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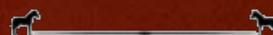
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Horse's love it when their owner's understand them.

Horsemanship is about the horse teaching you about yourself.

Here are some links to articles that will help you understand horses better and address some issues you may be having with horses. Some I have written and others are ones that I find helpful and informative. Enjoy and remember- **knowledge about the horse is the best gift you can give to your horse.**

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*Photos Rick and Horses

Clinics on Request

*Contact Rick



**Think Like A Horse
By: Rick Gore**

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Training Horses & Making Cookies

Guys may not get this since most have never made cookies, but women who have made cookies will get it. Therefore, my Buddy's wife makes some great chocolate chip cookies. Any time we have dinner she whips up a batch and cooks them up for desert. I have watched her make these cookies many times. Therefore, I asked her what is her secret for making such good cookies. Her answer was surprisingly simple. "The directions are on the back of the bag of the chocolate chips". The answer was so simple, I felt like a dummy for asking. I said to myself, I am not an idiot, if the directions are on the bag and I have watched her do this many times, I can go get my own bag of chips and make my own cookies.

So off I go, I get my chocolate chips, flour, oil, nuts and sugar. I cannot wait to eat some of those good cookies. I read the measurements for the ingredients on the back of my bag, measure them out and put them all in a bowl, stir them up, bake and they come out like crap. I was confused and frustrated. I put all the right ingredients in the right measurements and my cookies turned out like runny play doh and they did not taste much better. Now I bet right now, every one who has never made cookies is thinking, wonder what went wrong. I bet every person that knows how to make cookies knows exactly what went wrong. Hands on experience make the difference!

Well being a guy, I called the expert (my trainer) cookie maker, explain that my cookies turned out like runny cow patties and asked what the hell happen? She asked a simple question, did you follow the directions? I said yes, I am not an idiot, I told her I put in exactly what the bag said to put in, mixed it up and baked them. She started laughing hysterically. Remember, I am still lost and confused about what is so funny about me wasting all morning measuring and stirring and all I get is rotten runny cookie dough that tastes horrible. She stops laughing long enough to ask me if I added each ingredient in the right order, like the directions said. I thought she was crazy. I'm thinking what difference does it make what order the stuff got mixed, all the ingredients were measured right and got mixed together anyway and then gets cooked, so why would it matter what order. Well, much to my surprise (take note guys), it makes a big difference. Not sure why, but it does, trust me. Not only does it matter what order, there also some rule about mixing verses stirring that I am still confused about. So to make a long story short, after several attempts and many dollars wasted, I now buy the pre-mixed cookie dough for my cookies. I cheat. I take the easy way instead of investing a lot of time and effort to do it myself. This is exactly what too many people do when it comes to their horse.

So how does this relate to horse training? I admit I don't know much about mixing cookie dough, but I do know horses. What I experienced with cookie dough is what a lot of people experience with horses. If training a horse is compared to making a good cookie, then if you watch someone else do something, and if you do it the same way (the way you think you saw it done), you should get the same results, right? Wrong. Just like I watched cookies being made and somehow missed a lot of little important steps and the results were not the same. If you just watch somebody do something with a horse, or you read a book (directions), or you try to train the horse from scratch, your end product will not be what you expect and will be much different than an experienced horseman would get. The difference is hands on experience.

With cookie dough, the ingredients are the same, the way you mix or stir is the same and the directions are pretty clear (if you read them carefully). With horses not much of anything is the same. The environment changes, the weather changes, the horse changes with past experiences, fears, confidence and emotions. You change with how you are feeling, your confidence, your experiences, your confusion and your fear. Yet so often, I get questions from people wanting me to give them a fix to some horse issue that they see as a simple problem. I hear it all the time, my horse is perfect, but it walks off when I mount. On the other hand, my horse is great, except it bucks when I canter. Alternatively, my horse does everything great, only it rears and kicks when I lunge it. Horses are not cookies. There is not a clear list of directions with easily measured steps and ingredients that if followed, will always get the same results. With horses, if you take shortcuts, think you can do something since you saw

someone else do it, or skip critical steps; you can end up with much worse results. A mistake in cookie dough means you throw out the dough and start over. A mistake with a horse can mean you are dead, seriously injured or hurt. However, I see many people doing with horses exactly what I did with cookie dough.

When making cookies you do not have to worry about the blender spooking or what kind of day the eggs are having. With a horse, the variables are endless such as fear, flight, reactions, environment, equipment, you being one-fifth the size of a horse, you trying to control a horse that is 30 or 40 times stronger than you, your training, your fear, your past experiences, the horse's training, the wind, tractors, blowing plastic bags, cars, bikes, motorcycles, kids, other horses, all the volunteered advice you can take and many other things. All which will affect the outcome.

With all this in mind, I see people everyday trying to control or train a horse without directions or knowledge of how bad things can turn out. There are no clear definable and exact steps to training a horse. No perfect ingredients to get the same results. With horses, a mistake can be extremely costly to you, others and the horse. Experiences with horses can be talked about, they can be put in a book, they can be demonstrated by someone who knows, but experience cannot be taught and experience is the best teacher. Too often people want to learn how to train a horse, fix a problem, become a trainer or know everything about a horse from watching, reading and trying. It just does not work that way and the person and the horse ends up paying.

For those who have kids, can you imagine asking a kid trainer how to raise your child so it will turn out good? You can raise five children and they all will turn out different. No one knows it all when it comes to raising kids and no one knows it all when it comes to training horses. Acknowledging that a horse is a strong, reactionary, fear driven, survival motivated, prey animal that has emotions, incredible strength and power and that no two are the same, is the first step to having a better understanding of the horse. With understanding comes confidence, power and the ability to recognize that you do not know it all and that a lot of horse training and handling depends on many factors not necessarily in your control.

NOTE: The final product of raising a child is the parent. The final product of training a horse is you.

Horse ownership is not a part-time gig. It is a serious commitment that requires time, patience, understanding, experience, knowledge and passion. Although horses love cookies, they are a lot different than cookies and require a lot more than simple directions and ingredients.

With that said, is there an easy fast way to learn about horses? No, and many try and fail, many horses get hurt, many trainers make lots of money on videos, books, tricks, special ropes, special equipment and special games to play with your horse. Can some of this help? Yes. Does having a good trainer train your horse and make you better? No. It may make you think you are better, it may make your horse better for the trainer, it may help you and your horse win a ribbon or money, but it will not make you a better horseman or horsewoman.

In my opinion, two things make you successful and better with horses. The first is understanding and knowledge of the horse. The ability to "think like a horse". Without this, you will continue to try to fix problems and never realize that each problem is nothing but a symptom of your lack of understanding of the horse. The second thing is time. Time will give you experience, time with horses will teach you to listen, observe and learn from the horse. Time will teach you the language of the horse. It will teach to trust and read the horse. It will teach you to observe and notice the slightest change in the horse and yourself. It will teach you that the horse is only a reflection of what you do and how you do it. Only then will you see the horse as the amazing creature it is.

Therefore, if you are making cookies, follow the directions exactly. If you are working with horses, realize there is no secret recipe, shortcuts or easy fast experiences. Understanding and time will get you the best results and your horse will thank you for your efforts. In addition, in the end the more you know, will make you realize how much you do not know and then you will realize the journey of horsemanship is never ending.

Happy trails,

Rick

Ride Time

Riding is the art of keeping a horse between you and the ground. This is done with some luck, a good seat, balance, good equipment and of course a good Horse (Is there any other kind?). I see riders fall off horses all the time and then hear later that the horse threw the person off. I guess saying you got thrown and blaming the horse is easier than saying, I lost my balance, I was not paying attention, I got too relaxed or just, it was my fault and I fell off. I used to hear expressions about, "Riding between the reins" and "Keeping the horse between your legs", I used to think this was just some clever way that old good riders talked about riding. It was not, it was like many things with horses, that you do not really understand it until you experience it.

I am by no means a perfect rider and there are many out there can make me look like a rookie. However, I can stay in a saddle, I can communicate to a horse, it is said I have a good seat and I have many hours of time in the saddle. Time in the saddle is key, in my opinion, to making you a good rider. If you are a weekend warrior, ride an hour every few days or just on the weekends, then it will take many many years for you to really learn to ride. Owning horses and riding horses is a lifestyle and not a hobby. Unless you fully engulf yourself into the equine, you will probably not ever get really good at horses or riding. You may ask, surely not everyone that wins awards and medals spend all their time with a horse or in a saddle. I would say most of them probably do, especially in their area of competition. If you want to circles good, you have to do a lot of circles. Can someone learn to ride and become good by just taking lessons? People can learn how the horse was trained, what cues were used to train it and then be taught to give those cues. In this case, the horse is carrying the rider. This person will not be able to fix issues, will not be able to refine the horse's movement, will not be helping the horse and may never truly understand what it takes from the horse to give them what they are getting.

Ride Time is the key. Some say that only perfect practice is beneficial. I say all practice and contact with horses helps you in some way. Even if you ride badly, spending time in the saddle helps. If you just sit in a saddle, it helps. Just getting on and off the saddle, helps you get better in the saddle. Any time you spend time in the saddle, you train your balance, you use muscles that increase your balance, you improve your balance, you gain confidence, you feel more comfortable in the saddle and all of this transforms into making you a better rider. Every time you fall off a horse, you get better! Yep, just like when you learn to ski, you fall a lot and each time you fall, you learn how not to repeat the thing that made you fall last time. Soon you are not falling as much. No difference in riding horses. Experience makes you better; the only way to get experience is to "DO IT". You can get some help from a trainer, you can get lots of help from others that don't know much and you can watch videos until your DVD wears out, but when it comes down to it, "Ride Time" is the best teacher. But Rick, I am busy, I have a life, I have kids, I have responsibilities, I just don't have the time, bla, bla, bla, either you want it or you don't. It is very frustrating to see people always looking for short cuts with horses, there are not any and every time a person tries, "the horse pays for it". Spend time with your horse and spend time in the saddle, there is no better way to learn how to ride.

With that said, I will try and give some tips that may help you understand riding a little bit better, but without doing this, practicing this and spending time in the saddle experiencing this, what I say is nothing more than some talk from me. When riding your horse, your goal is to be neutral. Neutral is "stay out of the way of the horse". Ride and concentrate on staying out of the way, stay neutral in balance, do not lean, do not lean forward, do not lean back and do not lean to the sides. But Rick, I thought you were supposed to lean back when you stop. That is correct, when you want to send a cue to stop you lean back and or shift your weight back. Stopping is not riding. When riding, you stay neutral. If you cannot sit on a horse bareback, you do not have balance. If you need a mounting block to mount a horse you probably do not have good balance or strength. I do know some old cowboys that have gotten "long in the tooth" and their body is just not able to jump onto a saddle to mount, so they use a block. They still have balance from years of experience of riding, also know as "muscle memory." The people I am referring to is the people that are overweight, unfit, lack coordination, do not exercise and have little or no leg muscles and then think they can ride. Riding takes balance and the ability to keep your balance while the thing (the horse) is moving

under you. By being able to stay neutral in the saddle, you stay out of the horse's way. You allow the horse to carry you with the least amount of effort. You make the horse's job easier and you learn how he moves when you are not in the way. If you do not do this, you are so busy keeping your balance that you confuse the horse, make the horse work harder and make the horse uncomfortable when you are on him. So do not compensate for the horse, do not try to help the horse and do not interfere with the horse. Work on yourself and your horse will get better. If you do not learn how to stay out of the way of the horse, you will create future problems. Learn to be neutral, learn to stay out of the horse's way and learn to be balanced in the saddle. You learn this by doing it! Ride time!

The more you ride and the more horses you ride, the more you will be able to tell the difference between a horse that can carry himself well and it will help you carry yourself better. At the beginning, you will not know the difference. To be well carried by horse is a good feeling. To help a horse you must make yourself a good load and an easy load to carry. You cannot do this if you are pulling and using the reins for balance, if you are using the stirrups for balance, if you are hanging onto the saddle for balance. As you get better, you will learn to use all things a little and nothing alone! This is really important. The reins alone do not stop a horse, the bit does not stop a horse, your seat position does not stop a horse, your legs do not stop a horse, your voice commands do stop a horse, a fence does not stop a horse, and your whip does not stop a horse. Communication to the horse and the horse wanting to comply is what stops a horse. Some of these together may work, but in my experience if a horse wants to run more than he wants to stop, he will run. Not because he is mean, not because he is stubborn, not because he is a bad horse, he is just simply a horse and has not been taught to stop. Therefore, like balance, not one thing gives it to you. You should use the stirrups lightly, the saddle lightly, your leg muscles, you center of balance, you seat, your head, your shoulders, your back, your position of your arms (not your arms pulling on the reins), your knees acting like shock absorbers, your core strength, all of this will help give you better balance and help keep you neutral. Being neutral is NOT sitting like a lump on a log. Using all of these takes time to learn so it becomes natural, until it becomes unconscious, over time you will not have to think about it, it will just happen. However, to get you to that point, you need to "Do it", you need to spend time in the saddle to learn it and practice it. You need "Ride time."

Anyone can stand around and yell "Keep your heels down", "Sit up straight", "Don't look down", "Relax your back", "Use your legs", "Look where you are going", "Use your seat", "Don't lean", "Keep your hands still", "Stop pulling on the reins", "Relax", "Don't bounce in the saddle", "Move with your horse", "Find your rhythm", "Keep your hands soft", "Get off the bit", "Get on the bit", "Stop picking at your horse", "Feel your horse's beat" and many other tips. If you are trying to think about this, you are not riding. Most will tell you that you should have a straight line from your ear, shoulder, hip and ankles. If you have to think about this, it is hard to make it happen, it will happen when you are not thinking about it, if you ride enough to feel it, to learn it, to feel how it does not feel right when you do not do it. All of these words may help, but you have to experience it to recognize the significance of it. You need to learn this by doing it. Ride time! The horse is best teacher of the horse.

I mentioned shock absorbers earlier. This is muscles working and it takes training and strength. Your shoulders cannot help you stay in the saddle, per say. Your seat is made soft and secure by being relaxed and not tense. Your feet and ankles, your knees, and your legs and hips all working together can help reduce movement, control movement and absorb shock. By using your ankles, knees and hips, you control your bounce up and down, forward and back. You use these to stop some movement and then to create other movement (impulsion). By using these correctly you help the horse carry you and make yourself appear lighter and easier to carry and that helps you give good signals/cues to the horse. You use these to stop your shoulders and arms from bouncing up and down and all around. Just like a horse running on the wrong lead, it is hard on the horse, you bouncing in the saddle because you don't know how to use your body and balance is hard on you and hard on the horse. By not using your shock absorbers correctly, you harden the jars and blows to the horse's back and your back. The horse pays for his mistakes, pays for your mistakes, and then pays again when he is blamed for both.

I hear lots of people tell people to use their legs. If you do not have balance, if you do not know how to control your reins softly, if you do not have much "ride time", then trying to use your legs is just one more thing to confuse you and the horse. Legs help communicate with the horse, but it has to be done without throwing you off balance, without you getting confused

and having to think about it. When you try to do too much, you make the situation worse and you confuse the horse. I cannot help a person round pen a horse if they do not know how to lead a horse. I cannot help a person use their legs if they do not have balance and rein control. I cannot teach rein control if the person who has not got balance down. Legs are additional cues to the horse, but if your horse is confused with your lack of balance and your lack of consistency of rein usage, confusing him more with legs will only make it worse.

I say this a lot, 80% of all horse owners are women, and 75% of new horse owners get OUT of horses in the first year. New horse owners want to get a "baby" (a young untrained horse), want to teach it themselves, want to learn with the horse, all BAD! Green riders with green horses = hurt riders and people getting out of horses. It is a bad combo and no matter how much you tell someone this, they all know they are different and they can do it and they can make it work, it won't happen to them, and they will be careful, they know the risk..... "And they all get hurt and get out of horses and the horse gets blamed". The statistics are out there, they grow every year and if you go to any clinic, you will see mostly bright-eyed women with their dream of owning and training their own horse coming true. Then go to any barn and you will women being dragged, thrown, with slings on, wearing helmets to keep them safe and riding with fear and insecurity. They will ride in enclosed areas where it is safe and making their horse arena sour, barn sour, or other names they want to pin on a horse. This is done by men too, it is just now the horse world is predominately women. Had I been writing this 25 years ago about, I would be talking about men beating and abusing horses to get them to listen and blaming the horse and when they got hurt I would be saying good for the horse. When someone gets hurt trying, it is sad and unfortunate, but when someone gets hurt being brutal to a horse, I say, good for the horse.

