



Comanche Moon will likely gallop onto the CBS network next year.

Comanche Moon Rising

This *Lonesome Dove* prequel is the season's most anticipated new Western.

By Michael Giltz

CASTING A MOVIE or television show is a difficult task; finding the right actor for the right role can make or break a project. When making a Western, however, it is just as crucial to cast the right animals for the right actors.

The horses must be able to fulfill the requirements of the script, deal with all the distractions on a set without spoiling a take, and, on top of it all, mesh with the comfort level of each actor and his or her various skills.

For the upcoming CBS miniseries *Comanche Moon*—a prequel to *Lonesome Dove*, one of the most popular TV events ever—boss wrangler and livestock coordinator Tim Carroll had the added challenge of filling all those needs not just once, but three times, because the epic time-span covered roughly from 1840 to 1880 and each main actor required three different mounts.

"There were 24 'cast horses' for the main eight Texas Rangers," explains Carroll, who has been working on film sets since he was 12 years old. "They're really

good campaigner horses. They've been around the block, and they're really good on camera. I coordinate all the livestock and own all of it. Basically, I'm in the rental business. I own all my trucks and trailers and wagons and all the horses."

The miniseries looks at the early days of Gus McRae (Steve Zahn of *You've Got Mail*) and Woodrow Call (Karl Urban of *The Lord of the Rings*), two tough Texas Rangers. Robert Duvall and Tommy Lee Jones memorably played those same men as aging veterans who went for one last cattle drive in the blockbuster 1989 miniseries *Lonesome Dove*, based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Larry McMurtry (*Brokeback Mountain*).

For Zahn, who owns a ranch in Texas, it was clearly the chance of a lifetime.

"Steve is really into this cowboy stuff and so is Karl," notes Carroll. "But Steve, he really got into it. Weeks in advance, before we started production, he was out getting [on] horseback and running the rope and practicing all sorts of

things. He's got some horses of his own, too. I had him on a Quarter Horse and then I had him on a big black horse that was half Thoroughbred and half Quarter Horse. Steve likes nice-handling horses that stand well and put up with all the gunfire and all that."

Many actors fall in love with the horses while filming and are disappointed when Carroll refuses to part with the animals after the project is finished.

"Liam Neeson had this big black cast horse that Steve Zahn was also riding. Neeson just fell in love with him [while making *Seraphim Falls*] and wanted to take him home. The problem is, I've raised these horses from colts and they're kind of family. It would be like giving your family away. If we get a good cast horse, we keep 'em. Besides, it's not really worth selling, even if it's for a tremendous amount of money, because then you gotta replace them."

Carroll has seen some lean times over the years—for a while only commercials and print ads like the Marlboro Man kept him afloat—but the last three years have been nonstop, with the miniseries *Into the West* and now *Comanche Moon* proving to be the most elaborate productions.

"We had a hundred Indians mounted and a hundred loose horses just for one scene," says Carroll. "It was the Austin raid: the Indians came in, raided the town and stole all the horses. So we had a master shot of them riding into town and then the battle, and then we took all those horses and all those Indians and nine times we came out of town with them running as hard as they could. And never stubbed a toe. It was quite something."

Carroll has a good feeling about *Comanche Moon*, even though sequels are always intimidating and risky—and the overwhelming success of *Lonesome Dove* is a hard act to follow. Yet, sometimes everything just works out right: one of Carroll's horses, Magnum, had his first job on *Lonesome* and Carroll decided to retire him when the *Comanche* shoot was over. "A good start," muses Carroll, "and a good ending." ♦