was to paint the United States Equestrian Team. His book, *Equestrian Olympics*, followed.

"I went to Mexico that year," he says, "and covered all the horse events: three-phase, pentathlon and stadium jumping. I made shorthand drawings of each fence on the cross-country course and had the rider's numbers. Then I was able to reconstruct the action later."

Some of Savitt's earlier works include *Around the World With Horses*, *America's Horses* and *Midnight, Champion Bucking Horse*. *Midnight* won the Boys' Club of America Junior Book Award in 1958.

Sam Savitt lives in North Salem, N.Y., enjoys foxhunting with Golden's Bridge. He schools horses when he is not painting them.

Savitt has drawn and painted horses of many different breeds. among his favorites is the wild mustang, subject of his latest book.

Savitt's facile brush has also turned out hundreds of cards, charts, and posters, all about horses. And because he is able to catch individual qualities in particular horses, he has had many commissions for portraits.

Sometimes an impromptu portrait, however, earns as much recognition as one long in the making. "I was at the Badminton trials in England last year. While I was there, Mark Phillips won an event on the hairiest course I've ever seen. I sent some pencil sketches I'd done of Phillips to Princess Anne. She sent me a nice thank you note." □

