

Trailings Prioson

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E-Book

Smart
Start
STABLE®

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The training techniques we use at Smart Start Stable are all based on what we can do to get the horse to think. We use a blend of “natural horsemanship” exercises and “French” dressage and call it “Smart Horsemanship”.

Horses have two sides of the brain, two ways they react to everything in their life. One side is the natural, reactive, instinctive side - the one that’s kept them alive throughout the ages. When danger is perceived, run first, ask questions later. Horses also have the thinking, reasoning side of the brain.

Different horses have different ratios of these two ways of thinking. The really tough, problem horses have a high sense of danger and self preservation. Unfortunately, with the reasoning ability of a 2-3 yr old child and the size of the horse, this is a very dangerous combination.

We teach the horse from the moment we meet them to think. They learn through various exercises and the way we are with them at all times, that we are asking something of them and we expect an answer. We develop them to think on their own, offer them the chance to give us the answer and let them know what the right answer is.

The more exercises we practice, the more the thinking side of the brain

works and takes over. A horse has to have a leader, we want to be that leader, not the horse. (Remember, the 3yr old Brain in the 1000 lb. horse?). When the horse perceives danger we **MUST** be the leader and show them that it’s going to be fine. It’s like changing the subject on a child who is focused on the piece of candy and showing them the toy. When the horse is afraid of the plastic we ask it to bend, move it’s right

front foot, move its left hip, stay soft, something, anything, to take it’s mind off the plastic. In essence we say to the horse ‘ you know it’s

there, I know it’s there, it’s a non issue - we’re too busy doing this and this and this and this to worry about some silly plas-

tic'. We've built up the horse's thinking side and teach it to take over for the reactive side of the brain. The biggest "secret" is that **THE ANSWER IS IN THE RELEASE!** We allow the horse to try different answers and when they give us the answer we are looking for we "release" the pressure so they know that was what we wanted. The "pressure" could be the rein, the leg, our body language, our voice. We don't mind when a horse makes a mistake, it just means we get to practice it more! Horses always assume that they are giving the right answer and they never lie. If you say that your horse only bucks the first two minutes you get on, that horse thinks he's supposed to and that it's OK to buck the first two minutes you get on. If you don't teach him differently he will assume that there's nothing wrong with that. (As a side note: **A HORSE SHOULD NEVER BUCK, EVER** if it is with you - whether riding, on a lunge line, leading). Every moment of every day that you are with your horse it is learning, good or bad, what you expect of it. That's how they stayed alive in the wild, always adapt to the surroundings, always find the comfort zone. Always know who the leader is. If you aren't the leader, your horse will be. Period. We teach the horse the exercises to understand that humans are the leader and they can rely on us for safety. We teach the people "horse language" so that they learn how to be the leader and show their horse how to rely on it's people. If you see us at shows you won't always see perfect horses/riders. We are all in the learning process and some of our horses had **HUGE** problems when they came. Just to be there on a horse that isn't rearing, running off with the rider, going absolutely crazy in a stall is a major accomplishment for some of the horses we show! We

teach problem horses how to deal with the human world so that they begin to understand it and learn to trust that life is OK. Each horse is wired differently, just like humans and when they come to us they have also been influenced by the humans in their life. Most horses never truly understand the training process and the majority aren't even "broke". They're trained to do "stuff" but they don't truly do things for their humans and because they want to, they just submit and do what they've been programmed to do. If you do something not in the program it can be rather upsetting to them as they have no good way to figure out how to deal with it.

Starting a horse under saddle is the most important time of a horse's life. The first time a horse does anything sets the tone for how it will react to that thing for a very long time. When a horse is being started under saddle it is first taught to think, then to respond. Before the first saddling and mounting, tools are built into the horse to stop any bad reaction, like bucking. If the thought of bucking enters the horse's brain, it is immediately replaced with a thought of something being asked of it by it's person such as give to the bit, soften the shoulder, move the hip. Remember **A HORSE SHOULD NEVER BUCK**. If we leave you with anything to learn about our philosophy on horses, it's that they are extremely intelligent creatures if you can learn some "horse language" and it becomes like ESP when you have worked a horse long enough. They can literally feel like they read your mind, they pay such close attention to your body language. It is a wonderful feeling to have your horse trust and respond that closely with you! Teach your horse that you are with them and they will learn to be with you.