I love horses, but they are very "DANGEROUS" in the wrong hands. Do not underestimate the gravity of this statement. A horse will kill themselves if they are scared and trapped or think they can get away. It is their nature. So people want to wear a plastic helmet and feel safe. A helmet will not stop your neck or back from getting broke. It will not stop you from breaking a hip or leg. It will not help keep you in the saddle or stop your from being dragged with a foot in the stirrup when you fall off. A helmet gives a false sense of security and causes people to do things they would not normally do without a helmet, because they FEEL safe. This is bad when it comes to horses. A horse does not care if your head is protected or if you ride him in a Styrofoam body suit. If he gets nervous, scared or feels you are not in control and you are putting his safety in jeopardy, he will take charge and react. Moreover, when he does it, it will be with extreme force and strength and you and your safety will be of no consideration to him. But Rick, I have heard lots of stories where a horse has saved a person and protected a fallen rider. It is the rare exception and people want to see things in their own way and it may be different from what actually happened. I can bring a horse a carrot and hay every day and the horse will be happy to see me and allow me to feed him, but let me try and get this horse to move or put this horse in a fear situation and I assure you, the last thing in this horse's mind is that I have given him carrots and feed. As the horse threw his rider into a tree or barbed wire fence, the rider thinks, "why would you do this, I treat you so good", the horse thinks "I can run faster and save myself now with less weight".

So why do I talk about dangerous horses when I am talking about riding. They are so connected it is not responsible to talk about one without the other. Riding a horse is dangerous, this is why it is probably so fulfilling and gives such a joy and a sense of wholeness. Joining with a horse is something special. It is risky and does not come cheap or without time and sacrifice. The problem is being human; we want things now, fast and without sacrifice. Well, I think you can either sacrifice now and learn to ride and understand the horse, or you can sacrifice later and get hurt, maimed or killed by taking short cuts. If you take the time it takes, it takes less time. The slow way is the fast way with horses. Ride time is the best teacher for learning to ride and the horse is best teacher of the horse.

If I said it once, I say it a thousand times, ride your horse, spend time with your horse and learn about the horse. Knowledge about the horse is the best gift you can give to your horse, second only to time. If you spend enough time, knowledge will come and the horse will teach you.

Happy trails,

Rick Gore

Picking a Horse Trainer - Tricks of the Trade

I have wanted to do an article on this for some time now. It is too bad, but it seems there are so many shysters, unethical horse trainers and just plain old rip off specialist out there in the horse world. I see many more horse traders that pass themselves off as trainers, than I see good honest horse people that truly have the horse's best interest in mind. Since the beginning of man, it seems people have always found ways to use the horse to make money. Not much as changed over the years.

I worked with a horse the other day that was sent off to a trainer for seven months of "training". Let me say that again, seven months with a so called professional trainer. After seven months of training, this horse would not let you catch it, could not be lead, could not lunge, could not be tied and was fearful of every thing. This is just a shame for the horse and owner. The owner paid good money for help and thought she was getting her horse trained for seven months. This so-called trainer was leading the horse around by tying it to a quad and dragging it, this was her idea of teaching the horse to lead. Did I mention that this horse did not have his feet trimmed for the seven months it was at training? Why? - they could not get the horse to hold up his feet for the Farrier. If I said it once, I have said it a hundred times, just because someone calls himself or herself a trainer, it does not make it so. When talking to the owner of this horse, I was told that when she wanted to go watch her horse and visit, the "trainer" told her she had to call first before coming out. This is a big red flag. I will list a few red flags you should watch for when picking a trainer.

Red Flags to watch for from "Trainers":

- If you are told to call before you come to visit
- "I train at varied hours, so I can't give you a specific time I work with your horse"
- "I always wear spurs on my boots, but I don't use them"
- "I don't like or buy into that "natural horsemanship" crap"
- "I don't want you and anyone else working with the horse while I am training it"
- "I need to have time alone with your horse"
- "I need a minimum of 60 or 90 days to fix this horse"
- The trainer never ask what you plan to use the horse for
- The trainer tells you what he is going to do and will not modify for your needs
- The trainer can't handle your horse any better than you can, on the first day
- The trainer has over seven or eight horses in training (no time to work that many horse daily)

Your trainer should tell you, and if not you need to ask, what will my horse be able to do when you are done. If you get some mumbo jumbo about it depends on the horse, some horses learn faster, I do not like to rush the horse or my favorite, they get offended and tell you that you will get your 30 days of training then we will where the horse is after that. If this trainer is reputable, honest and trust worthy, they will tell you a list of things you can expect and if it takes longer then they will not charge you for the additional time. Your trainer should tell you your horse would be able to do one, two and three when you get it back. Be aware of the trainers that just give lessons and you never see them on a horse. This is big Red Flag. This is more popular in the English area, but far too often, I see people charging good money for lessons that last years and there is little improvement. Many use trainers as high priced baby sitters. Parents just pay to have someone supervise their child on a horse and call it a lesson. If your trainers cannot demonstrate how to ride or how to do get the horse to do something, then they are not much a trainer. It does not take much skill to just sit back and

yell "keep your heels down", "sit up straight", "don't look down", all of this sounds like riding lessons but is nothing more than lots of people repeating what others have said over the years. A good responsible trainer should be able to get on any horse and make that horse look better than you. There are some common excuses out there, that many trainers like to use, like I cannot ride anymore due to an injury, or I am too old to get on this horse and show you, and many others. I know one trainer that has been teaching at a local barn for the past 10 years, I have never seen her on a horse in all that time, yet she has no shortage of parents that pay her to teach their kids to ride. Many people think, I do not know anything about horses so I will pay someone. That is a big mistake. It would be like getting medical advice from a butcher since he wears a white coat like a doctor.

Things you need to make sure and tell your trainer before you hire or pay them.

- I need to know when you work with my horse so I can watch, be there and ask questions
 - I need to have full access to my horse while in training
 - I don't want spurs worn or used when I horse is in training
- I don't want any bits other than a snaffle (or bit that you intent to ride) used on my horse
 - I don't want a stud chain used on my horse
 - I don't want my horse dragged or led by any vehicles
- I want my horse to be able to do 1, 2 and 3 when I get it back
- I would like weekly or bi-weekly demonstrations on what my horse has learned or improved in

A good litmus test when picking a trainer is does this trainer own horses? Can you ride his/her horses? If these answers are no, I would not think this person is much of a trainer for you. You would not take your car to an unlicensed person, who works in an alley, that does not own any cars and then he tells you he only takes cash and you cannot watch him work on your car. I would call this a "clue". If your trainer cannot immediately handle your horse better than you can, then I would be suspicious. A good horse person can make a horse look worse and more difficult to try to convince that you need to hire them, so be aware. I have a video on this on Youtube called "horse trainer tricks".

You need to get weekly updates from you trainer. Like a report card, what your horse has learned, what issues your horse has, what are the strengths and weaknesses of your horse and any injuries or problems? Just because you give your horse to a trainer, you are still responsible for its care. You should checking if the horse has clear fresh water, what it is being fed, is the feet being trimmed, etc.

If your horse is sent away to another location, you need to ensure shots and hoof care are kept up to date and your schedule is followed. Have goals defined on what you want from your horse. I want to lead him, ride him on trails, have my inexperienced child ride him and be able to pick up his feet. If you want these things and your trainer trains your horse to slide stop and spin in an arena but will not work for you. If I want to trail ride my horse, I do not want a trainer that only works my horse in a round pen or in an enclosed arena. If I want to ride dressage, I do not want some cow cutting horse trainer training my horse on cows. A good trainer should be asking these questions so they know what and how to train your horse.

You have to be actively involved with your trainer and training. You have to know how your horse is being taught, what aids are being used, what leg pressure is being used, how are the reins being used and just general handling of your horse. You need to be able to see how your horse handles pressure, how it deals with fear and too much pressure. By being involved you can ask questions and work on YOUR horsemanship and horse knowledge, so you will be able to continue teaching and growing with your horse. There is no such thing as a trained horse. I can screw up a horse is a few days that was trained.

If a trainer is good and honest, he or she will have no problem with any of these requests. They should be encouraging you to be involved and if they are really interested in helping the horse, they will end your horse's training with a few days or week of training you and your horse together. That way you can get immediate feedback on what you are doing wrong or why your horse is doing what it does with you. A trained horse in the hands of an untrained rider is like giving a car to teenager with no license and no driving experience. The car will be fine and knows what to do, but the danger is with the driver. Not a lot of difference with horses. Any good trainer will know this and will not try to sell you on how good a trainer he is or on how good he can make your horse look when he rides it. Any good rider can make a horse look good or better than an inexperienced rider. That is a cheap trainers trick. Much like me making a horse rear or pull to make you think your horse is hard to handle and needs a professional.

A good little trick that some trainers like to do is tell you how bad your horse is and how it may take longer since your horse is so bad. BS is what this is. Any real trainer knows that a horse can be fixed as easy as it can be messed up, with few exceptions. Any person who knows horses will know how to make your horse look worse than it is, cause it to pull, rear, or act out and then convince you that this horse is really difficult. This is nothing more than a set up for extending the horse's training and dragging out the training so you feel you have to keep the horse in training longer. Taking advantage of an inexperience horse person is not hard. It is really very easy for any horse person to do. It is wrong, unethical and bad for the horse. By taking advantage of inexperienced owners, these trainers set the owner up to get hurt and set the horse up to get blamed. Inexperienced horse owners be warned!

I hear a lot of people who are fearful of their Farriers, Vet and trainers. They are concerned about upsetting them by asking questions, giving instructions or making demands. You pay these people for a service and have a right to request things from them. If anyone of them wants to get upset about your request, then they should be able to explain why they cannot do something and why they think it is a bad idea. Do not let people you pay for a service dictate how they treat your horse? With that said, you have to be involved in helping your horse. If you expect your Farrier to teach and train your horse to hold his feet up, that will not work. If you expect your Vet to teach you how to control your horse safely while getting medical attention, that won't work.

So do your homework, pick a trainer with caution and skepticism. Ask lots of questions, stay involved and make some clear goals. If at any time, the hair on the back of your neck stands up, pay attention to this clue. Ask another trainer, do some research on the internet, get a second opinion and confirm things for yourself. Do not take anything as gospel, just because this person calls himself a "Trainer". I know another lady that called six different trainers crying because she could not catch her horse. Finally when the six trainer said they train her horse, she jumped on the offer since the first five told her no. Not a good choice for her or her horse.

Remember the first rule of horse ownership "Never believe anything someone tells you about a horse". Don't forget to make sure what and how your horse is fed, if you leave good hay, there is no way for you to know if that is being fed to your horse, so a sudden weight loss is a clue. If a "trainer" tells you the horse has lost weight due to how much it is being worked, another old trainer trick, what normally is happening is your horse is being fed substandard hay, not being fed or starved so it will not have the energy to fight or resist. I know many trainers that if you bring high quality expensive hay and drop it off, they will keep your hay and feed their cheaper low quality hay. How will you know? Your horse - your responsibility.

Good luck and Happy Trails,

Rick

Jim Wofford: The Times They Are a-Changin'



Scientific studies show there is no place in horse sports for tight nosebands and unstable - galloping positions.

There is not much to like about this photo. You would have a hard time getting the recommended two fingers under the straps. When this poor, unfortunate horse's noseband is finally loosened, you will see grooves cut into his sinus cavities by the overtightened noseband. His open mouth and the tension of the reins tell us he is not in self-carriage. Strapping your horse's mouth shut usually produces the sort of deadened response we see here.

If you are a horseman, chances are you are extremely conservative. I do not mean this in the political sense of liberal and conservative, but in the literal sense that you are disposed to preserve existing conditions. You have very good reasons for this conservatism when it comes to the welfare of your horse. The penalties for change without contemplation can be severe, and your horse pays the penalty with his health and soundness if you are wrong. If wisdom is the anticipation of consequence, then we all labor to be wise when it comes to our horses, - because they trust us so completely with their well-being.

Looking back over my career, I find I have always been resistant to fads and changes in the horse world. Some fads, especially when it comes to apparel, do little harm to our horses, although bling says something about the rider's need for attention rather than the attention she should pay to her horse. Other fads are more abusive (rollkur comes to mind) and some, like the now outmoded use of a true interval system of conditioning (short bursts of maximum exertion), injure horses with sickening regularity. Unlike humans, horses do not self-monitor their own soundness. If you ask a good horse to gallop until he is exhausted, he will cheerfully injure himself for you. Modern eventers may speak of using an interval system to condition their horses, but what they really mean is they use an intermittent system of exercise and conditioning.

Although conservatism has its benefits, we must always be open to improvement in the care and training of our horses, especially when that change is supported by scientific research. I am speaking of two topics I have discussed previously: the use and abuse of tight nosebands in dressage and the unsafe and unsteady galloping position that has crept into our teaching.

One Noseband for All?

Nosebands are one of my many irritants when coaching. For example, flash nosebands are ubiquitous in the eventing world. Almost every horse I see is wearing one. Flash nosebands are inherently ill fitting—a flash is basically an inefficient figure-eight noseband—so they are invariably overtightened, causing a pronounced indentation in the flesh of the nasal bone and, occasionally, small sores on the lips. In addition, these nosebands can interfere with the horse's normal swallowing mechanism, producing the very resistance they are intended to cure.

I can't decide which irritates me more: overtightened nosebands or the mindless application of equipment, regardless of whether it is suitable for this horse at this stage of training. Not every horse in the eventing world needs or goes well in a flash noseband. Yet when I ask riders whether they have tried other nosebands, or even no noseband, they look at me as if I had just stepped down the ramp of the mother ship. Obviously, it has never occurred to them to try something else. After all, everybody tacks up their horses this way, so it must be correct. Sigh.

In the past, I have spoken out against the use of overly tight nosebands on pragmatic rather than scientific grounds. My reasoning was that both the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) and U.S. Equestrian Federation rules consider it a good sign when a horse softly chews the bit, and judges reward this behavior during the dressage test with favorable marks. A good working definition of classical training is that we do not ask the horse to do anything he does not do in nature. Clearly, strapping a horse's mouth shut is unnatural and will not produce classical results in terms of acceptance of the bit, softness of contact or self-carriage. Naturally, we want the best possible score for our horses, but by cranking the noseband as tight as possible, we actually prevent them from accepting the bit correctly.

Given all this, you can understand that a recent series of articles at www.eurodressage.com got my attention and led me to scientific studies regarding the effect of tight nosebands on equines. The researchers' findings—that tight nosebands are abusive to horses—are not surprising. However, new scientific knowledge means that we now can prove something that was merely alleged in the past.

If our current practices are proven to be abusive, even unintentionally, then we must immediately adopt new practices based on the latest findings. What surprises me is that this is not happening: Riders and trainers are not changing their practices in response to new information. We do things a certain way because we have always done them this way and it is too much trouble to learn new techniques. This attitude is prevalent in the horse world and is a huge barrier to improving the health and training of our horses.

Still Galloping Inefficiently

William Fox-Pitt gallops the same way he does everything else in the saddle—he is technically close to perfect. His stirrup leathers are vertical, which allows his stirrups to support his weight. His ankles and knees are flexed and obviously acting as shock absorbers. The stability of his lower leg, even at speed, is the reason his elbows can follow the oscillation of his horse's head and neck correctly. Although I like to see a rider gallop with a slight arch in the small of his back (a slight arch conforms to the natural shape of the human spine), William is so tall that he can be forgiven the lowering of his shoulders and slight rounding of his lower back. Taller riders tend to do this because it brings the center of gravity closer to their horses. Note that William is supported by the spring of his knees. He is not standing straight-legged, which would drive his weight down into Parklane Hawk's withers with every stride. His reins are adjusted correctly, not bridged against his horse's neck. This allows his arm and shoulder to function as a spring and a pivot. William has discovered that form follows function, which explains why he always looks so stylish in the saddle. His mechanics are so sound that he can concentrate on getting the best from each of his horses.

