

December 2009 Essex Rider Magazine
(Behavioural Work and Equine Veterinary Care Improvements)

I would like to discuss some positive evolution in equine behavioral and veterinary care. This is in some sense a good Christmas gift for the horses and their owners.

Good news in the growing awareness by DVM Professionals:

I was recently invited to make a trip to Germany for a few days where I gave a talk, answered many questions and did some demonstrations with horse handling (with 6 of their horses) for a large group of some 50 DVM's and PhD's. These Veterinary Professionals were having their annual European gathering and I was invited as they are becoming more aware of the needs and benefits of Natural Horse handling as well as learning how to reduce stress levels for their Equine charges plus becoming more adept at avoiding accidents and personal injuries.

The European Veterinary Professions are becoming more aware that generating horse behavioral changes consumes similar time (if not more) as does their veterinary efforts in discovery of problems and causes of illnesses. They are realizing how much better the subsequent healing process is enhanced and speeded as a result of better understanding and handling of the horses. They are realizing the importance of the fact that they must improve their abilities in dealing with horses minds, which are just as complex as their bodies are. There was a Canadian Professor invited and he gave a long "up to date" talk and slide presentation on the horse brains and how nervous systems are affected by various states of mind. There is a growing desire by many such professions to better understand behavioral issues and solutions and they want to be more "up to speed" or "up to date". It was an impressive gathering and refreshing to see them focus on these behavioral aspects of the horses and how to handle them better. The Americans are thankfully making similar progress and I hope will continue that movement. It would be wonderful if the British Veterinary professionals would move more in this direction.

I believe a closer coordination and cooperation between equine behaviorists and Doctors of Veterinary Medicine would be an efficient means of progressing equine care. It is easy to understand how, for example, I cannot take the required time to learn the vast medical knowledge the Veterinarians possess and must keep up to date with -- nor do they have the time to learn the large volume of knowledge required to effectively deal with such a myriad of equine behavioral issues. Obviously the DVM's can learn to handle "on the spot" situations better with continued practice but they will never have sufficient time to spend dealing properly with behavioral issues, which can take days or even longer.

Good news in the growing awareness by British DVM Professionals:

One of the stud farms that I work with is owned and managed by an open minded and enlightened lady who has vast experience in breeding (Natural Covering, Artificial Insemination and Embryo Transfer). She also has a great understanding of the racing world and spends a lot of time trying to improve the lot of the horses in that business. A couple of years back she invited me to come over and work with a couple of the problem horses. After that was handled, apparently to her satisfaction, she asked me to begin a program of behavioral work with the stallions, mares, foals (colts and fillies). She (Zoé) also asked me to teach her staff my methods and improve safety on the yard.

I have worked for Zoé and her yard with more than 30 of their horses (including overseas and European stallions shipped in for training) and the staff has done well in instituting / practicing the methods I use and teach with very good results. I still do the initial behavioral work and then the staff can carry on with the methods specific for each

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horse -- much as I have done for private clients and their horses (thousands of horse jobs) that I have dealt with here in England. We do a lot of work dealing with horses destined for the race track via more natural methods and they have been performing much better, going through the initial race training yards as well as in racing. When they aren't fast enough and are retired, they are also much easier to retrain for sale into the private sector. We also rehabilitate many damaged horses so that they get a further life, which is much different that the old standard of what generally happens when they are damaged on the race track.

Then we got a great surprise when we discovered the stallion work we were doing was making great strides in improving semen count and increasing the commercial value of the Boys. This was an improvement solely down to better handling, feed and exercise management plus behavioral training. Then another important change and evolution began to occur when one of the most respected UK Veterinarian Hospitals in New Market started booking their horses with the stud for us to handle their physical and mental rehabilitation. Therefore, to my delight !, the UK Veterinary system is beginning to open it's mind. Maybe we will rub off on other aspects of the British equine industry.

In sticking with the behavioral train of thought in this issue : here are some more points about Round Pen work.

Round opens are very good for allowing horses to run freely and without constraint they can release a lot of stress. Being flight animals this suits them very well.

Although the release of stress is a big factor in round pen work, there is an equally important result to be gained in the "join up" (as it is popularly know now-a-days) where the horse can lean it has nothing to fear from the trainer even though the trainer is also taking the role of leader, as it is done in the herd situation, by controlling the movement of the horse. Teaching the horse specific cues to call the horse to you is also important in beginning the communication between the two of us. I will discuss this more fully in a later article.

In round pen work, the trainer can move in an intersecting direction to the front of the horse in motion to stop forward motion as well as to the rear to increase impulsion, although I recommend never using whips or ropes on or behind the rear, since a horse cannot see behind themselves when running. I also recommend using looking into the eyes of the horse often when communicating. I do not hide my eyes although I do turn away from a horse when I want them to follow (this applies when at liberty as well as when haltered on line and even if I have roped them with my lariat). I will discuss this more fully in a later article.

By having the horse run the large circle around the open whilst remaining in a small circle in the middle allows the trainer to control the horse and remain ahead of the horse easily as a horse has different perception than we do with our binocular eyes.

I trust this is useful and interesting information for ya'll and I wish you a

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year !

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