The horses are our best teachers and as time has gone by since we first posted our training philosophies on the internet we've honed our focus and training methods and will continue to do so as the horses teach us more and more. Horses are our best teachers. When someone asks us who's natural horsemanship teaching we follow, our answer is "the horse's". We aren't even really doing "natural horsemanship" anymore, we're doing "Smart Horsemanship". We focus on teaching the horse to think, to understand that we are trying to communicate with them. As we develop our skills at training the horse we've found exercises that are like keys that open doors into the horse's brain. They are incredibly intelligent willing animals that seemingly have ESP when the thinking side of their brain is developed. Our primitive attempt to speak "horse language" - which is actually very little spoken word - is well received by the horse and as the relationship between horse and human develops the horse actually helps to cover for our lack of communication.

In the beginning we keep the communication very simple and yet it is the basic premise of what we do throughout the training. We ask for one thing, and stop asking when we get a correct answer.

As more questions and answers are learned they can be blended like a joy stick on a video game. We can ask the horse to soften to the bit, lower it's head and move the right front foot to the right at 90 degrees all in one thought we put into it. The horse essentially reads our mind by reading our body. As the lines of communication become clearer and clearer between the horse and rider subtle body movements by the rider produce wonderful movements by the horse. The horse understands what we are asking and offers the answer. Our hardest thing to do as a human is to ask the horse and allow them to do it without us helping. Superior dressage is not done with "aids", it is done with cues. We tell the horse what we want and they do it for us. We cannot help them do it nearly as well as they can do it for us.

As the horse advances in training, within the second or third month on a newly started horse, for example, we teach them 3 basic steps which will develop into a canter pirouette. It takes time to develop the balance of our cues and their strength and understanding but they love learning such challenging things. Our horses get great satisfaction in accomplishing something they worked hard to figure out for us. It makes them more and more confident and feeling secure both in their riding and in their life as a horse. Our exercises teach the horse to figure out for itself how to collect, how to engage, how to achieve true bend from the flexion in the poll to the tail. We initiate the exercise, they have to complete the job. Because the horse figures out engagement, collection and bend themselves we can improve the gaits of the horse to achieve their fullest potential. Our show horses are not gifted in their physical talents with 8 and 9 gaits, they are well trained and they give us 110% at the shows. We are most proud that our horses compete so well at a national level against horses that have phenomenal talent.

What we've explained above is mainly about theory. The actual concrete results are things that we take for granted, things that other people notice when they are in our barn, at the shows watching our horses, watching us work with our horses.

Some examples:

Horses stand in the grooming racks, usually without being tied, sometimes even when we're putting grain and hay in the stalls, walking right past them.

Horses often share the grooming rack with another horse, neither of which is tied. We've even had a stallion next to a mare like it was no big deal.

Horses stand while being mounted. They also stand still when we're not working them. When they aren't working they know it's time to just relax. They perk right back up and are ready to get back to work as soon as we touch a rein, usually when we reach for it.

Our horses love their work. They think of it like a puzzle, they are a part of it, trying to figure out what we want and doing their best to accomplish it. They are quite satisfied with

themselves when they figure it out and it adds to their attitude of being a great horse.

We lead horses often 3 and 4 at a time to the pasture and back. Our horses load in trailers 100% of the time, no bribing, no tranquilizing, no pushing, cussing, pleading, praying.

We've been known to accidentally leave a horse standing in the aisle at a show and forget we haven't tied them or that no one's holding onto them while we're putting things away after a class. We even did a tack change in the warm up ring once and didn't realize no one was holding the horse we were taking tack off of while we tacked up the other horse.

We have a tendency to ride to close to others at a show as our horses are expected to not make any notice of other horses working. They've been exposed to new and problem horses being worked in the round pen while they are working so it becomes no big deal for them to keep on working while another horse thinks the world could end at any moment (we've seen other's horses at shows feeling overwhelmed and totally abandoned - our horses figure that the other horse is just "going through something" and that their people will be showing them a better way soon)

Our horses NEVER will go off bucking mindlessly. In fact there's never a buck. The most we get would be an indignant kick out at the whip when they weren't thinking forward with their hind leg and they were sure they were right in what they were offering, even if they weren't.