In the same vein as the continuing abusive use of nosebands, eventers are still being taught an inefficient and unstable galloping position—long after the Royal Veterinary College in London (in conjunction with the British Racing School) determined that the most efficient, scientifically correct galloping position is very different from the one many eventing instructors teach.

This puzzles me on several levels. First, the various associations and organizations involved in the operation and advancement of eventing exhibit a distinct lack of curiosity about the fundamentals and mechanics of our sport. In addition, instructors seem to have scant critical faculty when it comes to the mechanical principles they pass on to their students. They seem content to repeat something they heard along the way.

We need a continued re-examination of our basic principles with an eye toward adjustment and improvement, especially when those changes and alterations are based on scientific research. Sadly, this is not the case. At present, too many eventers are standing straight-legged above their horses, resting their body weight on bridges against their horses' necks and

galloping like lemmings toward the cliff. This lack of both curiosity and a desire to improve is a disservice to our sport. The standing position at the gallop has the potential to damage eventing as much as the crest release did to the hunter/jumper world, which created generations of riders unable to maintain a connection with their horses' mouths. If we do not learn from others' mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them.

While watching the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event last spring, it was clear to me that many riders' problems with the course were caused by woefully incorrect galloping positions. Four-star horses are exuberant by nature, and once we get them completely fit, they take an attitude toward speed and fixed obstacles that is not for everyone. Time after time, riders came into view standing straight up in their stirrups. Because their horses were galloping so aggressively, they usually leaned back on the reins in a vain attempt to slow down and set up for a serious combination.

When a rider stands straight up and pulls on the reins, his horse will usually invert his shape, with his head high and his back low and locked. This shape in the approach to a fence is almost guaranteed to produce trouble, and the Rolex riders who used this technique were very susceptible to error. When you contrast this with the position that cross-country stylists such as Great Britain's William Fox-Pitt and New Zealand's Andrew Nicholson use, the differences are stark. It is interesting how good results always seem to follow sound fundamentals.

Based on scientific findings, then, many of our U.S. riders' fundamentals are flawed in terms of galloping and jumping across country. Obviously, we need some serious study and remedial action. Possibly it is time for the USEF and the U.S. Eventing Association to join some kind of partnership with organizations such as the Chris McCarron North American Racing Academy or the British Racing School. In their field, these two organizations have the same credibility as our dressage and show-jumping gurus, and we should avail ourselves of their expertise.

I understand there are coaches and theoreticians around the country who disagree with me, but to date their opinions are just that—opinions rather than scientific evidence. Until further studies prove that standing in the stirrups is the most efficient way to gallop, I will continue to teach according to current findings.

In closing, it puzzles me how little study and time eventers put into the cross-country part of their sport. Riders cheerfully spend six months in a dressage barn learning to sit the trot. They will leap at the chance to work for show-jumping trainers to improve their timing and ring-craft in that discipline. Yet, when it comes to in-depth study about riding at speed over fixed obstacles, nothing happens.

It would make sense for these riders to become involved with a steeplechase barn. There they could learn to gallop correctly, restrain their horses using leverage rather than sharp bits and gain a sense of pace that will make their speeds around the Rolex cross-country course seem like a walk in the park.

While eventing is a risk sport, we must make every effort to control that risk with expertise. Repeating our mistakes with an expectation of improvement is a good definition of insanity. People outside of our sport have remarked that they think we are crazy to go cross-country. Let's not prove them right. It's time for a change.

This article originally appeared in the September 2012 issue of Practical Horseman magazine.

Release, Timing and Feel - The Big Three

Wow, talk about big topics. I call this "The Big Three". These are sometime mystical terms that are used often and most people never really understand them, never know their importance or never experience them. These things come from "Time". Time handling horses, time working horses, time riding horses, time watching horses, time making mistakes, time seeing others do it right, time seeing others do it wrong, time listening to the horse and time reflecting on all of this. "If you take the time it takes - it takes less time."

Many of my videos on Youtube explain this in more detail:

Sounds like double talk. Sounds like old horse whisperer stuff. Are these things really real or

is it something that old timer's just talk about to intrigue others. Let's talk about each one of these since I think they are all connected and all affect each other. So I will try and discuss them individually.

-- Release: Anyone can pull or yank a horse, but it takes someone who understands how to release, and how to release with timing and feel to really get results. Release is that exact moment where learning takes place in the horse. The second a horse gets release, he connects that release to the right answer. So if a horse is pressured by a person and it rears and as soon as it rears, it scares the person putting on the pressure, so the person backs away in fear of their safety, the horse sees this as release. So the person gives release, but with bad timing. The horse does not know this, it only knows, it got release when it reared, so rearing gets him release, therefore, rearing must be the right answer. This is an example of bad release but since release teaches, the horse always sees release as good.

Good release teaches the right thing. So if a person tries to get a horse to back up and puts pressure to back up and as soon as the horse takes one step back, the person releases, and then the horse learns that backing up is the right answer. If the person stops pressure when the horse turns away, rears, or tries to bite them, then the horse thinks and learns that is the right answer. So knowing release only works if the person knows how and when to release pressure. Almost everything a horse learns is by pressure and release. An example of a horse learning something without pressure and release is more "classical conditioning". You break a carrot in half, the horse hears this, knows what this is and comes over to get the carrot and you give the carrot to the horse. However, this could be seen by the horse as pressure and release if you are not careful. If done wrong, the horse can see him coming over to you as putting pressure on you and then you giving the carrot is release from his pressure on you. Everything with a horse is how they see it. This is a Key Point.... it does not matter what you intended to do, what you do or what you think you did, it only matters how the horse sees it. Too often I see people teaching things they do not know they are teaching and then wonder why the horse does it. I have a couple of videos that explain Classical conditioning on Youtube:

So understanding release is very important so you can know what you are teaching, when you are teaching it and when you did it wrong. And remember, once you understand release, if you do it with bad feel and timing, it means nothing and you will be teaching something you did not intend to teach. Confused yet? We are just getting started.

-- Timing: Sounds like a clock thing; if you can tell time you can have timing? If you can hit a baseball, drive a car or play any sport you should have some sort of timing. So having timing with a horse should not be that difficult. Well, timing could be a horse book in itself. Timing comes from doing wrong, experience (good and bad) and many other lessons from many horses. Pull on a horse at the wrong time and you get a fight, pull too early and you create the horse to pull, pull too late and you get behind the advantage point and you are dragged or get the rope pulled out of your hands. Of course pulling requires release, so if you time it right and do not release right, you blow it.

On the other hand, if you have timing, you can get a horse to do things twice as fast, twice as easy and twice as good. Wow, this sounds pretty important, why are so many people so confused about it? It takes time and practice to learn it, develop it, perfect it and refine it. Every horse requires it to be done differently, maybe just a little, but each horse responds to timing with different feel. So having good timing with bad feel does not work, having good timing with bad release, does not work. All three are required, all three have to be constantly adjusted and all three need to be refined depending on what the horse does and how the horse responds.

-- Feel: This is putting timing and release together with constant adjustments. So, lets look at this like kissing a girl (girls apply this to guys), a kiss is a kiss right? Kiss your wife good morning is different than kissing her goodbye, sometime. Kissing her after not seeing her for a month is different than kissing her after a hard day of work. Kissing her after giving birth to your child is different than kissing her for getting you socks for your birthday. Kissing her after she is in a car wreck is different than kissing her after you broke her favorite silly glass thingy collection special piece. Kissing her after you say "I do" is different than after she says "No you can't". And lastly kissing her after or during that special private time is also very different. Therefore, if someone said how many ways can you kiss, your first response may be a kiss is a kiss, but if you think about it and break it down, very little changes in timing and situation

changes the feel and way you kiss. Of course, I kiss my horse differently than I kiss my girl. :)

So just applying feel to a kiss you can see it has many variables. Now lets apply feel to how you handle a rope, how you put on a head stall, how you catch a horse, how you saddle a horse, how you pick a horse's feet, how you handle a horse in general, how you ride a horse, how you handle the reins, how you move towards a horse (pressure), how you move away from a horse (release), how you look at a horse, how your body is used to influence a horse and understanding a horse can feel and shake a fly off his hip. If you are thinking how can anyone know all this, welcome to the world of horsemanship. No matter how long you do it, you are always learning from each and every horse. You never know it all and the journey is never-ending. There is never one right answer since every situation is different, every horse is different and every experience is different.

Then how can anyone claim to teach this? I have not seen too many that try to teach feel. Tough subject and not easy to learn, but the horse can teach it. This would explain why so many people have so called "problem horses". You may hear things like, soft hands make soft horses. You cannot pull a horse to softness, but if you do not know timing and release, feel will not matter.

I mentioned handling the reins earlier. Feel is so important in this area. Too rough, too loud, too soft, too easy or inconsistent will all result in confusion and frustration to the horse. When a horse is confused for too long it will stop trying to learn and stop searching for the right answer. This is when your training becomes harassment. Then they look at all these conflicting cues as picking or harassment and then they can become upset or they feel (different kind of feel) that there is no right answer and they can't find release so they go into fight mode if they cannot flee. So feel on the reins can be very helpful or can teach bad lessons. Being soft at the right time, firm at the right time and consistent will teach a horse how to be soft. But all this needs to be with timing and release.

Let's see if I can tie these together now. A good example of using all three of these would be catching a horse. How many times do I hear the same old story, "my horse won't let me catch him", "my horse is hard to catch", "my horse just runs away when I try and catch him", and my first answer to this is "STOP trying to catch him". I have a few videos on this topic on my Youtube channel:

In order to catch a horse you need release, timing and feel. You need to know how to release pressure when the horse looks at you or faces you and tries to communicate with you. You need to release this pressure with timing so the horse connects the release with the looking or facing you. You need feel to read the horse on how to put just enough pressure to create movement and just enough release to create draw or stop movement. So when catching a hard to catch horse, a person with understanding of release, timing and feel can catch most any horse. A very common complaint is how do I catch my horse, this tells me, that people that ask this, do not have a clue about these big three. Can I teach you this? Can anyone teach you this? My answer is the best teacher of the big three is the Horse. Listen, watch, and learn from the horse and stop trying to teach, train and improve the horse. Always remembering, "The best teacher of the horse - is the horse."

Happy Trails,

Rick

Understanding Horse Fear

I still see far too many people blaming a horse for their instinctive fear responses. If you think like a horse and see the world as they do, it will help you understand them better and enable you to help them. Imagine if you were put in a cage with lions, bears and tigers roaming free. You know these animals will eat and kill you, but the only place that was safe and could protect you was a steel cage in the middle of all these people eating animals. Would you want to leave this protected cage? If you had to get to this cage, past an open area, can you image the fear you would feel as you ran to the cage trying to beat the many predators around you? Once in this protected cage would you be willing to come out? If someone tied a rope around your neck and pulled you out of this cage past the watching lions, tigers and bears, can even

begin to think of the fear you would be experiencing? Welcome to the world of a horse.

The other night I was out in pasture with my horses. It was about 10 PM, a beautiful night with a little rain falling lightly. I decided to bring a flake of hay out to the back of the pasture and let my guys eat in the open pasture, next to the side of a hill. It was quiet and I was enjoying listening to the horses eat and chew in the calm night. It was very peaceful and relaxing. Then in a second, everything changed. As I stood in between my two horses, rubbing them both on their backs, I saw a shadow appear on the hill. I was looking at the stars and my horses were both relaxed, head down and eating some good mixed grass hay. As I saw this shadow, I could not make out what it was, but I knew I saw movement. I also thought that me and my horses were the only ones in the pasture, so I thought. I became more focused on the area where I saw something. I forgot about my horses soothing chewing noise and I was not relaxed anymore. My heart rate went up and I was straining, or focusing to hear and see what I could not. I was transferring to my "flight or flight" instinct. Blood stopped flowing to my fingers and toes and moved to large muscles in my arms and legs, my heart rate raised, my instincts became more refined, so I could fight or run. Still searching for what I saw, then suddenly I found it. It was a coyote. A very large, not skinny and very healthy well-fed coyote. My first thought was "Holy shit, it's a coyote." As I watched him, he watched us. Hearing coyotes howling in the night is not uncommon and there are several packs in the area. However, they normally avoid humans and big horses, so all this was also running through my mind.

After my initial, "this ain't good" reaction, I started thinking. I thought my horses had not seen this guy yet and when they do, I might be screwed since I am in the middle of them. Self-survival was kicking in. I knew my horses could take this coyote out with one kick, strike or bite, but I did not want to be collateral damage in the middle of their reactions or survival. Therefore, I slowly and calmly stepped back and moved away from their charge or escape path, as to not be trampled in the reaction, I was sure was about to happen. As I moved, I kept my eyes on the coyote and he kept his eyes on me. Did I mention that this coyote was only about 10 yards away during this natural encounter? It was very close and unnatural.

So after I got to a position where I felt safer (not safe), I started wondering why the horses have not spotted this guy yet. Surely if I saw it, my horse's keener sense of smell vision and hearing should have enabled them to see it? I was confused. I checked the wind direction to see if the coyote's scent was being blown towards the horses or away from them. Oddly enough, it appeared as if it was being blown towards them. So now I not thinking completely calm but I am wondering if my horses are idiots, are they too engrossed in the good hay to be paying attention or are they so domesticated that they did not realize the danger I was seeing. So now, about 15 seconds have passed and it seemed a lot longer, yet no reaction from my horses, not even a head raise. I am thoroughly confused now. How can these horses, perfectly designed for survival, not see this clear and present threat, which I saw over a half of a minute ago?

As I watched this strange occurrence develop, the coyote decided to get a better look at us and he came a step or two closer, down the hill and towards us. I am thinking, this coyote must be crazy, he sure is bold, maybe he has friends and something bad is about to happen. Then, to my amazement, my Mustang (Mr. T) calmly and deliberately lifted his head half way, faced the predator, pinned his ears, gave a slight nod and gave that "don't come any closer look". To my surprise, the coyote seemed to understand the message. The coyote stopped immediately in his tracks, turned away and went back up the hill. I was in shock, here I was, second-guessing these marvelous creatures and the entire time, they knew exactly where the coyote was and what he was doing. As my Mustang told the coyote to leave, my Quarter horse lifted his head slightly, looked at the coyote and calmly looked at the Mustang, as if to say "I saw him too" and then they both went back to eating. Simply amazing I thought. Once again, I was so caught up in me, thinking I was smarter, I was being so aware, I am the superior being and all the while, the horses knew. They knew he was there before I saw him, they knew he was not a threat; they watched him as they ate and they knew when he got too close and when to warn him. What a great experience.

I was so proud of my boys. Here they were, their own little herd, looking out for each other, being alert and aware, knowing how to handle the situation perfectly without panic, running, kicking and just the right amount of action. All of this without my help or interference. Wow, once again, I had to remind myself, horses know! They know what is going to happen before it happens. They are more aware than any of us can imagine. They are the ultimate survival

animal. They are not mean and do not attack. They only want to be horses, seek comfort and avoid conflict. They know, because their life depends on it.

So after big hugs, a sigh of relief and a few favorite scratches for both of them, it was time for me to leave this perfect herd and go back to my reality. Then it hit me. I was never really threatened by the coyote. I knew that my horses could take this guy on with no problem and I felt safe being with them, part of their herd. After the warning given by my Mustang, the coyote did not come any closer, however he did walk around us a few times before wondering off in the darkness of the night. In addition, when he left he walked the same way I was going to walk to get back to the barn, to my safety, to my truck and protection. This changed things for me. With the herd, I felt safe, now I had to walk back, alone, in a dark pasture, in the same direction that the coyote did, after seeing this rather brave coyote circle us as if he was checking us out and searching for weakness.

