

Opening Comments :

My training methods are directed towards creating confidence and trust between human and horse. Rather than fighting the animal, I advocate patience, understanding and beneficial leadership which generates a desire in the horse to do what is asked of it. Working through understanding eliminates any need for rough handling. Being a Native Texan, the change to Natural Horsemanship was not an easy transition. Over the years and via my many experiences with horses and their problems I have solidified my methods and become “consistent” in my application of my methods. Consistency has been a huge key in succeeding with horses.

Horses can learn live with harsh treatment if it is consistently applied, however it does not generate a true partnership. Whereas, dealing with firm yet benevolent non-confrontive leadership in a consistent fashion generates a long lasting solid partnership resulting in “interested and more accurate attention” being paid by horse to rider rather than fearful attention which is not always accurate.

Riding & Training Advice:

For every muscle we tense as riders, the horse will tense one as well. If we relax then so will our horse.

By offering our horse the method of pressure release for all physical and implied pressures we apply to our horses, they will quickly recognize it is much akin to what they originally learned from their mothers and they will be much more ready to follow so long as we are clear and concise with our messages / requests.

Folks have asked me how horses have dealt in the past with harsh human behavior before the last 80+ years of Natural Horsemanship awakening. The answer is actually simple in that horses can deal with most any kind of human behavior so long as it is consistent as a survival mechanism. This can be seen and felt by feeling how hard they are along the esophagus and down their neck, when their heads are “up” (some even over develop crests, as remaining hard for too long). This stiffness indicates stress load retention in order to exist in uncomfortable situations or worries. Many (over 30) years back, I realized that was not the best way for horses to live so I began practicing (over the last 31 years) what is today known as Natural Horsemanship - where non confrontive, albeit firm, benevolent leadership is practiced along with two way communication being understood by both horse and rider. I have found horses to be extremely responsive to these methods and they can carry on with their lives in a much more cooperative manner.

As always, rein control should be accomplished via slow, soft yet firm hands and with definite rein to bit contact. Remember to be firm whilst benevolent. Use well timed releases (pressure release) with no constant or steady pulling / pressure and never “jerk” unnecessarily on the reins. Although sometime “blocking” may be required to reprimand when a horse “roots” and in such cases - simply hold the block (often against your leg) and when the root or “brace” is released by him you should immediately release the blocking rein.

Never pull directly back when asking for turns, first ask for a slight lateral move which protects the edges or corners of the mouth. By doing this your horse will become ever softer and easier to turn as there will be no pain associated.

With regard to all I advocate “in my opinion” there are a couple of applicable quotes, one by W. Edward Deming (former American statistician, professor, author, lecturer, and consultant that

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advocated quality in the reconstruction of the World following WWII) “Learning is not compulsory ... Neither is survival” and another by the former World Wide great horseman Jimmy Williams “It’s what you learn AFTER you know it all that really counts” (both now deceased), that also apply to the current state of horsemanship evolution. Not all riders / owners feel it necessary to learn how to deal with their horses in a more understanding way to the horses, i.e. in the horse’s language or a more understandable language. Horses can deal with this in varying results as it is a survival technique but not necessarily an enjoyable way of life. Therefore what I suggest is my opinion and not in any way a claim to be the only way to deal with our horses.

However as I agree with both quotes vehemently, I will continue to push everyone to drive out fear and instill firm yet beneficial leadership and partnership so that our horses can work much more effectively because they want it to succeed with trusting and calm minds rather than with fear of us.

More on the Laminitis report:

Following up on the information I included last month (more information from Bill Moyer, DVM, Texas A&M University): Moyer advises that caretakers / owners and veterinarians should address environment and ground surface, housing and cause of obesity to help head off laminitis. Obesity is a primary factor and a generally harmful state for the horse. Diet management practices that lead to obesity include overfeeding (particularly grain), lack of exercise and varied perceptions of what is considered “good” body condition. In the wild horses would have scarcer forage supply during winter, so weight would fluctuate with season; in domestic life horses are often fed more in the winter and eliminated seasonal weight loss. Bouts of laminitis are not always clinically apparent other than visible growth rings of the hoof or radiographic evidence of coffin bone rotation. Progression of obesity can also include insulin resistance and both exacerbate laminitis risk. As a horse gets fatter, insulin sensitivity decreases. Insulin resistance worsens with chronic obesity, making a horse more susceptible to laminitis and less tolerant of triggering causes. The longer a horse is obese, the more other tissues are affected.

Laminitis Triggers include exacerbation of an insulin resistance crisis due to increased starch and sugar in green grass or other stresses such as diet and grain supplements, change in pasture, stress of transport, disease, hospitalization and/or surgery. The crises can also be related to hormonal changes. **Another trigger** develops in the intestine, especially when a horse is turned out on new pasture with a sudden increase in starches, sugars and fructans that creates a carbohydrate overload in the large intestine. Avoid sudden feed changes and gradually introduce a horse to new pasture. Regulate starch, sugar and caloric intake.

Closing reminders:

1. Don’t confuse “preparing your horse to do something” with “desensitizing”.
2. Keep cues clear and consistent.
3. Remember that Martingales are constraining to horses and are not conducive to being able to control horses flight as horses naturally lift their heads to stop. Where Martingales are handy sometime for initial training they are not safe tack for riding out on hacks.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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