

THE HORSE'S MENTAL FITNESS

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(PART 4)

TRAINING HORSES DOES NOT ALWAYS PROCEED ACCORDING TO PLAN. MANY DIVERSE PROBLEMS CAN ARISE AND IT TAKES YEARS OF EXPERIENCE TO BE ABLE TO OBTAIN DESIRED RESULTS WITHOUT UPSETTING THE HORSE AND LOOSING ITS GOOD WILL



TEMPERAMENTAL PROBLEMS:

Sometimes horses who are basically willing, reliable and good to ride, suddenly develop temperamental changes. The first thing the trainer should ask himself is whether the horse has had sufficient and regular exercise, and also whether he has perhaps been asked for too much too soon. He should also check that the horse is receiving the right amount of food and balanced diet (e.g. not too much protein). The horse should also be checked by a veterinary surgeon to ensure that there is no physical reason (e.g. in the horse's back or mouth) for the behavioural change or resistance. If these points have been checked and eliminated as possible causes, the rider will need to think carefully

about his training methods. Has the horse's training been too one-sided recently? During the training sessions, is there more time devoted to the serious work than to loosening and relaxation? Is the horse ready for and able to cope with the advanced work? Has it been "gymnasticised" equally on both reins, and so is it sufficiently "connected" and "through"?

BLOCK TO AN EXERCISE:

Some horses who have so far worked willingly develop a resistance for "block" to one exercise in particular which seems impossible to overcome. Often the trainer makes the mistake of practising the exercise over and over again which only serves to confirm the horse in its resistance. Instead, an experienced trainer will concentrate on getting the horse to meet the basic preconditions for the exercise and put off practicing the exercise itself until much later. With patience he will succeed in rebuilding the horse's confidence and with better preparation the problems with the exercise usually disappear. Although back to basic seems to be a retrograde step, sometimes it is the only way to start moving forwards again.

VARIATION IN WORK:

There should be a variation in the horse's training. Repeating the same exercise every day can quickly have a deadening effect, especially if the lessons always follow the same pattern. Obviously each training session should be made up of three phases: loosening (riding in), the main phase (work), and relaxation (winding down). However, just as a show



EXCESSIVE REPETITION AND “DRILLING” DESTROYS THE HORSE’S ENTHUSIASM

how you can tell that this horse is mentally fit during training. A correctly trained and relaxed horse can be ridden better according to plan. His energy can be regulated and he can be collected easily along with being turned in balance, as well as being ridden on a light contact to the utmost of his ability without harming his health and well being. The rider also stays relaxed, full with energy, and in constant control. However, any healthy and well-schooled horse can be ruined quite quickly - health wise and performance wise - if handed over to a worse rider with less feel and bad nerves.

jumper is not jumped over a course every day, a dressage horse should not be asked to perform the same exercises, in the same order, on a daily basis. Excessive repetition and “drilling” destroys the horse’s enthusiasm for its work and the end result is a dull performance lacking in expression. For the training to be successful, the trainer needs to be able to spot immediately when the horse is beginning to lose energy and concentration which is a point that should not be reached, thus the daily training session should be ended while the horse is still working well.

CORRECTION OF BAD HABITS:

Resistances and bad habits during training can usually be traced back to insufficient basic training, over forcing the horse, misunderstandings between rider and horse, or the use of constraint. If you want to correct a horse during training you should respect his mentality; for example, if an aid is applied energetically as a correction, it should be used only with the context of the forward-driving aids. Harsh or punishing rein aids should never be used. They are un-horseman-like and usually have a reverse effect; the horse

becomes “dead” in its mouth and even less responsive to the rein aids. Before re-training a spoilt horse, two questions should be answered:

1. Why is the horse difficult? Are there conformation faults which make it unrealistic to spend a long time re-training the horse?
2. Does the rider and trainer have the necessary experience and temperament to do this work successfully?

If answers to the above questions are positive, work on the horse can then start.

SIGNS OF GOOD TRAINING:

A well trained horse has a contented expression, a correctly developed musculature, and a friendly, trusting relationship with people. It should satisfy all the requirements for “looseness” in the advanced as well as the basic exercise under the rider; it should swing through its back and work with its mouth closed but not tensed. Furthermore, the tail should also be free from tension, “carried” and swinging in time with the movement, and the movement of the ears should denote contentment and alertness. That’s

KEEP YOUR HORSE MENTALLY FIT:

It is important at top form competitions to keep your horse's mentality fit in between competitions. It is essential to keep a confident relationship between the horse and his rider and/or groom. The most perfect training system is useless if the horse is not kept in good condition mentally. All guidelines are valueless if the horse becomes nervous, if he turns sore or becomes a coward, and if he does not work willingly. The groom plays a big part in keeping a horse physically and mentally in good condition. Peak fitness can only be achieved if the horse is content and has received the best of care without being pampered. A warning signal is if a horse stops eating, although this can be due to illness, teeth problems or worms, it might be due to a little too much training.

To sum up the above, the deciding factors in keeping a horse in top competition form is not just medical care, but much more of the basic training, built up logically and systematically and the establishment of a trusting relationship between horse and rider. **HT**