As I walked back alone, since my herd was not going to leave their nice hay they were enjoying, I felt uneasy and vulnerable. I was walking and looking around quickly. I was not relaxed. I was not paying attention to much of anything, but constantly searching for that rather large coyote. As I got further away from my horses my uneasiness became greater. I was feeling and living what horses live everyday. I was suddenly not at the top of the food chain and I was the prey and knew there was a predator possibly stalking or hunting me. I took my hat off and waved and swatted at mosquitoes in an attempt to appear bigger and maybe scare the coyote, that I could not see but I was sure was out there. Somehow, the walk back seemed much longer than the walk out. As I got back to my truck without an encounter (that I knew of, maybe I was being watched) I suddenly got a better understanding of how horses live each moment of their life. Always uneasy, always watching and looking, rarely relaxing for fear they may miss something and always with that fear of being eaten if they drop their guard, fail to pay attention or get into a position where they cannot run or defend themselves. They know any mistake could be their last mistake.

I am sure that everyone reading this at one time or another in their life, they were in a situation where they were scared, fearful and felt uneasy or lacked control. I hope they can remember this and gain a better understanding of how horses live each day. Maybe the next time their horse pulls, runs away, accidentally steps on them, reacts to a scary sound, spooks, throws their head quickly or they react to the horse eating baby stroller or bicycle; maybe you will have more patience and understanding that the fear the horse is feeling is real, never ending, deeply instinctive and never done to be mean or bad.

Happy trails,

Rick

Riding Your Horse in Rain

With the rainy season upon us, there will be great opportunities to enjoy a ride in the rain. I often get strange looks when I ride my horses in the rain. Later I hear people commenting that it is dangerous and my horse could slip, might get hurt or I hear there is no point in doing it, so why would anyone do it? These comments come from people who do not understand or are just unwilling or fearful of doing it, so they try to down play or do not understand the importance of it. Fear is a powerful thing in the horse world. Many use it so they do not have to progress or do things they are scared to do.

Riding in the rain is so beneficial to you and your horse that it is hard to cover it all in one piece of writing. A ride in the rain teaches trust, confidence and balance to both you and your horse. For your horse, it is harder to balance while carrying you since he has less footing, is sliding or sinking in mud. The horse is trying to determine the depth of water puddles and is dealing with some loss of sight and hearing from the falling rain. With all this going on, the horse has to look to you for guidance, leadership and support. He looks to his leader for confidence and direction. He has to depend on you more and trust that you will not get him hurt, will not lead him into danger and will keep him safe. The better you do this, the more the horse will trust you and will see you as his unequivocal leader. It is a growing process for both. You must get over your fear and insecurity and the horse must learn it can do things with you on his back.

This unknown area causes you to learn as much as the horse does. You learn how to help the horse and guide him even when you are a little insecure. You have to be much more aware of your horse's capabilities and his strengths and weaknesses. You have to balance more in order to stay out of the horse's way and make it easier for him to carry you, without panicking or pulling on his head or reins. You have to trust his footing and reassure him if he gets nervous or insecure. You learn to control your fear and rely on your horse more. When you trust your horse, your horse trusts you. All of this while getting wet, having rain in your eyes and adjusting to the slicker reins and saddle. Your confidence in yourself, your riding ability and your horse grows expediently. This confidence is passed on to your horse and since a horse is a reflection of you, he grows as you grow.

"But Rick, I have seen horses fall in the mud when it rains, isn't this dangerous?" Walking up to a horse is dangerous, picking his feet is dangerous, trying to hold on to a lead rope, getting on a horse's back, running a horse under saddle, jumping a horse, taking a horse to a show, trail riding and just about anything you do with a horse can be dangerous. If you are trying to avoid danger completely, you should not be around horses. I feel safer riding my horse down a slick rock cliff than I do having some people walk their horse near me. I have been hurt and nearly hurt ten times as much by other people's horses and their mistakes, than by my own horses. It is never the horse's fault and the horse always has to pay for their mistakes, your mistakes and other people mistakes. Try not to be caught up in the fear card played by many people. When people do not know how to do something or lack the ability, knowledge or confidence to do something, they will sometime use fear or it is dangerous to cover up the real reason. Riding a horse in the rain or mud is no more dangerous than many other things done with horses. Like many things, YOU need to adjust and learn how to minimize these risks, accept that there are some risks, learn to increase your skills, confidence and know when you are over your head. I say it on my site and in my videos, never do what someone tells you, you take the risk so do not substitute others advice or directions. Your horse, your responsibility.

So how do you minimize the risk? You slow down, you think more, you concentrate more and you become more aware of your horse and how you are affecting your horse. When riding for the first time in the rain or mud, go slow. Take your horse to a place he is familiar with. Walk him and let him explore carrying you and deal with the mud and loss of secure footing. Stay out of his way, work on your balance and allow him to use his mind and body to figure out things. Be ready to provide direction and assistance if he gets scared or lost. Be ready to take him to a slow circle, a nice walk or an easy stop. Learn to give him his head, a horse uses his head for balance and he uses it more in mud, stay neutral in the saddle and know when to give him help. After showing him he can do it on flat level and familiar ground, then move to a good straight away, so you can do a slow controlled trot and a few downward transitions and stops. So trot and slow to a walk, then trot and do a stop. Do NOT do fast turns in mud, a horse's legs get deep and they pull a hip or stress a joint. Slow controlled movements are best to help a horse learn. This will all teach the horse how to adjust to the slicker surface and will let him know that he can still stop and turn if he slows down and does not get in a hurry or panic. All of this will be a little scary for both you and your horse, so you both have to depend on each other more. This is where the growth occurs, growth in ability and growth in confidence.

"I do all my riding in an arena and never ride in the rain, why do I need to this?" If you ever go to a show, a trail ride, a parade, or just get caught in the rain sometime, this will be invaluable to you and your horse. By doing this when you control the situation, you set your horse up for success. If you ever have to do this when you did not plan it or when you get stuck doing it, you set your horse up for failure. Even if you never plan to ride in the rain, this is an invaluable lesson for you and your horse and real chance for growth and trust. It challenges you both, increases the bond and trust and redefines you as stronger and more confident leader. Of course riding after a good rain will give you most all the benefits as well, but the falling rain really makes the adventure a more rewarding and challenging experience.

So dress warm, try to stay dry, get rid of the umbrella, saddle up and take advantage of a good ride in the rain. It will do you and your horse wonders. In addition, I assure you, after you are done, you will feel closer and see a better bond between you and your horse. Sharing the freedom with our horse, enjoying the journey and growth through understanding all make horse ownership worth it.

Happy trails,

Rick

Twitching is all Bad?

Although I am not a fan of this, like a lot things, if done appropriately, can be helpful and when abused, can do more damage. Therefore, I post this with mixed emotions. I can only hope that if you are reading this, you are trying to learn more and educate yourself about horses and will not abuse them. Twitching strangely enough lowers the heart rate during an unpleasant procedure. A twitched horse's heart rate increases 8%. Horses not twitched during an unpleasant procedure experience a heart rate increase of 22%. The experts say that twitching causes an endorphin release that makes unpleasant experiences less stressful. Although I am not sure this is has been proven, the lower heart rate appears to be caused by something.

In Australia, for example, the handlers who load horses into racing stalls used to be allowed a twitch, but that procedure was outlawed some years ago. Is this a good thing or bad thing? You have to ask yourself why would a country outlaw a simple procedure. In fact, most Aussie's think Americans are barbaric for still using this procedure. I stress the phrase, when done or used appropriately, it can be helpful. Done properly, twitching can defuse what could be a dangerous situation for a horse. The physical aspect of a twitch is to stimulate the body to release endorphins. This is kind of like giving the horse a shot of heroin (it gets them stoned or buzzed). It is a powerful and natural relaxant in theory. One theory is some predators instinctively know this and use this to their benefit. When lions grab a zebra, one usually latches onto the nose. That is not to shut off the air (that's done by the one at the throat), but to release endorphins. It is a natural preparation for death. Again, this is theory and not scientific evidence.

Note: A war bridle is not a twitch. I have pictures and explain what a war bridle is on my web site.

A twitch has to be controlled, which means it has to be able to be released and tightened as the situation develops. The most common twitches are neck, ear, nose and gum line.

The neck twitch is done with the hand and is used to simulate a horse bite or a horse grabbing another horse by the neck. You will see a mommy horse disciplining their young by biting and holding them by the neck area. I have also seen older geldings do this to other horses to teach them. This neck grab will sometime calm a horse and or distract him enough that you can mess with an injury or give him a shot. The ear twitch is not good or effective and I think, tend to cause a horse to be ear shy, can damage the ear and is more of a pain compliance and not a relaxant.

The nose twitch seems to be the one of choice and it can be applied with the hand, rope or chain. Obviously, I do not like the stupid chain idea, but somewhere, a brilliant horse idiot came up with this revelation and decided that if a hand or rope worked then a chain would work better. "NEWS FLASH" - Chains and horses are BAD! So back to the hand or rope, by squeezing the nose, endorphins are released and the horse is apparently relaxed and preoccupied with you squeezing his nose, so he is less likely to react to you cleaning a painful injury or giving him a shot.

The gum line seems to be used by Farriers mostly. It may work but, once again, there is a propensity for abuse or over use. A twitch is a last resort before using a tranquilizer or other drug. It should not be the first (easy) choice and should be used by EXCEPTION and not routine. (IMHO)

I often hear of horse being burned alive in burning barns. A twitch could be used in this situation to get compliance from the horse so you can save them. If the option is a horse stays in the barn and dies or I use a twitch, chain or cattle prod to get the horse out, obviously getting the horse out, at any cost, is better than letting it die.

Happy trials,

Rick

What is a Cheat?

Let's talk about Cheats: I use this term a lot in the horse world. Synonyms of cheat are to defraud, to take advantage of, con, trick, swindle or deceive. So when I use this term to refer to different things people use on horses, people get offended or insulted. This is not a personal issue. Most any cheat can be an effective aid if used in moderation with a good thinking horseperson, with the goal being to use it short term. I will list a few cheats that I see used too often with horses; A stud chain, a whip, a martingale, draw reins, spurs, tie downs, bits, pain and fear. Hold on, I know many are thinking, wait a minute, I use some of these and "I am not a cheater." Remember what I said earlier about moderation and thinking. There are many other cheats in horse training and after reading this, you may identify others that you did not see as a cheat before.

Let's discuss why I think a cheat is a cheat. A stud chain causes pain; it is designed and used so it can cause pain to get compliance. Chains, no matter how they are used, are used to cause pain to a horse. Can it be used and not cause pain, yes, but if it is available, the likelihood is it will be used for pain. If it was not available, then it will not be used for pain and you have to learn how to get what you want without pain. Therefore, I hear all the time, "I don't use it, he just knows it is there" or "If he listens then he does not get it used on him (pain)". Both these statements are cheats. What is really being said is I do not know any other way to control my horse, so I use what is easy, fast and works. The easy way is rarely the right way. The right way normally takes more time and more effort. By taking the easy way, you cheat. We all do it, I have done it and still do it sometime, but it needs to be the exception and not the rule. When you cheat, you cheat your horse and you cheat yourself. I can take most any horse being led around on a stud chain and lead the horse better and with more control with a simple rope halter, in less than ten minutes. Not because I am special or have magical horse whisper power, but because I understand horses, I know if I was a horse what I would want, I know that if I take a little more time, I get a better final product.

When you only use cheats or over use them, I think you take something from the horse. You change the horse in a way that you never get back. You change the very being and steal some of his soul. Who would want a horse that will not move unless told, will not think on his own, has no personality, will not react to anything and is basically a mindless robot that you sit on and bark off commands? It seems too many people are always chasing this type of horse. People that want this are usually fearful and lack the confidence to truly understand and trust a horse. They do not trust themselves so they do not trust the horse. Most all issues people have with horses come from fear and lack of understanding.

Most problems with horses (really people) come down to time, fear, being in a hurry and lack of knowledge. If people just slowed down, took the time it takes, it would take less time. The slow way is the fast way with horses. Most cheats are used for faster and easier results. Therefore, you may think it helps in the short term, but overtime, cheats become less and less effective. Not only do people start relying on them, but also horses start relying on them. Ever see a horse that has always had a tie down, if you take it off, the horse is almost lost and fearful, the head is high and appears out of control, since the horse has never been allowed to learn how to carry his head without restraints. Most all cheats do not improve your relationship with your horse, it normally damages it. So overtime when cheats stop working, they are normally used more and with more effort, since people have become dependant on them. The more you use a cheat the less effective it becomes and the less effective you are. You can desensitize a horse to just about anything, including cheats. If I slap a horse in the face every time I see him, sooner or later he will expect this, know it is going to happen and will stop trying to prevent it. If you constantly correct a horse with a stud chain or a bit, sooner or later your horse will expect it and ignore it. At some point, the horse may decide enough is enough and hurt you. "Hard hands make hard horses."

I think if people are more aware of cheats and the cheats they use, they will be less likely to over use them and will be thinking of ways to get the same results without the cheat. You will learn to get more from your horse with less. For example, if I can get a horse to lead well with a rope halter, then I can try to get him to lead well with just a rope around his neck. Once he is good at that, then I can try to get him to lead with just a piece of hay string around his neck and once he is good at that, then I can get him to lead with nothing around his neck. By looking at most horse training this way, you are always working your horsemanship (horsemanship) and you are constantly improving and making it better for the horse. If you

take care of your horsemanship, your horsemanship will take care of you. When you improve yourself, your horse improves. When you and your horse understand each other, your partnership and bond grows, and everything you do with your horse seems effortless and like a dance. You would never find beauty in a dancer, if a whip or spurs were used to make the dancer dance.

Know your cheats, use them sparingly and always try to stop using them, so you do not have to depend on them.

Happy Trails,

Rick

What is a Draw?

I get the weirdest looks when I tell people you need to draw your horse in, you need to create a draw and you need to use the horse's natural draw. So what am I talking about when I say Draw? Understanding this seems easy to me, but hard to explain. It is like a mind game with your horse, I have to act submissive and non-threatening, I have to make the horse think and want to follow me, I need to get small and non-predatory, I want him to get curious and investigative of what I am doing and why I am doing it. I have to have my timing down to give release at just the right time. Horses are curious creatures anyway, they just get that beat out of them or corrected out of them or "RESPECT MY SPACE" out of them.

People are so busy trying to control their horse that they forget that a horse is just horse and this is all it knows how to be. I get so tired of seeing people who yank, pull, push, correct, backup, yell and blame their horse for "Just being a horse". If you spend all your time keeping your horse away from you, how in the world are you going to get your horse to want to be with you? Think about it. If every time your horse rubs you, touches you or gets close to you, all you do is push him out and yell "Respect my space", is it any wonder your horse won't come to you when called or wants to run from you when it gets loose? It seems pretty simple to me.

Draw is playing cat and mouse with your horse, looking at him and then backing away, in a way that makes him interested and curious. Horses do it to each other all the time. I can get most any horse to follow me by just walking away, but it is the way I walk away. It is my body language, my facial expression, my posture, the position of my head, where my eyes look, how I hang my arms and probably some other things that I don't even know I am doing, but I assure you the horse knows! Higher horses always seem aloof in herds. They do not beg horses to follow them.

A natural draw is where a horse wants to be or wants to go on his own. Good natural draws are a grain bucket, a gate to leave the arena, the barn or other horses. If a horse wants to go to these places, use this to get your horse to learn what you are trying to teach. Like crossing water, if I am going away from the barn and I try to get my horse to cross a stream, for the first time, it will be harder than if I am on my way back to the barn and try the same stream. One way I am working against the horse natural draw and facing away from the barn or home, the other way, I am working with the horse and facing the barn. Know the difference. A good horseman knows how to draw a horse, because he understands a horse and "thinks like a horse". This is why you should not work on stopping on the way back to the barn. You should work on stopping going away from the barn. That way the horse wants to stop and thinks you may turn around and go back to the barn. If you try to work on stops going back to the barn, then your horse gets nervous and anxious thinking you may not go to the barn. When leaving a draw you create more or stronger draw.

