

Summertime advice, Equine facility designs and Horse

handling: I am standing on my soap box today, pointing out problems that I continue to run across much too often. I hope to coax owners, managers, etc. into opening their minds & eyes with regard to their horses' points of view as well as to prevent these errors.

I often comment on how stables and trailers are built so much differently than in the Southern USA (esp. Texas) and how they are often built in a fashion that is not friendly or helpful to horses. I recently ran into an extreme example of the stable construction problem, within an otherwise well designed Farm based equine facility. In this particular facility there were stables, although not too confining in size, were built without sufficient windows to provide needed ventilation - much less sufficient to lessen the claustrophobic (lack of peripheral vision) problems closed in stables generate for horses. The lack of ventilation on the day was of particular importance and very distressing. There could easily and affordably have been windows, to provide peripheral views, cut into all three (side and rear) "cave style" walls, even if they needed to be small enough not to allow horses to bite each other through them (i.e. 4" high by 18" wide). What I observed at the farm were horses enduring the higher than normal summertime heat whilst standing in their stables without sufficient ventilation or peripheral views and of course they were exhibiting extreme discomfort and acting in very agitated, potentially dangerous and habit forming manner. This is cruel treatment and most folks would realize how detrimental it is keeping a horse inside what was effectively a sauna, even if they do not (or cannot) recognize the claustrophobic problems generated.

Staying with the subject windows, I am currently dealing with a number of trailer loading issues/problems and in "most" cases I have recommended more windows be installed in the trailers so that their horses can "see" things pass by out of sight more normally. Most trailers have insufficient windows and that leaves the horse in a situation where they see something coming from the front quarter only to then see it suddenly "disappear" from view and as they have such good lateral field of vision that is most disconcerting to the majority of horses. I have recommended this correction by made to many trailers and the result is always positive. Back in Texas we seldom have trailer loading problems as our trailers are mostly open design (as can be seen on my site) and not built as "caves". Also our trailers do not use ramps to load as horses are just fine climbing up. Of course horse boxes are too high and ramps are then needed. I spend a great deal of time convincing horses the empty space under ramps is not dangerous to them. I have also found it best not to tie horses in transit (when possible) as they need to be able to balance and if they actually fall they need to be able to move their weight to get up and a tie down keeps them from being able to maneuver their head and neck counter weight – most often we travel this way with race horses who are less well trained and more hyper / claustrophobic.

I want to point out a very affordable, easily solution for some common paddock problems/omissions that I see regularly around the country. The paddocks, which often have insufficient trees for natural cover in heat or other extreme weather conditions, also do not have the typical modern day three sided, moveable, free standing shelters. These are not expensive and require no building permission to set in the paddocks. Horses also enjoy very much having simple flat top mounds of dirt (eventually grass covered) about 5 feet high, 15 to 30 feet long, 5 to 10 feet wide and tapered on all four sides at about a 45° angle. They climb up to look around at their surrounding as they would in the wild and it is an easy, cheap, removable way to provide something of value for the horses.

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Regarding handling of horses, I recently had to bite my lip when I overheard an owner telling a client of mine that they needed to use a chifney to “teach their horse a lesson” on how stable manners and how to simply stand still. I, of course, admonished my client not to do anything of that sort to their horse and proceeded to demonstrate how to solve such problems in a much more humane and effective manner of mutual understanding between horse and owner via the use of firm, albeit benevolent actions, with a simple 6mm rope halter and 22’ - 12mm English braid on braid rope. This is understandable to most horses as their Mothers used the same firm and benevolent manner / method when they were foals. These 400 year old design style halters have never been improved (with exception to the Spanish Fiador knot under the chin for adjustments) upon and we owe the Mongols for that invention.

I work with Chadwell Stud Farm helping them and their staff to stop the use of chifney’s on their horses and it has made a huge difference and improvement in safe handling and to the personalities of their stallions and brood mares. I will state that this advice is primarily meant for the people who are willing to take the time to learn how to correctly deal with their horses in a firm and benevolent manner.

Continuing with spring problems which have carried over into the summer: try not to cut the pasture grass to low or allow horses to graze down to very short grass. This has been managed well by numerous clients via the use of the popular electric fencing for sectioning their paddocks into three parts in order to allow growth, behind each section, as you move the horse around. If you move the lead & following fences over each day by one yard, in a short period you will have completed the sectioning and can leave it in place to move the horse from section to section as they eat the grass down. It is important to remember that it has been discovered / proved that the longer the grass the lower the sugar content. When it is just sprouting, or eaten down very low, it is heavy with sugar in its attempt to quickly grow out to a length where it has sufficient surface to collect sunlight. This is especially prevalent with early morning grass.

Of course, some horses tend to behave in a self destructive manner by eating too much and too quickly once they learn that we feed them abnormally and generate their understanding of feel the fasting that follows between meals This feeling comes as a result of us not feeding in the manner that they are built for, which is constant ad-lib grazing. This rapid eating causes a surge of carbohydrates, which in turn causes a surge in insulin (to as much as 300% of normal) and the insulin is not able to be properly metabolized by their liver so it remains much too high and too long in their blood stream, inducing resistance by their cells and can result in laminitis. A simple aid in this is the commonly known grazing muzzle.

Another wide ranging horse handling problem with grass eating (when in our company) is another problem which can be solved by teaching a horse to realize they are not being completely prohibited from eating grass when in our “leadership” company but being allowed to get a munch when we deem it alright. Many people generate a “plunging onto the grass” problem with their horses by “completely forbidding” them from being able to gain the grass as we walk or ride along and by not taking the time required for teaching horses to eat grass when directed by their “Leader” owner and to stop grazing when say so - **without argument**. This error is a short-sighted mistake. When riding out (hacking out) a rider can be hard put to get their horse out of the grass if it gets the chance to stop and gorge itself as it believes it will never get the chance otherwise.

A closing note about bits:

Chrome bits have nickel in the metal mix, which generates electrolysis much as tin foil generates electrolysis when we humans touch our teeth to such metals and most people have accidentally done this in their lives and know how bad that feels. Therefore, please consider your horses point of view and well being by using **(specifically for the section of the bit that touches their teeth)** sweet iron, copper or brass (or even plastic now that happy-mouth and other manufactures use plastic that does no splinter as it did in the past). Chrome or stainless steel for other sections of the bit does not cause such problems.

I hope this has been helpful and useful for ya'll.

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