

Riding & Training Perspectives

Training horses is almost always very rewarding. Training riders/owners is sometimes different. Ever so often, happily in growing numbers, I meet another person and/or client that lifts my outlook. Over my 23 years here in Europe and England, I have witnessed a positive evolution in the equine world, somewhat parallel to the one back home in Texas and throughout the USA. I have seen a growing desire by folks over here to make things better for their horses and making more effort in learning how we as humans affect our horses. Riders are becoming ever more open minded. The results are changing a lot of heretofore closed minds. There remains a large number of horse owners that are still stuck in unbending methods with closed minds. However and thankfully, the improving attitude over the last few years bodes well for the horses over here.

I am very lucky to regularly work with so many different and interesting sizes / breeds of horses with so many different ailments and psychological problems.

In my job of improving communication between horses and riders plus improving foundations, the methods I teach have benefited many varied riding disciplines : dressage (at novice & advanced levels), jumping, hunting, endurance / cross country, racing, general hacking out and western disciplines.

TRAINING NOTE :

When you run into the situation where a horse has learned to effectively “shut down”, you need to patiently look for and locate the cue that will cause them to interrupt their thoughts that are being used for their shut down before you can accomplish training objectives. The cue(s) must not be harsh or heavy as that will most likely serve to cause them to revert even further into the shell they build. The importance of using the horses’ own pressure / release communication - only after you have the attention of your horse – is paramount. Of course, then you have the choice of doing it the more natural and non-confrontive ways.

HEALTH NOTES:

There has been a lot of discussion lately concerning feeding problems. For one pointer, remember to exercise caution from over-feeding with Alfalfa.

It should be noted that Alfalfa has a variation in content, due to different harvesting times. Alfalfa is high in protein, is a source of calcium and has high amounts of magnesium. These are all helpful in many ways, so long as not overdone. Horses bodies and glands do not do well when overloaded with minerals.

If overfed with Alfalfa it can affect the parathyroid gland. This gland controls the amount of calcium in the blood and it shuts down if an excessive amount of calcium is present. Then when the horse exercises, it can get into trouble if there is a sudden drop in calcium and the gland isn’t working “failing to detect the need for more calcium”. This can cause muscle cramping, soreness and syndrome called “thumps”. Thumps occur when nerves fire erratically and can show up as “hiccups” (or what appears to be hiccups). Kidney stones are another problem caused by excess calcium input. The magnesium content is high it contributes to the forming of “enteroliths” which can cause colic as they can grow to large sizes.

WINTER WEATHER :

Winter is fast approaching and cold / wet weather is leading the approach. Horses are already being refused turn out at many stables.

I am seeing many “Stress build up” / baggage) problems being generated by leaving horses in their stables too long and more so from stables that are built much like caves, in the horse’s mind. It is a rare horse that can handle staying inside too much. Horses generally become time bombs for riding and handling.

Stable manners also become eroded during confinement times as well.

They become difficult to bring in from the paddocks and again from the stable back out in the morning. There are a number of leadership (pecking order) exercises you can (and should) accomplish often and it takes only a minute or two plus can be done in limited space, such as in front of the stable. These, pecking order, exercises are important to do with your horse all year long. Horses themselves do it each and every day in double checking the hierarchy /pecking order from day to day.

There are number of solutions in stable construction that greatly help them. Easiest of which are to cut windows (rectangles about 5 to 6 inches high and 2 or 3 feet wide) between stables (and in rear of stable) and in as many directions as possible. Bars, screens or Plexiglas can be used to prevent any damage between horses or shut out unwanted weather.

Equally important are exercise programs which help them to more naturally release some of their built up, stored stress – I call it “baggage”.

HEIRARCHY (PECKING ORDER) :

As our job (as leader of our two entity herd) is protecting the horse when predators attack, the fact that a horse cannot see us when we are mounted becomes very important. If we are docile in the saddle they may (often do) forget who or what is on their backs. So, please....remind them often.

There are two sides to every horse’s view of the pecking order between them and us. One is of the individual being higher or lower in regard to housing, water, feed, etc. (ground work). Then, in the saddle, another view is taken where the horse actually needs us to be the leader / protector where they can rely on us to protect them if predators approach or attack.

REMINDERS :

An apt old saying is that if you are a predator and make a mistake you might miss breakfast, however if you are a prey animal a mistake could cause you to become breakfast. We need to realize that the millions of years of engineering done on our horses’ DNA, is not likely to change in our lifetimes. We must always be ready and able to deal with the true nature of our horses, using non-confrontational means and without exacerbating our horse’s worries and phobias.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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