When teaching a horse to come to you, let's say in a round pen, most horses want to leave the round pen. They know in the pen, they work. Therefore, if I stand at the gate and call a horse, he comes easy, thinking we are going to leave. If I stand across (opposite) from the gate and call a horse, a horse has a natural draw to the gate and will want to stand at the gate and will not be as willing to come to me, which is away from his draw (gate). I see this all the time, people working against a draw and then blaming the horse for being stubborn. It is not and never was the horse's fault. Learn your horse's natural draws and use them to help teach him what you want. This way you help your horse succeed, set him up for

success and make finding the right answer easy. You have to try less to get what you want from your horse and you do not have to fight or force things, which hamper your relationship with horses. Remember with horses "less is more" and "the slow way is the fast way". Some people just like to fight and "show the horse who is boss" rather than work smarter and help the horse without force or fear. The old saying, "You can't fix stupid" applies to these people. It is just too bad the horse has to endure man's stupidity and then the horse is blamed for being a horse. Pushing and correcting a horse for being your space is not the way to teach a horse that you are a draw. Know the difference.

Happy Trials,

Rick

Hard to Catch Horse

Catching horses and trailer loading seem to be two of the biggest problems for many horse owners. I get asked all the time, why won't my horse let me catch him? My first advice is "Stop trying to catch him". A horse knows what is going to happen before it happens. This is because their life depends on it. If they get caught not paying attention, they are dead, eaten or seriously wounded (which means certain death). Horses have to know what is happening around them or they die. It is that simple for the horse and is very instinctive. I have a few videos on hard to catch horses on Youtube:

By not trying to catch a horse, a horse will not try to get away from being caught. You can still catch him, it may take a little longer, but remember, "The slow way is the fast way with horses." Therefore, by just approaching your horse to pet them, to say hello, to bring them a treat, you tell the horse you are NOT trying to catch them, so they do not react to being caught. A horse will not run from someone who is not chasing or putting pressure on them. So if you go after a horse with a purpose of catching him, go straight to his head, like a predator, and only approach your horse when you want or need to catch him, it will not take him long for him to figure out what you are up to. If you were a horse, you would know this and would not want to get caught either.

So how do you hide this idea of catching your horse from your horse? It is not easy. Since horses are the king of observation and do not miss much, you really have to use your horse sense. You do not want to look at the head, or look into the horse's eyes, do not reach out with your hands, do not sneak up and do not talk. You really need to understand pressure, release and driveline. You have to think that you are approaching your horse only to say hello and to rub his withers. By focusing on that, you will not telegraph your intention to catch the horse. So your objective is to pet the horse at the withers, not to catch him. If you think you are fooling the horse and you try to only pet him when the real intent is catching him, he will know it and you will fail. You cannot hide your intentions from a horse. "Horses keep you honest." The old saying: If you think you can or think you can't, you are probably right.

Now, that information will only get you so far. You still have to be aware of pressure and release. Anytime you approach a horse, even just to pet it or bring it a treat, you need to move as if you are the Alpha, high horse, and you understand horse language. By knowing when to put pressure on and when to release pressure, how to create a draw, you communicate with your horse and your horse knows that you talk horse. You make the horse know your intentions and you make the horse feel that you are not a threat. When you see birds, deer, rabbits or other animals hanging out with horses, you do not see horses caring or reacting to them. They know these things are not a threat and are not trying to catch them or hurt them. Horses do not know this about you, until you tell them. You tell them this with your body language, not your mouth and saying "good boy". You read the horse and know when he is getting nervous or when you are putting too much pressure, so you know when to release that pressure. If your horse tries to leave, you need to know how to move in front of the driveline, just enough to stop his forward movement. The more you control the horse's movement, by anticipating what he is going to do, the more you tell the horse you control him and he will have less incentive to move away from you. If you do not know how to lunge or round pen a horse and create a draw and make a horse come to you or follow you, you will not be successful at catching a horse.

Release is the key to any and all horse handling. Knowing when to release is timing. Knowing

how much to release is feel. Understanding this is critical if you want to be successful with horses. Whether it is release of bit pressure, release of leg pressure, release of drive pressure, knowing when and how much to release will enable you to get great results from any horse you work with.

So, for the hard to catch horses, the smart ones, you need to be smarter. Do not think catch and do not chase them. Simply understand how horses talk, how they communicate, be like the horse and join up with your horse. If you can communicate that you are the herd leader and you are higher, then your horse will always allow you to approach him, just do not try to catch him.

I have lots of information about "the Horse" on my web site:

Happy trails,

Rick

Horse Shoes - Pros and Cons

Too little land to support horse herds; Too many wild horses; No place for wild herds; BLM to euthanize over 30,000 Wild Mustangs; and many other head lines about how there is not enough land to support wild herds, yet the herds keep growing... How can this be? There are no stalls in the wild, no blankets, no worming schedules, no shots, no fresh Alfalfa and worst of all NO horse shoes! So how do all these horses keep living and reproducing so abundantly? How in the world can all these horses continue to survive and thrive without the help of humans? (Read my Horse History page for more information about the history of horses)

I have just added an "Amazing Horse Hoof" page to my web site with lots of hoof information:

I have a photo on this page that shows a thermograph image of a horse with only one horse shoe on. It is very easy to see the lack of blood flow to the shod hoof and very easy to see the good blood flow to the three unshod hooves. Study after study keeps confirming that metal shoes nailed into the hoof causes pain, impaction damage, stress fractures and prevents the hoof from operating like it should.

Horses have been around for countless years. Somehow, they continue to grow in numbers, even with the shrinking supply of open lands. The reason is simple; they are a perfect example of "survival of the fittest." Natural thinning of the herd by many factors, including man and an exceptional ability to adapt to different environments, enables them to flourish both in the wild and in domestication. A couple of things you do not see in the wild are horseshoes and Farriers. Over the thousands and millions of years, horses have never been shod in the wild. Yet somehow, they continue to thrive, grow and succeed.

Yes, horseshoes have been around for a number of years and were developed, designed and promoted for the benefit of man. Let me say this again, nailing metal shoes to horse's hoof was designed to help man, NOT the horse. Horseshoes are used to keep horses in unnatural environments, such as stalled and on stoned floors where the horse was never meant to be kept for long periods of time. In these man-made conditions, the horse's hoof deteriorates from the lack of exercise and blood flow, the urine and feces soaked floors destroy the hoof's reliability, create bacteria pools, the shavings and arena footings strip the moisture from the hoof making it brittle and frail and the many unnatural footing does not facilitate chipping or natural hoof sculpting. However, these conditions do make it easier for the rider to catch their horse, easier to keep their horse clean, easier to keep the horse free of natural scarp and cuts from horse play and herd behavior and easier to ride their horse without concern for the footing or ground conditions, but it does nothing for the benefit of the horse. Other ways man have been able to weaken the horse's foot is by over breeding, inbreeding and close bloodline breeding, all of which have contributed to weakening the hoof wall of the horse. Racing Thoroughbreds are a perfect example of this and the Quarter Horse breed is rapidly following the same path. In simple terms, domestication of the horse and man's interference as led to a weaker and genetically flawed hoof for the horse.

Horse shoes are more convenient, makes it easier on the rider, may prevent some soft sole

bruising, will allow for longer work hours on the horse and will make the hoof temporarily stronger since it is metal, non-bendable and non-flexible. Shoes normally only have to be replaced every six to eight weeks and will allow the rider to run and trot over rocks and uneven terrain with less chance of stone bruising. In some rare occasions, the horseshoe can be used to help a cracked hoof or injured hoof to aid in healing and support. Horseshoes can also be used for gait management or to improve other movements of the horse. In most all cases, horseshoes are for the benefit of the human, not for the horse.

So what are some of the cons to horse shoes? A shoe is made of metal or other hard non-flexible material or impact intensifying substance. This creates extreme shock and transfers much more stress on the hoof, bones and tendons. A shod hoof receives 10 to 33 times more "impact force" than a hoof this is not shod. Shoes have to be nailed onto the hoof, in most cases. These nails puncture the hoof wall, which compromises the structural integrity and strength of that wall. It also allows for foreign material to now access to the internal hoof where infection can set in and cause real problems. If the nail is only an 1/8th of inch off it can puncture the sensitive laminae, damage the soft tissue, penetrate the hoof capsule or puncture the digital cushion. All of which can cause infection, swelling, bleeding, lameness and extreme pain to the horse. (Another name for this is called a "Hot Nail" or "Quicking") Not to mention that the number one cause of lameness, in shod horses, is bad or incorrect shoeing. The shock from metal shoes transformed up the hoof and leg can cause chronic lameness, damage to the hoof wall and arthritis in later years.

Other disadvantages to horseshoes are they cause horses to slip on paved roads and rocks and cause loss of footing on hills and uneven ground. A barefoot horse has better footing than a shod horse. Horseshoes can spark when hitting or sliding on rocks, which causes fires that burn pastures, fences, kill livestock and our horses. Horseshoes prevent the hoof from flexing and avert the self-adapting qualities of the hoof. Horses can injury themselves when the rear shoe clips or over-steps onto the rear of the front hooves, causing bruising, cuts and lameness. A kick from a shod horse will break a leg bone of another horse and do much more damage than an unshod hoof, causing the euthanasia of many horses. When a shoe falls off or is stepped on and pulled off, the horse is forced to walk around off balance, which creates pain and possible injury to other parts of the horse. When shoes are thrown or come off in pasture, the rusty and unsanitary nails of these shoes stick up and puncture the sole or other horses creating lameness, infection and injury. Not to beat a dead horse, so to speak, but I think I covered enough negatives on shoes, but I am sure there are still many others.

On my hoof page of my website, there is an excellent example of a working barefoot hoof flexing. (A shoe prevents this flexing from happening)

The benefits of barefoot are many and very achievable if more people would get the facts, do their own research and be open to an alternative, to nailing shoes on a horse. Keeping your horse barefoot takes more caution on your part. You may have to get off and walk your horse over large rocks for his comfort and to remove your additional weight while walking on rocky terrain. This is a small price to pay for the many disadvantages of having shoes. People who ride shod horses think that shoes prevent rocks from bruising the hoof sole. This is a not true, anyone can look at a horse shoe and see that it will only prevent rocks from hitting the horse shoe part of the hoof, the entire center sole and frog area are still exposed and susceptible stone bruising and punctures. Shod horses have much softer soles since they never get tough, since they are protected by the shoe. Barefoot hooves are allowed to flex and function more naturally. This naturally flexing, increases blood flow, which increases growth and strength of the hoof. The longer a horse is barefoot the stronger the hoof becomes. An unshod hoof gets stronger and tougher and the need for shoeing becomes less and less. Footing is enhanced with a natural hoof as opposed to a shod hoof. Nails around the barn, in the pasture and in the hoof - almost vanish. Shoeing expenses are decreased and natural barefoot trimming is replaced. In non-shod horses, the horse is spared the nails, the metal weight, shock and stress transfer, the chance of a hot nail, poor fitting shoes, uneven shoeing and many other negatives that come with shoeing.

Most Farriers agree that barefoot is better and a more healthy option for most horses. However, if the client wants shoes, most will not try to convince them not to have them. I have put some reference links at the bottom of this article and hope that people will take the time to educate themselves so they have a better understanding of horseshoes and barefoot horses and maybe be equipped to make a better informed decision. I have a collection of many hoof and other anatomy pictures at this link:

My horses are barefoot. I like keeping my horses as natural as I can. Am I bias about horseshoes? You bet I am and the reason is; "If I was a horse, I would not want nails or shoes on my feet" I am always bias to do what is better for the horse.

Happy Trials,

Rick

Is a Riding Helmet Bad? Does it Make You Safe?

Every person that thinks a helmet is a safety item will disagree with this title. Every parent that wants his or her child to wear a helmet will disagree with this title. Every person that is scared of his or her horse and wants to wear a helmet will disagree with this title.

I tend to cover topics of common sense and topics that are controversial. I speak for the horse and most all my articles will take the horse's side and the horse's point of view. That is not normally the most popular side. So how does a helmet help the horse? I will try to explain.

I am sure there are many of you out there that think a helmet is needed when riding a horse and some even think it should be mandatory. Like many things in the horse world, opinions vary depending on experience and knowledge. So if a helmet protects someone's head and makes them safer, how can it be bad? There is a condition out there known as the "Superman Syndrome". The condition is when someone perceives no danger can come to them, they are safe, protected and cannot get hurt. This syndrome is common in many high-risk professions such as Police Officers, Firefighters, Military personnel, Race Car drivers and others. Years ago, a bull rider would never wear a helmet much less a kick proof vest and now this is very common.

With advances in technology and safety equipment, people have a tendency to think they cannot get hurt when doing dangerous activities since they wear safety gear. With this mindset, it causes people to take more risks and greater risks and they will do things they would never do, if they felt they could get seriously hurt. Here is my take. Riders and horse owners will neglect improving their skills or advancing their knowledge of the horse, since they can take a shortcut, use a cheat, get lots of free advice and of course, wear a helmet that keeps them safe. Helmets DO NOT make you safe on a horse. This is a very commons misconception.

On my website, I discuss a test in "Fear" that was done where rider were told they would be sprayed with a fire hose as they rode their horse by this specific area. All riders and horses showed signs of stress and fear when passing the area, even thou no rider or horse was ever sprayed. Do not forget, the did not know anything about the water or being sprayed, so why did his stress level rise? A horse knows when you are scared. Many people that wear helmets are scared, fearful, and insecure and the horse knows it. You can read more about fear on my website:

I see many people that ride horses that they should not ride, but they wear a helmet. I see riders push their horse when scared, but they wear a helmet. I see harsh and painful bits being used by people with hard hands, but they wear a helmet. I see horses confused, scared and in pain, but their rider wears a helmet. I see horses begging and screaming for their rider to stop pulling on their mouth and head. I see riders carrying on conversations and ignoring all the warning signs that their horse is about to blow, but they wear a helmet. To me wearing a helmet when you are on a unsafe horse is pointless and makes a dangerous situation more dangerous. It creates the illusion that you cannot get hurt or that you are protected, since you wear a helmet.

Thousands of people a year get hurt in horse related accidents. Most, if not all, could be prevented with better horse skills, more informed and educated riders, but the majority of people hurt by horses, were wearing a helmet. A helmet will not protect you from a broken arm, broken back or broken ribs. It will not prevent a neck or spinal injury. It will not prevent you from being thrown or from being dragged if you foot is caught in a stirrup. A helmet will not prevent you from being kicked in head, stepped on, run over or severely bitten by a horse. A horse reacts the same way whether or not his rider is wearing a helmet. Only the rider

seems to think a helmet changes things, a horse has no knowledge of a helmet or what it does.

Many people that are loyal helmet people will get upset about this article. If they do they are missing the purpose. They are making this about them and their feelings and not about growing, understanding horses better and growing in their horsemanship.

A helmet may give people the perception that they are safe. A big thing a helmet does is it makes the horse pay. The horse suffers from people who will not learn about the horse since they can wear a helmet and then make the horse listen with bigger bits, more force and since they think they are safe with their helmet, the horse pays. If people invested time to study the horse, if they would try to improve their horse skills and learn the way of the horse, they would be 100 times safer with no helmet. I would equate this to sky diving. You can jump out of a plane falling to the earth at 120 miles per hour and for liability reasons, insurance requires you wear a helmet. Does anyone see the irony in this?

It amazes me when people won't ride a horse without a helmet, yet they will get on a horse that does not have good brakes, won't steer, will spook and run off, is nervous and insecure and then they feel safer because they have a helmet on. Most people wear seatbelts in car. Seatbelts have saved countless lives and minimized injuries for years. However, just because you wear a seatbelt, would you drive a car with no brakes, bad steering, bald tires, broken windshield and broken steering wheel? I would hope not. If you did, you would still be safer in that car than you would be on a lot of horses I see people ride. At least the car will not spook, the car does not have a mind with instincts to run and survive. The car will not chase other cars or run from other cars. The car will not react to pain or fear. The car will not panic and think it could die when scared. A car will not buck and try to throw you out. The same people that think helmets should be mandatory on horses do not wear a helmet when driving a car.

