

Four Front

September 2010



ACPAT Celebrates
25th Anniversary

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy

HORSE BEHAVIOUR – TREATMENT FROM AN EQUINE PROFESSIONAL

SIX STEPS TO STANDING STILL

Sue Palmer MSc Veterinary Physiotherapist (ACPAT Cat A) Intelligent Horsemanship Recommended Associate MCSP EBW BHSAI based in Stafford www.holistichorsehelp.com.

Picture the scene – the horse physio (substitute vet / dentist / farrier / saddler / other equine professional as appropriate) arrives to work with you and your horse. You've taken the morning off work, and kept him in his stable so that there's no problems with not being able to catch him (you know that sometimes even a feed isn't tempting enough if he's only just been turned out!). He's been carefully groomed so that the equine professional doesn't get smothered in the dust that he's so enjoyed collecting in the field, and he's happily munching his way through a couple of sections of the best hay you can offer. His feet are picked out, his mane and tail combed through, his stable clean so that you don't have to stand in his droppings whilst he's being treated, and it's clear that you love him dearly.

And then, after all the care and attention you've given him to make sure everything is just right, he lets you down – he won't stand still. The physio wants to see him stand on the yard so she can look at his conformation, but he keeps moving his feet. She wants to check how level his pelvis and shoulders are, but he won't stand square. She tries to run her hands over his body to assess him, and he turns round to nip her, and waves a back leg in her direction when she finds a touchy spot, before squashing her against the wall, barging you out the way, then traipsing round his stable with you in tow on the end of the lead rope.

It's a common problem – we spend so much time 'doing' with our horses that we forget to teach them about 'not doing'. Where being with our horse should be our leisure time, all too often it gets squeezed into being a 'duty' that has to be done before



Sue Palmer

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we can get to work / get home to look after the kids / cook dinner for the husband, and any peace and tranquillity is lost. So it's not surprising really that a lot of the horses I work with aren't very good at keeping their feet still. It's good to know, though, that there are some simple steps you can put into place that will make a big difference in just a few short sessions. Remember that the best reward you can offer your horse for getting it right is peace and quiet, keeping out of his space and just leaving him alone to be a horse. Anything else that we train the horse to see as a reward (e.g. a stroke) is secondary to this.

1) Pick an area to work in (the stable

is a good place to start), and ask your horse to stand still. Stand directly in front of him, square on to him with your toes pointing towards his toes, with a smile in the rope (i.e. a loop in the rope between your hand and the clip of the rope).

2) Take a step backwards away from him. If he moves his feet, immediately put them back to where they were originally, instantly release any pressure you used to do so, then take a step back again.

3) When he stands for 5 seconds, step towards him and give a gentle stroke as a reward, then step back again.



Sue Palmer assessing a horse's back at a Monty Roberts demonstration

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4) Progress to being able to step back to the end of a lunge line without your horse moving unless he's asked to do so.

5) Before long he'll realise that you're asking him to stand still until asked to do something different, and more importantly, because you're reacting to his actions, he will know that you are listening to him.

6) Practise this in different areas (in the stable, on the yard, in the field, on the track to the field), and soon you will have a horse who can willingly stand for treatment from his equine professional.

Teaching your horse to stand still when asked will have far reaching effects, not only affecting his attitude and manners on the ground, but also improving his ridden work. Horses don't think like people, they think like horses, and it's up to us to try to understand this before we try and influence it.

DIARY OF EVENTS

8th-11th September 2010	BEVA Conference (BEVA Member rates for ACPAT members)
19 September 2010	British Veterinary Rehabilitation and Sports Medicine Association. 'Rehabilitating the Veterinary Neurological Patient'
25th September 2010	Pilates in Horse Riders
23rd October 2010	WERC Pulse TMM Course
31st October 2010	Canine Sports Seminar
26/27th February 2011	ACPAT Annual Seminar

For Further details please see www.acpat.org