We NEVER lunge our horses to "let off steam". If they are excited, we tune them in by using their brain, not by trying to physically wear them down so they relax.

As you will notice, not all of our horses are perfect and match the above 100% of the time. They are all at different stages of training AND none of us, not us and not our horses are perfect. We've all been seen heading down the barn aisle occasionally to catch our horse that "made a move"! We allow them to make decisions, they don't always make the right one. The majority of the horses we work with are horses that had problems, most mentally, some emotionally and some physically, some a

combination of these three things. It's not that we want problem horses, they just seem to show up. For many of them, this was their last stop, they would have had to have been put down if we couldn't fix them. This includes some of our national winning show horses.

It's been a few years since we've updated our training philosophy page. Our principles in training are still the same; they've just been refined and defined in more detail. The past philosophy pages dealt more with basic expectations of the horse and person, this page is more defined as to the finer details of training.

Our exercises are all designed to teach the horse in the way the horse understands. We teach one specific thing at a time, for example, move the right front leg exactly at 90 degrees to the body. Move the left front leg to a 45 degree back. As the horse learns that we can move any part of their body simply by asking we build on the simple. We take one piece and another and start blending them. It becomes like a joy stick for a computer game. We can ask the horse to soften and give in the nose and to lower the head all with one cue, the rein. The exercises get more complex as the horse learns and the cues become more refined and transfer into the horse reading the rider or handler's body cues so closely that it seems as if the horse is reading their person's mind. Horses love to do this and look at it like a puzzle that -needs solving. They are so pleased with themselves when they figure it out and learn to love their work.

One of the most difficult things for us as the handler or rider is that we do not need to help the horse to do anything. We simply need to ask and release when the horse answers correctly. As the horse progresses the releases become grouped so closely together that they become softening. If we give a full release to the horse we are, in essence, hanging up the phone and then having to dial back again. The horse is listening to all that we say and we need to keep the communication going. It is hard for us as humans to have just a bit more patience to allow the horse to figure it out and not pull on the rein to make it happen.

The beginning learning starts with the use of one rein. It makes it clearer to the horse what we are asking, as there is only one cue. It also helps the rider to be more specific and focus better. It takes away the reins for riders who are using them for balance. Since horses simply cannot listen to two reins talk at the

same time (could you listen to two conversations at the same time if you had a phone in each ear?) the rider learns to talk first on one rein at a time. As the rider develops he/she will learn to speak on each rein separately. For example, one rein will be the outside rein to determine the bend of the neck while the other rein will ask the horse to soften and give. As the training progresses with the horse and rider the outside rein can ask the horse to have a specific bend in the neck and throughout the body, the vertical-ness of the face and the speed of the horse and the amount of collection desired through the use of half halts. The inside rein will not only soften the horse for flexion, it will help to get the horse to take the outside rein.

We believe that it is the horse's job to do the work. We ask and try to stay out of the way! It is the horse that does the leg yield, the half pass, the shoulder in, the canter pirouette, the go, and the stop. We only put in the request. We have developed a half halt the horse understands. Half halts are really quite simple if we allow the horse to do them! The horse must learn to be in self-carriage, which means we do not carry them!!! Half halts are easy to understand if we know what part of the horse needs to be self-carrying again and talk to it.

Horses are much like teenagers. They would rather flop on the couch and con someone else into taking out the garbage. Horses are good at getting us to plead and beg them to do things instead of just asking and being able to back up our request. All of our exercises have a back up plan. If we ask the horse to soften to the bit and they ignore it we can add energy and ask them to move their hip over. They soon learn that it is easier to give to the bit than to move the hip. If an exercise doesn't have a back up plan sooner or later the horse won't answer the request and we would have to resort to pulling on the rein., driving more with the leg and/or whip and it would end up where we would be working harder than the horse.

So, if you would rather your horse do the work and you just put in requests, we can show you a great way to accomplish it!