So let us compare, the car has no emotions, no fear, no reactions, you have complete control over the accelerator, which direction you go, and you can turn the engine off with a turn of a key. The horse has strong emotions, lots of fear, reacts to survive and you have little control over the accelerator, limited control of direction and you cannot turn the horse off. Ummmmm? Which one do you think you are safer driving? Which one do you think you have more control over?

I bet a lot of people would not drive the car I described with a seatbelt, helmet and a protective suit, yet they have no problem getting on an untrained and unsafe horse - since they have a helmet on. Or better yet, these people have no problem putting their kid on a horse with no knowledge of the horse as long as the kid is wearing a helmet.

People should actually think about what a helmet really does. Can a helmet really make you safe? The purpose of this article is to help people think. I hope riders will realize that by working on your horse skills and understanding the horse better will make you much safer than the best helmet you wear. If you improve yourself, your horse will get better. By doing this, the real winner is the horse. The horse gets a rider and owner that understands him better, the horse gets a better deal and the horse knows his rider grows in confidence so he grows and they both become better and safer partners.

So wearing a helmet may help you if you get thrown or fall off, but understanding your horse, understanding their instinctive fear reactions and working on becoming a better horse person, will help keep you from getting thrown. Help yourself and your horse become safer through understanding and knowledge of the horse.

So it is OK to wear a helmet, sure it is. However, do not expect it to make you a better horseman or make your horse better, that is up to you.

Hope this clears up why I think helmets can be bad if they used to justify neglecting your horsemanship. Remember, if you take care of your horsemanship, your horsemanship will take care of you.

Happy Trails,

Rick

Control Your Horse Not the World

It continues to amaze me that so many people try and control the world and the environment around their horse in attempt to feel in control and safe with their horse. Even if they temporarily succeed, it will not work every time. I see people who run around and try to prevent things from happening and try to prevent things from scaring their horses. These people run around and say do not drive the tractor when I ride, it scares my horse. Do not use a whip when I ride, it scares my horse. Do not run your horse because it makes my horse want to run. And one of my favorites, I can only ride alone since other horses scare my horse. When you hear someone say these things, a flag should go up. This is their fear talking, there is nothing wrong with their horse.

I often wonder if these same people could stop planes from flying, cars from driving, people from walking and just stop the world so they can ride and think they are safer, would they do that as well? There is no way you can control everything that happens when you ride your horse, so people should stop trying. Work on controlling your horse, work on training your horse to respond to you, work on being a strong leader to your horse so he will not worry about every little thing that happens around him. Build confidence in your horse and yourself. I wonder if these same people run about on the highway telling everyone to slow down and if they see someone in the supermarket with 13 items in the 12 item lane, if they try and stop and correct that. People that try and control everything, are scared since they do not know what to do if something happens they cannot control. All of this fear and insecurity runs down the reins to the horse.

A horse needs fear to survive. It really is OK if your horse gets scared, in fact I think it is healthy for them. I better say that again in case some missed it. It is OK for your horse to get scared. It keeps them alert, keeps them paying attention and prevents them from becoming dull. If you really want to ride a completely safe horse that will not hurt you, ride the ones on the merry-go-round that go up and down. If you ride a real horse, then you need to accept the fact that they are strong, made of pure bone, muscle and instinctive emotion, and that they can never be completely controlled. No matter how big the bit, no matter how strong the tie down, no matter how strong the rider and no matter how much you try to control the world, a horse is never 100 percent completely under control. I always say no matter how good or perfect your horse is, if a plane crashes in the field or arena where you are riding, your horse will react, spook and run off. Nothing you do can prevent this and you cannot train this out of a horse. If a bear rushes out of the woods while you are riding, your horse will run and will not care if you hang on or fall off. No bit will stop a horse when it is running for his life. If you are smart you will want your horse to run if a bear is after it.

So, all you can do is improve your chances of surviving with good consistent training, good leadership, lots of practice and lots of confidence. How do you get confidence? By knowing and understanding your horse. You need to be aware of how your horse handles fear. If you spend your life trying to avoid scary things and protect your horse, then you will never learn to read your horse's fear, you will never learn to help your horse through his fear and you will always be reacting to his fear, with your own fear.

Sacking out is a term many in the horse world are either not familiar with or do not understand it. This is the most misunderstood and neglected part of horse training. It is so important to you and your horse, yet most "life long" horse owners do not do it, think it is not needed and do not understand it. A horse has to get scared to know it does not have to be scared. This is such an important step in horse training. By scaring your horse, under controlled conditions, you remove fear from your horse and teach a horse not to run, rear or panic instinctively when scared. By running around telling everyone else what NOT to do, so your horse will not get scared, only makes you neurotic and makes your horse more scared and creates less confidence in you.

Research the term "Sacking out", learn about it, understand it and apply it to your daily horse handling and training. I have a more detailed explanation and examples of this on my horsemanship page of my web site. Be aware that the old style of sacking out was cruel and was used to break the horse's spirit. It has modified and improved over the years with more understanding of the horse, so do not be misled with bad information. When done properly, sacking out builds confidence in you and your horse, it removes fear, it teaches a horse that it

is OK to get scared and then helps the horse deal with fear in other ways besides their instinctual reaction to run. It teaches you to read and respond appropriately to horse's fear, which builds confidence in you and your horse.

Most people are already doing this without knowing it. Since sacking out is desensitizing a horse, most do this with a saddle, a lead rope, loading in a trailer, a loud jacket or other things that your horse has to accept in his daily life. Advanced desensitizing is dragging things, plastic bags, hobbles, ropes under the tail, coving the eyes and many other things. One of the most important things to remember when sacking out is that you are learning to read and observe your horse's response to fear. You are learning how he gets scared, how he deals with it and when to intercede or get involved to help him find the correct response. The goal is to stop or reduce the fear before the horse reacts. Release teaches, so when you stop before the horse blows up, you teach the horse the right response is not to blow up.

Sacking out is much more fun and beneficial than trying to control everyone and everything around your horse. The more you sack out, the more your horse will have confidence in you and you will have more confidence in your horse. With confidence comes trust, with trust comes better understanding and awareness of your horse and with that you get a better relationship with your horse.

Happy Trails,

Rick

Bite, Nip or Nuzzle? Start Trusting Your Horse

Is your horse biting, is he nipping or his he nuzzling? Knowing the difference can increase your relationship with your horse. I see lots and lots of people always pushing their horses away from them. "Respect my space" they call it. I hear life long horse owners telling new owners do not let you horse get too close, keep him out of your space, if you let a horse put his nose on you he can bite you. When I see this, I see horses that want to feel safe with their owner, who want to see their owner as a herd member, who want to show affection to their owner and then they get pushed, backed up, disciplined for "being in my space". Stop this madness. A horse is not going to bite you if you let your horse get close. Beware of those that tell you otherwise. Watch any of my videos on Youtube and you see my horses all over me and they have never bit me. Why, because they know they should not. www.thinklikeahorse.org If you pay attention to your horse, if you read your horse and understand your horse, it is pretty easy to tell if he is being naughty or nice. A problem is many do not know the difference. Horses nuzzle each other in the herd; they show mutual respect to each other. They also sometimes nip each other and sometimes bite each other. It is all normal and natural horse behavior. It is true a horse can bite you anytime he wants. If he wants to bite you, you cannot stop him. You may think you can, you may think that you are so in control and that if you keep your horse "out of your space" then your horse will not bite you. Most horses do not bite without a reason. A horse that bites is biting for a lot more reasons that just being in your space. A horse will bite for protection, to show dominance, to play, to tease and to explore. Sometime a horse bites by accident when taking a treat. Not all bites are hard or forceful. However, most bites do hurt most people. If you make a choice to be around horses, then you make a choice to accept certain risks associated with horses. If you are around horses you can be stepped on, kicked, hit in the head, ran over, bit or struck. If you ride horses you can get bucked, thrown, dragged, ran into a fence post, head butted or fall off. All these things can happen to anyone at anytime. So if you choose to accept all these risks, then why are so many, so adamant that your horse can NEVER put his mouth or lips on you? Trust is a two-way street with horses. If you never trust your horse, he will never trust you. If you do not pick up his feet from fear of being kicked, your horse knows it. If you do not walk behind your horse or mess with his tail from fear of being kicked, your horse knows it. If you do not ride your horse or get on him bareback from fear of falling off, your horse knows it. If you do not work your horse from fear of making a mistake, your horse knows it. If you do not get close to your horse from fear of being stepped on, your horse knows it. Moreover, if you are always pushing your horse away from your face or pushing his mouth away from you from fear of being bit, your horse knows it. If you do not trust your horse, do not expect your horse to trust you. I let my horse nuzzle me, he searches me for treats, he licks the salt from my sweat off my face and he loves to feel the different types of clothes I wear with his muzzle. I think fleece is his favorite; he cannot stop wiggling his nose

on fleece. I allow him to choose to bite me whenever he wants. I know he will not because I trust him, he trust me and we understand each other. He has no reason to bite me, since I give him no reason to bite me. He knows and I know I am his leader, I am the head horse and he cannot disrespect me or show dominance over me. He knows this since I show him every time we are together or if he forgets. I address each act of dominance with the appropriate level of direction. I teach him that he cannot push me, he cannot move me, he cannot test me and cannot move up (higher in the herd) over me. Since I am consistent, since I make the rules clear and easy to follow, he knows them well. I think our relationship is better because of this. Horses need direction not correction. Prevention is always better then treatment. Consistency is your horse's best teacher and inconsistency is his worst enemy. I really wish more people would reconsider the long honored position of "never let your horse put his nose or mouth on you". Trust your horse, learn to read your horse, bond with your horse and let him know that you understand him enough to trust him not to bite you. Do not try to prevent him from biting you; help him learn that biting is not allowed. He may try to nip you to see if he can, correct it, show him that is not allowed, help him learn and teach him as his leader. The more you trust him, the more he will trust you and trust is the building block of a better relationship with your horse. So go give your horse a hug, give him a nose to nose nuzzle, let him show you that he will not bite you and that you can trust him to trust you. Happy Trials, Rick You can visit my Youtube site for over a 500 free videos: www.youtube.com/user/horseawareness

Why Men are More Successful with Horses

Holy cow, I bet I got more jumps to judgment on this title than a horse with a cactus under his saddle. Easy ladies, hear my out and you might even agree with what I have to say.

Let me start with what a few of you are thinking. Where does this guy get off thinking some sexist thing like men are better with horses? Some time we all tend to jump to conclusions, even with our horses. A horse may accidentally step on us and we take it as a personal attack or insult. A horse may not feel good and be lethargic and we call them lazy, disrespectful or blame them for not paying attention. Horses teach up patience and if we forget that, they teach us a lesson.

Now back to men and women with horses. Men and women are different, that should be no surprise and most would agree on this point. Ying and Yang in all things, I discuss this on my site. Men tend to be more stringent, tougher and less forgiving. Women tend to be more flexible, not so ego driven tough and more forgiving. Men tend to be disciplinarians and enforcers, while women tend to be more willing to give additional chances and not as quick to discipline. Men tend to be stronger than women are and are more willing to use their muscles, where women tend to find other ways to get results other than brute force. Both have situations when their specific traits are useful and better for the specific task or circumstance. I know these are not absolutes, but generally, these tend to hold true.

Horses like direction, they like consistency, they like knowing the rules and having the rules clearly defined. Horses respect dominant leaders and in fact, if they are not dominated they will see it as weakness, take advantage of you, treat you like a lower horse and try to move upwards in the pecking order. Horses are tougher than humans and live differently than humans. Horses give out strict and consistent discipline to other horses. Horses are enforcers when it comes to their hierarchy, social structure and pecking order. Horses do not allow transgressions without enforcement and a response. A horse will NOT say, "Oh, that's ok, I know you did not mean to do that, I will let it go since I know it was an accident." Horses pay attention and expect other horses to pay attention. If you do not pay attention and impose or invade on a higher horse and miss a signal to back off and you do not show the proper respect, you will be kicked or bitten. If a horse kicks you, it is not personal it is just the rules. You will NOT be kicked softly to give you a chance, you will NOT be kicked lightly, you will NOT be pushed away kindly with a hoof... you will be kicked hard and fast because those are rules. If you take a horse lesson personal, you miss the lesson.

You can read about herd behavior and hierarchy on my Horsemanship page of my site:

If you look at horses and their way of life, they are closer related to the way men are rather than the way women are. Since men tend to get aggressive, strict or forceful quicker than many women, a horse responds better and see that as clearer. Most men tend to be more

specific and less flexible, some may say stubborn or macho, so they are quicker to correct than a lot of women. Whereas women are more likely to give a second, third or a fourth chance before giving out discipline, women tend to have more patience than men do and are less likely to resort to physical or aggressive discipline. This is good for teaching horses certain things, but can be counter-productive for day-to-day handling of a horse. I say it all the time, when working with men I have to say ease up and do not be so aggressive and with working with women I have to say get tougher and be more aggressive.

Women have been a big part in getting "Natural Horsemanship" to take off. Natural Horsemanship is kinder, gentler and better for the horse. It also takes more time, more patience and a better understanding of the horse. This is why women tend to be better with Natural Horsemanship techniques and men are more resistant to accepting it. Women traits help them succeed better in Natural Horsemanship verse the old way of force, fear and intimidation. However, with that said, force, fear and intimidation works with horses and normally works faster. I am not promoting meanness or encouraging it, but the fact is it works. Aggression tends to work faster, takes less time and gets results. I always hear if Natural Horsemanship is so much better, why would anyone use the old ways? It is really simple, the old ways work, they worked for many years, they work faster and they get results, not necessarily better results but results. Easy now, I absolutely still think the old ways are not as good as Natural Horsemanship. The old ways may get results, but it destroys the spirit of the horse, it tears down trust, it is much harder and tougher on the horse and you do not get as good of a horse as you can with Natural Horsemanship. I say it all the time, the slow way is the fast way with horses. Natural Horsemanship is slower than the old ways.

So why would anyone use the old ways? Time and lack of knowledge are the two main reasons. The old ways are faster and you do not need to know as much or understand the horse. If you beat a horse or intimidate a horse enough, you can get it to do just about anything and never worry about understanding a horse or worry about working with the horse. If you just want fast results, so you can use the horse for work faster, the old way is better. Which is why I have a problem with trainers who claim to be Natural Horseman and then use the old ways to get fast results in less time and unless the client is there during the training, they will not find out until it is too late. The old ways work better for men since they can use force, strength and aggression. These ways are not as easy for a woman to use, so they tend to do better with Natural Horsemanship.

Unfortunately, if you can get aggressive, you really do not have to know as much about a horse, to get results. The problem is, if you do not know much about a horse and cannot get aggressive, then you will not be very successful with horses. If you are NOT going to be able to depend on aggressiveness, strength and the old ways, you really have to know much more about a horse and have a much better understanding of the horse, in order to get results. Natural Horsemanship is just being nice and never correcting a horse. This is a big misconception in the horse world.

The statistics say about 80% of all horse owners are women. I hear and see the same thing all too often. Women who mean well, who try hard, who want to be successful, who love horses and give great care to their horses, but they are not successful. They struggle, get frustrated, hire trainer after trainer, sell and buy horses and just do not seem to be successful with their horse. Then they justify or rationalize their failure by blaming the horse, the breed, the trainer, the equipment and everything but they never look in the mirror. To me, when people fail with a horse, it comes down to them not willing to get aggressive, not willing to be dominant, and not having the inability to get tough and be consistent. This lack of willingness is either fear or inability. When people fail, they give carrots, they try to talk to the horse, they continue to try to give the horse chances, they accept less than what they want, get frustrated and think they are being kind and loving to their horse. In fact, this behavior confuses horses, the horse sees this as inconsistency and it creates a lack of respect from the horse.

So why do I think men tend to be more successful with horses, because they don't have to be as smart (I know all you women will love this point), men are willing to use aggression and force quicker and they are more dominant and more likely to discipline. That works with a horse, not because it is better, but because it works and horses understand it. It works since it is the way of the herd communicates and it is the same way horses treat each other. If you have ever seen a mare correct her foal, it is not pretty, it is aggressive, hard and overdone in my book, but it is their way. A mare will bite a foal so hard in the back that it will drive it to the ground almost smashing it to the ground buckling the foal's legs. The foal will immediately

get up and run back to mom and stay right next to her showing extremely submissive behavior. Not a lot of words or begging in a herd, no offering of carrots, maybe a couple of warnings and then it is "action" time.

I guess the moral to this is, if you do not want to use force, fear, intimidation or aggression, you better be willing to learn 10 times as much about the horse and horse behavior and have a much better understanding of the horse. You have to be willing to study and educate yourself, so the need for the old ways are not needed. You need to know that sometime you will have to get tough, dominate a horse and make them see you as a strong leader. If you are never willing to discipline and you believe that all horse problems can be corrected with a carrot, love, threats, words and other non-herd things, then I believe your odds of succeeding with horse will be low.

The horse is never wrong; they want and need direction. They need consistency so they know what is expected and know what the right answer is and know who the smartest and strongest leader is. You help a horse by being consistent, knowledgeable, fair and making sure there is only one right answer for the release and by making that right answer easy for the horse to find.

I hope everyone got something out of this article. Maybe now you have a little better understanding of how a horse thinks and how a horse sees their world. Happy Trails,

Rick

For more information about horses, visit my site: www.thinklikeahorse.org/

Horse Training Sayings - What they Mean

If you read about horse training, articles, books or talk with people about horses, they will commonly say things that may sound like double talk, cute sayings or fancy horse talk, some will say. There are many old horse sayings about horses and training and they are used frequently, but not really understood. If you do not know what they mean, you probably do not know the importance of their meaning. I have listed a few here, some of them you may have heard, some maybe not. However, if you hear them in the future, you will have a better understanding of what they mean, hopefully understand their importance and will be able to apply them better to help you and your horse. If you learn to understand these, you will understand horses better and can apply these to make yourself better. You will understand why it is so important for you to get better by the end of this article.

You find more horse saying on my Cowboy Wisdom Page of my site:

All of these sayings are interconnected and all affect each other. If you can imagine a spider web and piece of the web is one of these sayings, then you see how each one makes the other ones stronger and more effective.

So let's take a look at some old horse training sayings and try and apply some deeper meaning to them besides just the words.

"The Slow Way is the Fast Way with horses": This is critical in any horse handling. If you rush something, if you get in a hurry, you increase the chance of a wreck, you set the horse up to fail and since you did not take the time it takes, it will take more time. If you teach the horse small steps, allow small successes, give release for those successes, always rewarding (release) for the smallest try. By doing this you help the horse know what to expect and the horse will know what is going to happen before it happens. Knowing this makes the horse feel safe and establishes a routine and trust. By going slow you limit confusion, you give the horse time to understand what you want, what you are asking for and you help the horse find the right answer. If you don't rush training, the horse will learn faster. Horses find comfort in knowing what to expect, they don't like surprises and they like routine. Going slow makes us better and when we get better our horses get better.

"If you get better, your horse gets better": Work on yourself more and not the horse. If you get better communicating and understanding horse, your horse will reflect that. When you are giving good direction and leadership your horse will do better, a horse is a reflection of you, if you do it right, your horse does right. If you ask the question right, the horse will give

you the right answer. When you work on yourself, you accept responsibility for what you cause the horse to do, you get better and your horse will get better, since a horse is never wrong and it is never the horse's fault.

"It is never the horse's fault" or "The horse is never wrong": A horse is a reflection of the person handling him, if the horse fails you failed, if the horse does something wrong, you did something wrong, when you stop blaming the horse, looking for excuses, you look to yourself for the problem, therefore you will work on yourself, you will get better and your horse will get better. If you accept wrong or bad results as your fault, you will be more willing to change what you are doing and if you want change in a horse, you must first change.

"In order for your horse to change, you must first change": Since a horse is only a reflection of you, if you do good, your horse will do good and if you do bad, your horse will do bad. You must be able to recognize and accept this so you will change what you do, when something is not working. If you blame the horse when things go wrong, you will never change what you do and your horse will never change what it does. Then the cycle continues and the horse suffers. Admitting that you cause all actions from a horse you handle, gives you the ability to know that you must change in order to get your horse to change. If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got.

"If you take the time it takes, it will take less time": By going slow, since the slow way is the fast way, you take more time by slowing down, doing it right and the end result will come faster than if you get in a hurry and confuse the horse. Confusion will cause a wreck and that will create fear and destroy trust. When you lose trust it will take twice as long to get results, since you will have to undo all the wrong you did when you tried to do it in a hurry. Therefore, when you do better your horse does better. Since the horse is never wrong, you set the horse up to fail when you get in a hurry and it takes more time since you end up doing over and over again.

"Set the horse up to succeed and don't lead him down a path to fail": This means don't just try things and see if they work since most of the time they will not work. If you do not know what you want or what the right answer is, how can help the horse find the right answer? When you try, the horse will fail since you did not take the time it takes and do slow proper steps so the horse can learn the right answer. If you plan, think like a horse, then you will break the training down into small steps, small successes, so you can teach the horse what to expect, lead the horse right where you want him to go, so he can find the right answer. By giving good direction, you help the horse find the right answer and avoid correction. That is why direction is always better than correction. When we help our horse succeed, we get better and when that happens our horse gets better.

"Listen to the horse or The horse is the best teacher of the horse": Everyone wants to train a horse, everyone wants to make their horse better, everyone is always so busy trying to make their horse learn or do something and they rarely take time to listen to the horse. A horse will tell you if you do something right or wrong. They will tell you if something works or does not work. They will scream this with confusion and wrong responses and all too often no one hears them and no one listens. An example of this is reaching too fast to pet a horse and the horse moves away. People that don't know will the horse is head shy, people that know will change what they do, move slower and will help the horse not move away, so the horse can learn the right answer. When a horse tells you something and you ignore him, he will not trust you, he will know that you do not understand him, he will know that he can't trust you since you do not speak his language. Watch and listen to the horse, the horse is never wrong and they always tell you what works and what does not work. The horse is the best teacher of the horse.

"A horse has to get scared so it knows it does not have to be scared": If you think like a horse, this one is easy. A plastic bag blows by, a horse snorts, jumps and prepares to run or runs off. We know it is only a bag and will not hurt a horse, but a horse has to get scared, this fear is what has kept them alive for thousands of years. You cannot take that out of them. So understanding this, we know that all horses get scared, we get scared, and we need to help horse deal with their fear a different way. We need to teach them that is OK to be scared, but they can't react like a wild flight animal when scared. We need to help them see that fear is normal, not all fear will kill them, and they do not have to run when scared. We cannot do this if we try and avoid scary things, if we beat them, or we scare them more and cause pain when they get scared. We have to let the horse get scared and show them that it

will not be hurt, show them trust and we will help them deal with their fear, by being a strong and confident leader who gives good direction and not correction.

“Direction is better than correction”: If you pay attention, if you give continuous feedback to the horse and if you make sure the horse knows what to expect, he will be less likely to make a mistake. By giving good consistent direction, you help the horse find the right answer and prevent it from making a mistake, which means you prevent having to correct mistakes. When your horse fails you fail, if you do not pay attention and you allow your horse to get into trouble or make mistakes, then you have to correct those mistakes. However, if you are active, paying attention and giving good direction, you avoid corrections. This is better for the horse and better for your relationship with your horse. So when someone is constantly correcting their horse, they are not giving good direction. Which means they do not know what they are doing and they are not giving good direction, getting better, or paying attention to what the horse is telling them? Which is why when you get better, your horse gets better.

“Trust your horse and your horse will trust you”: This is a big one that is far too common. Horses are big, strong, fast and reactionary animals. It is easy and reasonable to have some concern when you do not understand them. Fear is crippling to having your horse trust you. Horses know they are food for others, they are hyper alert and extremely sensitive, they have to be alert to stay alive, so they do not miss anything and they know what is going to happen before it happens. Therefore, when you think you fool a horse, when you think you can act not scared and the horse will not know it, you are wrong. Your fear only increases their fear. Your fear shows you as not confident, your fear says you are not a good leader and not someone a horse wants to put his trust/life in. You see it all the time, someone is scared of horses and they try to act tough, they try and cover their fear, they try and fool the horse and they really only fool themselves. These are the most dangerous people to be around and work with. They do not listen, they do not think, they do not learn, they are paralyzed by their fear, which comes from a lack of confidence, lack of knowledge and lack of trust and then they expect their horse to trust them and believe in them, when all the time they are lying to themselves, others and the horse. A horse will not trust you if he fears you and you scream loud and clear that you do not trust a horse since you fear them. Fear gets more people and horses hurt than just about any other thing. Yet a majority of older horse owners are scared to death of getting hurt and in all their wisdom they pick horse ownership thinking it will get them over their fear, when in reality all it really does is set the horse up to fail. When your horse fails, you failed. You cannot succeed with horses if you fear them. You will never see a good horseman scared or nervous of horses.

“Most horse problems are really people problems”: Since a horse does fine in the wild where no people are around and since horses only have problems when people are involved, it only goes to reason that horse problems are caused by people. There is no wrong or right in the wild, there is only survival. So when we put horses in domesticated environments, nail metal to their feet, box them up, isolate them, ride them in pain bits and keep them in unnatural environments, they develop problems, none of which they had before we (people) got involved. Everything a horse does, every situation a horse is put in, every time a horse gets hurt, panics and runs or does some other natural horse thing, people want to blame the horse and not accept that they caused or set up what happened. With that mindset, people never change what they do, since they blame the horse and don't understand that they cause every thing that happens with a horse, which why a horse is only a reflection of what you do and if you want your horse to change you must first change. Once you accept this, you change and you get better and so your horse gets better.

“It will always get worst right before it gets better”: When pushing horses past their limit, when trying to un-teach bad learned behavior, some horses can be very resistant, some will have learned this so well that they are unwilling or unable to change. They have been made stubborn, resistant, stiff or dangerous, and they have learned the lesson well. Bad horses are not born they are made. So these horses can have the toughest problems to fix (help the horse). It is still never the horse's fault, but since a horse will fight some things, if they were pushed too fast or abused in the past or are more fear driven because of bad handling, or some studs or stallions are very strong willed and all of this can be tough to overcome. So this saying, it will always get worst right before it gets better means some horses will fight their hardest, resist their most, right before they give in. It is like a last ditch effort to survive, resist or get freedom. Therefore, it will appear to get worse and then after that final effort, many horses will submit right after their last strong fight. This can happen in many training areas and we should not be fighting with horses, but I think that is where this got started and it

has continued over time. The key is, stay focused, do not give up, insist on only one right answer and continue pressure until you get it, no matter how bad it gets. Just when you think it is getting worse it suddenly gets better. If it does not, it is never the horse's fault.

“A horse is only a reflection of the rider”: This is more of the same, if you do good your horse will do good, if you do bad, or go too fast, or do not listen to your horse, your horse will get confused, do bad or fail (not find the right answer). Since it is never the horse's fault, you make a horse do all bad or all good. If you change what you do, the horse will change what it does. Listen to your horse, it will always tell you if you are doing something right or wrong, simply look at his response. If I raise my hand and my horse runs off, I caused my horse to run off, depending on what I wanted I will assign right or wrong. If I point and ask my horse to move and the horse moves, then I did it right, since my horse did it right. All things come back to what you do and what the horse does. Since a horse is only a reflection of the rider, when you hear someone call their horse stupid, look at them and say look in the mirror. If they call their horse crazy, tell them to look in the mirror. If they have a good horse, they are good. If they have a scared horse, then they are scared, if they have a horse that fights, then they fight. All horses do what they do because of what is done to them. Bad horses are not born, they are made.

“Bad horses are never born, they are made”: All horses are born a horse, knowing nothing but instincts, survival and they are just horses. From that moment on all interactions with humans will either teach good or bad. Depending on the handling, all horses can be either good or bad. However, there are many bad horses that were made and now they are labeled. Which is why so many horses have a past (bad handling) and no future.

“Release teaches or A horse learns on the release”: Horses hate pressure, they are comfort seeking animals; they avoid stress, danger and threats (pressure). A horse will always choose easy over hard, it will walk rather than run, it will avoid conflict and seek comfort. A horse looks for release from pressure or release from being uncomfortable. Therefore, by making the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard, we use the horse's natural instinct to seek comfort and avoid pressure and this helps the horse find the right answer. So stopping or releasing the pressure or discomfort, we tell the horse what the right answer is. Release with bad timing does not work and only teaches the wrong thing, but understanding how important release is and what it teaches enables us to better communicate with our horses in a language they can understand. If you do not understand how release teaches, you cannot talk horse and the horse will know it before it happens. Rearing horses are a great example, when people do not understand release and a horse rears, most people will stop what they are doing and move away from the horse so they do not get hurt. Therefore, by giving release (move away and stopping) the horse thinks and learns, by rearing I get release, therefore rearing is the right answer, to stop pressure. Soon he knows that when he rears, you will stop pressure and then he knows what is going to happen, before it happens.

“A horse knows what is going to happen before it happens”: Horses are “Kings” of observation and they miss nothing and see everything. You cannot fool them or fake them, they know if you know and they know if you do not know. They are exceptional observers. They know because their lives depend on it. If they miss something, they know they will be dead, that is powerful motivation and that is why they are so good at it. Horses keep you honest, since they know if you are lying or trying to fool them. They know if you are scared and do not trust them and they will not trust you. They read and see the slightest change in your stance, your mood, your intentions, your thoughts, where you look and if you think you can fool them, they will set you straight every time. So be aware, a horse knows what is going to happen before it happens. If you listen to the horse they will tell you they know and they will keep you honest, by not allowing you to lie or fool them.

“Horses never lie or Horses keep you honest”: Horses do not know how to lie, they do what they do from instincts and because of what happens around them. They are reactionary animals and have to be taught how to respond with control. When a horse kicks another horse, it is not from meanness, it is not from planning, it is from truth. A kick is pure with no malice or ill intent. When a horse kicks it does so to teach or to protect or from fear. So punishing a horse does not work, they do not understand it. Since a horse knows what is going to happen before it happens, they cannot be fooled or tricked and when you try they know it. When they see that you are being sneaky and not honest, they will not trust you. When you are honest, your horse finds comfort and responds with trust. When you try to fool them they will tell you that you did it wrong.

“Your horse will tell you when you do it right”: This goes back to listening to your horse. If you do something wrong, too fast or too aggressive the horse will tell you, if you listen and watch. Pay more attention to what your horse does after you do something. Then you will know what works and what does not work. You will see when you go too fast or when you make a mistake, the horse will tell you, if you listen and watch. Then you can change what you do so the horse will change what it does. If you do the same thing, you will get the same results. If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got. If you get success, keep doing what you do. If you get failure, change what you do. This makes you better so your horse will get better.

“Predicting a horse’s response is better than reacting to his response”: This comes with knowledge and understanding of horses. If you take the time it takes, do small steps and set the horse up for success, you will be able to predict what the horse will do. Prediction is better than reaction. This forces you to know the right answer and forces you to give specific direction to get that right answer. Then you can teach the horse with less stress and confusion and you give good direction and not correction. The horse learns faster when you go slower. The slow way is the fast way. By knowing what you do and what the horse will do helps you predict behavior (good and bad). That way you can change what you do so your horse will change what it does.

“If you fail, your horse fails”: When we do something wrong, our horse does something wrong. If you do not pay attention and you allow your horse to get into trouble you will have to correct the horse. If you do well, your horse does well. If you allow your horse to fail, then you fail. If you do badly, your horse does badly. Since a horse is only a reflection of the person handling it, if you succeed, your horse succeeds and if you fail, your horse fails. It is never the horse’s fault. When you get better, your horse gets better.

“If you get the wrong answer, you asked the question wrong”: Look to yourself for the problem, help the horse find the right answer by eliminating the wrong options. If I want a horse to trot and he walks, I have not been clear, I must have given the wrong direction, the horse is telling me he is confused or does not know what I want and now I have to change what I do or give correction. Since direction is better than correction, I failed so I made my horse failed. If I ask right, if I am clear and consistent, if I set the horse up to succeed, the horse will answer right. It is never the horse’s fault and if I do good the horse will do good and if I fail the horse fails, so if I get the wrong answer, I asked the question wrong.

“Make the wrong thing hard and the right thing easy”: Horses are comfort seeking animals, they avoid stress, danger and pressure. A horse will avoid conflict and seek comfort. A horse searches for the easy way (we have to make right thing easy). Therefore, by making the right thing easy and the wrong thing hard, we use the horse’s natural instinct to seek comfort and avoid pressure to help the horse find the right answer. A horse only gets release of pressure or comfort when he gives the right answer. By keeping the pressure up, making it hard and making the horse uncomfortable, the horse will keep looking for comfort or release (the right answer) and when he finds it, you release pressure and the horse now knows that is right answer. Which is why you have to know what the right answer is, and you must know that you only release pressure when you get that right answer.

“Green on Green equals Black and Blue”: A truer saying was never said. This means that when a green rider gets a green horse they will make mistakes, be thrown or hurt and will have many bruises. The term “Green” means young and inexperience. Now this term is relative since many older riders think they are not green since they rode a horse as a kid. A lot of people get back into horses later in life and think they can jump right back in the saddle after 15 or 30 years off. They are wrong and they soon realize the bruises come much easier later in life. A partner of this saying is: Young troopers need old horses. This means inexperienced riders need an older horse that has lots of experience and has learned many lessons so it will be less likely to hurt an inexperienced rider and less likely to be confused by the inexperienced. Young horses need experienced good riders to the horse can learn the right answers. You would not have a third grader teach other third graders math. If you did, neither would learn, both would make mistakes that neither one would know were mistakes and both would learn wrong things thinking they are right, while all the time neither would know the difference. That is green on green in a nutshell.

“A horse does what it does, because you do what you do”: A horse is only a reflection of

you and what you do. That is why it can never be the horse's fault. If you do it right, the horse will do it right. If you get the wrong answer, you asked the wrong way. If you get better, your horse gets better and the horse will do right since you do right. You cause every thing when you handle a horse. You either cause what you want (right) or what you don't want (wrong). Which is why, it is never the horse's fault.

And last but not least and my personal favorite;

“Think like a Horse”: In order to think like a horse, you have to understand how a horse thinks and lives. You have to be able to see the world as a horse sees it, through a horse's eyes, with all their instincts, fear, flight response, their vision, the placement of their eyes for surround vision, what it is like to live as food for others, knowing that their best defense is their speed to flee, understanding their language, their herd behavior and actually being able to know how a horse learns, feels and lives. Only then can you approach things as if you were a horse and only then will you know how not to confuse them, not to judge or blame them and realize that they are nothing more than a reflection of you and what you do. Then you can understand why it is never their fault, why they know what is going to happen before it happens, why the slow way is the fast way, why when you get better your horse gets better and why the more you think like a horse, the more the horse will trust you, see you as a leader and will know that you know.

Therefore, if you read, live and breathe these saying, if you understand these sayings, you can apply them to most situations when dealing with horses. You will see crashes, wrecks, horses get hurt and people get hurt all the time and if you critically evaluate the situation and analyze what happened, you can probably apply one or more of these sayings that were not followed. You will see that had people applied these saying and understood them, the wreck could have been avoided.

You will notice that a lot of these sayings connect to each other like a web and all have a common theme. Many of the sayings are used to describe other sayings. They are all connected and they all put us closer to thinking like a horse. In addition, the more we do that, the more we will understand a horse and be able to listen to the horse. The more we understand a horse, the more we will communicate with them from their perspective and not ours, the more we will understand why they do what they do and how we can help them. The better we get we can learn from them and we can help them deal with their fears and instincts through mutual understanding and respect. In addition, our journey to higher learning with horses are improved and advanced. Then we get better and when that happens... well you know the rest.

Happy Trials,

Rick Gore Horsemanship

Horses Spook Less at High Noon – Ever Wonder Why?

The title is meant to get you thinking. Why is the title of this article true? If you think about what happens at high noon you will find many reasons on why this is correct. When the sun is at the highest point, normally about noon, the light is coming from directly above. When light comes from above it tends to cast less shadows. Light from above tends to create even light. When there are fewer shadows, the horse is able to see more clearly.

Horses see shades and shadows so when there is more even light from above, the horse sees better, and is more comfortable. When a horse is more comfortable it feels safer. When a horse feels safer, they are less likely to spook and react. All things are connect to other things when dealing with horses. You can read more about how a horse's vision works on my web site at this link: <http://www.thinklikeahorse.org/index-3.html#30>

When a rider is more comfortable, the horse is more comfortable. When a rider sees more, the rider can give better direction to the horse. All these things make a horse less likely to spook. Of course, there are many other things that help a horse feel confident and not spook. Things like sacking out, desensitizing, exposure to scary things, pushing a horse past their fear, doing new things with a horse to build his confidence and strength. When a horse is in shape, he feels better carrying a rider. When a rider is in shape, has good balance and stays

out of the way of the horse, the horse feels better. Conversely, if a rider is new, scared, unbalanced, has loud hands and are constantly pulling on the horse's head, then the horse cannot relax or get comfortable. This puts more pressure and stress on the horse, so the horse is NOT comfortable, is uneasy, and is more ready for something to spook at or ready to react.

Loose reins are another thing that helps a horse not spook. A horse needs to move his head up and down so it can see and adjust to different objects that are close, far, in the shade or in the sunlight. When a horse is allowed to use his head without restrictions, the horse feels better. Then the horse feels safer and more confident and that means it is less likely to spook.

Another side of this is if a horse is less likely to spook at high noon then it is more likely to spook at sunrise or sunset. Why is that? When the sun is low, it creates more shadows, longer and larger shadows. During sunset or sunrise, the sun is directly in the line of sight of the horse's eyes, that creates glare and sun wash out, so the horse has a hard time seeing and focusing on objects. This makes a horse more uncomfortable since it cannot see as well and more likely to spook. Horses do not close their eyes when the sun is in it, they do not have a sun visor or hat to give them so shade so they can see without straining. They do not have sunglasses to block out glare. All of these factors make it harder for a horse to see and that makes a horse more likely to spook.

Good clear vision = confident and less stressed horses

Poor vision, shades shadows, sun glare = fear, stress, less ability to see, cannot relax and feel safe

Remember, your job as a horseman is to make things better and easier for the horse. Your understanding of horses, your balance, your awareness, your ability to be an easy comfortable load for the horse all help the horse feel safer and more confident. That makes it easier for a horse to know and find the right answer and increases your communication with horse. All of these things may seem minor, but when added together really helps your horse. Always look at a horse with the attitude of why did my horse do that, how I did contribute to it, how could I have done better and made it easier for the horse. That is the attitude of good horsemanship.

Let's recap here. If you are "thinking like a horse" then you will understand how a horse sees the world and when the environment changes, the horse may also change. That means YOU must change. When you are confident, well balanced and give the horse his head, so he see better and when you realize that at dusk or dawn a horse's vision is decreased, then you can make adjustments to help the horse feel safer and more comfortable. Adjustments like understanding that a horse may be less secure, he may move his head more and he may stumble or trip more. If you are ready and expecting this behavior, then you can help the horse through these challenges. If you are clueless, want to blame the horse, and call him clumsy, stupid and not paying attention, then you show your lack of knowledge, understanding and your poor horsemanship.

Understanding a horse is the best gift you can give to a horse. With understanding, you are able to help a horse feel more confident, grow with the horse and be a better partner for a horse.

So, the next time you see a rider that is hurt from a horse accident, ask them what time the injury occurred. They may not understand why the time matters, but you will know.

Happy trials,

Rick Gore

Should Cows and Horses be kept together?

So, I get a question about if it is alright to keep cows and horses together. Like most all horse questions, the answer is "It depends" -

At first look, most would think, why not, cows and horses are both herd animals and they work

together so it must be fine if they live together. Horses and cattle have shared pastures for many years. This was normal in the old days and in the time of the old west. However, things have changed so there are many new considerations. Superficially, keeping them together would seem correct, but like most things, when looked at a little deeper there are many other things to be considered.

When dealing horses and making decisions about horses, I try to look at some various factors, a couple of these are what is best for the horse and what would I want if I were a horse. Like most of my articles, I try to put information out and give my opinion from my experiences and education, and then let the folks decide. I try not to give absolute yes or no answers to horse questions, since most time nothing fits every situation. Here is my short list of things that I think should be considered when making a decision to keep cattle and horses together.

Fencing: Not a fan of barbed wire, it does lots of damage to horses since their hide is NOT as tough as cow hide. Most cattle fencing can be hazardous or damaging to horses. Cows tend to be harder on fencing, they lean, scratch and tend to push through a fence unless it is strong or creates pain or discomfort, like barbed, since that pokes them, or if it is electric, since it shocks them. I would rather electric fence over barbed wire. Gates that hold horses may NOT hold cattle. Many pastures with cattle will use **cattle guards or cattle crossings** to prevent cows from leaving out gates. A horse can break a leg on these so using them can create danger to a horse. (A cattle guard is a hole or trench at a gate and it is covered with rails or pipes so cars can drive over it, but cattle see the gaps and depth as danger and will not cross it.)

Water: Cows can be harder on a watering system. Their hooves go deeper in the mud and can break low buried piping or they can break automatic watering systems easier than horses. Special protections for water delivery systems need to be considered. More water and multiple sources are suggested. If you have a pond or creek, cattle like to stand, lay and be in the mud and water, this can keep the water dirty and muddy and pass on disease or parasites. In winter, if water is under cover, shelter or inside, cattle and horses will create a path or trench pretty quick. Since horses tend to be higher than cattle, in the herd hierarchy, they may keep cattle from accessing a single source of water. Which is why it is a good idea to have more than one water supply?

Difference in Herd Behavior: Horses and Cow are both herd animals. However, they are different. Horses have a stricter pecking order enforcement and tend to apply it more than cattle. I would say horses are more predatory when they are with other herd animals. Horses have an instinctive drive to be higher, to push lower animals and to dominate others. Cattle do not do this so much. Cattle are more submissive, lazy and not as curious or involved as horses, when it comes to position in the herd. This can be a problem or may be good.

If you do not want your cattle moved, pushed or to lose weight then you would see this as a problem. If you like your horses to play and stay mentally stimulated and give your cattle some play and exercise, then this is not a problem. Horses tend to be higher than all cattle, expect maybe a bull. So cattle will move, avoid pressure and yield to horses. When horses figure this out - they like it. This makes a horse feel better and more dominate. Some horses may become more assertive, more pushier and sometime even be a little bully when it comes to the cows. Many think horses will get hurt by cows, I think cows are more likely to be hurt by horses, not necessarily intentional, but a horse will chase, bite, play or may kick at a cow and if they connect it could do damage. If cattle spook and run into a fence and a horse is in the way they can be hurt as well.

The good thing is all herd animals feel safer and more secure in numbers, so both cattle and horses benefit from being together. More sets of eyes means a better chance of spotting danger or a predator. Cattle tend to spook more than horses and are not as social so they will move or stampede easier than horses. When together this can be a bad thing.

Shelter: Again cows lean and push on things, if your shelters are not strong, I think cattle are more likely to damage or break shelters and or fences. Back to a previous point, if your shelters are enclosed, horses may claim it and may prevent cattle from using it. I like multiple shelters with multiple entry and exit points, good for both horses and cattle. Remember, cattle normally will not push past horses to get somewhere, so if your water or food is inside an enclosed area, horses may take over and not let cattle in since the cattle are lower. When horses do this, it is not because they are being mean it is because that is the way of the

horse. This can be a problem in the heat of the or when it gets cold.

Insects or Parasites: I think, in large numbers, cattle attract and have more flies than horses. Horses and cattle have different bugs, worms, parasites and diseases. This can create cross contamination and can increase the chance of passing things to each other. The one that comes to mind is hoof and mouth, this is a cow problem but horses can carry it without catching it. I find this more of a problem with large herds rather than with a few horses and a few cattle. Flies, ticks, mites and various worms will transfer to and from each other. Numbers will obviously increase all issues since it multiplies the risk.

Type of Cattle and Type of Horses: I would not keep long horn cattle with horses, but have seen this done before. Some time there is no problems, others time a horse gets horned and has to be put down. I would NOT like horns around my horses. Calves can be another issue. Horses like to play and chase them; they may even claim them and keep them from their mom, so that is not a good situation. A breeding bull can be protective or aggressive. Horses that are used to work cattle can be hurt or benefit from this. It may desensitize some horses to cattle and remove their drive to chase; it may make other horses more aggressive. Aggressive cow horses can create a hostile or stressful environment for cattle. So how horses and cows interact can be influenced by their job, breeding or other factors.

Food and Feeding: This can create life-threatening issues, so being aware of these dangers is critical to protecting your horses. **DO NOT FEED HORSES CATTLE FEED.** This is a commonly over looked issue that can be deadly for a horse. Cattle can eat anything a horse can eat and will be fine. Cattle can also eat many things that will kill a horse or make them very sick.

Rumessin (aka: monensin) is very toxic to horses and it is commonly used in cow feed or cattle products. It is like a wormer and antibiotic to help keep cattle healthy. This supplement is also put in cattle blocks as well, so taking care to ensure you only have horse salt, mineral and other blocks in your pasture are important. With growing technology, humans have found ways to make cattle grow bigger, faster and stronger, the flip side is the things they feed cattle to get this result is toxic and can be deadly to horses. Back in the old days, cattle were fed oats, barley and corn with no additives so if horses shared it was never a concern. Good rules of thumb, if you have horses - do not feed or have any Rumessin or variations of it on site. I know people that keep cattle and horses separate and then cattle take down a fence and the horse go over, eat the cattle blocks, and die. Your horse, your responsibility to keep them safe.

Pasture Care: Personally, I do not care for cow poop. It creates large patties, attracts more flies and smells more. However, it is better fertilizer than horse poop, so that is good for the pasture. Cattle will go through more pasture than horses. Horses eat different than cattle so that can strain a pasture and since horses eat grass short, cattle cannot grab short grass. Horses tend to be more picky, if they have a choice and not starving, they will not normally eat moldy or bad food. If cattle are present, the cattle will eat the moldy food and will be fine, so that keeps your pastures cleaner and removes things that are not good for horses. Some people believe that horses should get first choice in pasture and then rotate cattle in afterwards to clean up.

If you keep cattle and horses together, horse feed is normally better and more expensive than cow fee, so by feeding them together, cattle eat better but it cost more to feed them. Since horses are higher and dominate over cattle, horses will normally get first choice of food and what they leave, cattle will eat.

Birds carry West Nile virus. Cattle tend to attract more birds that eat parasites off the cattle or pick through their poop. Although not a huge problem, it could increase the chances of mites, lice or other issues.

Numbers are always a factor; too many cattle or too many horses can beat down and turn a pasture to dirt post haste. Cows do more damage to a field when they lay down, which horses do not do very much, and cattle may create bigger holes in mud where horses could get hurt. If cattle break down a fence, horses get free too.

These are just some of things that need to be considered when putting cattle and horses together. With all that said, I will summarize my short answer. If I have small numbers of both,

I would probably keep them together. No horns around my horses, multiple water sources, strong fencing and shelter, horse feed and grains only, no cattle feed and close monitoring and adjustments as needed.

Hope that helps in giving you things to think about and consider before making an educated decision.

Happy Trails,

Rick

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Some folks have 20 years of experience, others have one year of experience 20 times. -- If wishes were horses, some folks would need a lot of Hay. --
When you lose, don't lose the lesson

Rick Gore Horsemanship -- Think Like A Horse