

APRIL 2012

FREE ONLINE MONTHLY

LOCAL HORSE

Magazine



The Magazine on the Scene

www.localhorsemagazine.com.au

The only bit a horse needs is a bit of understanding.™

Whispering Acres Horse Starting and Training
www.whisperingacres.com



This lovely Thoroughbred mare (left) could easily have joined the 60,000 horses in Australia each year that are sent to the knackery. Why? Because she had become so dangerous, she was sold on – and on – until someone was willing to see it a different approach might help her to regain that lost trust.

Do you think she would be as relaxed as this if I had brought to this session the same pain and confusion that she had experienced up until this point? I doubt it.

If we are truly here to make things better for the horse, to give the horse a better deal, we have to learn to do things differently to the way they've been done in the past.

We have to question traditions, looking at them always through the eyes of the horse.

We have to decide whether we want to practice showmanship or simply good horsemanship. If you think about it, the two are very different. Showmanship is about the glory of 'man', the 'person'. There is no room for the horse – the word horse doesn't even appear. Horsemanship, on the other hand, puts the horse first. Where he should be.

I always say, I may sit on top of the horse, but I am not above the horse. I strive to always be one with the horse. Let me leave you to with something to think on. Rules currently require that those who wish to compete in dressage must do so with a bit. Eventers and showjumpers in Australia are permitted to compete bitless. Yet, if a horse were going to become uncontrollable, it would be more likely to happen during those activities than in the dressage ring. Think it is time that competitors and their horses have the choice to compete bitless.

Some federations already allow it and the Royal Dutch Equestrian Federation (KNHS) has approved a rule that allows riders to compete bitless for the next three years as a trial. If successful, it may set an example that will encourage even more federations to follow. Even if we don't want to consider bitless riding from a competition point of view, maybe we should consider it from a humane point of view through the eyes of the horse. An example is the FEI blood rule, as it relates to the abuse of a bit.

My beautiful quarterhorse mare (right) demonstrates just how easily, and softly, such moves can be achieved with trust and understanding, not pain, through the eyes of the horse.

Until next time – safe riding and God bless
Carlos Tabernaberti



Let me give you another example. I believe by riding bitless, it is possible to conserve the horse's mouth for life and preserve the integrity of his overall wellbeing.

Yet, tradition tells us that bits provide control, as in the case of Spanish tradition where the name for a bit is *fieno*, which literally means 'hooker'. When has a bit ever stopped a bucking or belting horse? Never! And, I've been on a few myself. If it did, there would be no need for the huge range of leverage bits. I ride without a bit because I have found them to be unnecessary for control. Control is achieved through clear, pain-free communication, understanding and cooperation between horse and rider. It cannot be achieved when pain is involved.



In starting this brumby mare (left), I found she was more forward without any halter or bitless bridle. If you notice, I am in an open paddock, not a round yard or arena. If a bit's going to bit, she's got a good chance of going a long way! But we have trust and understanding. She is choosing to work with me because we have a relationship that does not rely on force.

And sure, if I was leading this little brumby filly (below) with a bit she would follow – but would she understand that she could walk calmly and safely in her first pony-up lesson?

I can't say this often enough – every time you are interacting with your horse, you are demonstrating whether he should trust you. You can't force trust. It's a precious gift that is terribly easy to lose, and terribly difficult – sometimes impossible – to restore. It's why I work so hard to speak on behalf of the horse and to bring an understanding of what the horse wants us to know.



When I first said this, I had no idea the impact it would have. But as people continue to discover the benefits of working bitless, they keep telling me how well this captures the experience.

So, as patron of the first bitless riding club in Ireland (Diamond's Lane Bitless Riding Club), which I will be helping to launch while I'm in Ireland in April/May for clinics, lessons and training, I thought it might be a good time to explain why I'm so passionate about putting the wellbeing of the horse first and always working through the eyes of the horse.

Benjamin Disraeli was known to have said 'where knowledge ends, religion begins'. Well, from a horse training perspective, I would say 'where knowledge and patience end, force begins'.

And when force begins, trust ends.

Much of my work begins when people bring me a horse whose trust in humans has been replaced with fear. Before I can even start to build a foundation on such a horse, I must help both horse and human to restore their trust and help them learn to work together with understanding, through the eyes of the horse.

Trust is earned through confident, consistent and kind leadership. It's that part of the equation to which the horse brings trust, obedience and respect (OCCLE – TOR). When it comes to consistency, the pressure of a bit, just sitting on the tongue without pressure on the reins, even if you ride on the buckle, raises questions about consistency in our training because of the amount of pressure it exerts on the central lingual nerve.

I know that there are many who say things like 'I ride on the buckle; I have light hands' or 'a bitless bridle causes pain as well'.

This is a very complex issue, but I would say, any tool in the hands of a person that is used without understanding can cause pain. That includes the use of a bitless bridle in unsteady or heavy hands. In this case, I use 'understanding' to describe the proper use of the legs, seat and hands as riding aids rather than being dependent on artificial aids like whips and spurs. My quarterhorse mare (above) is soft and responsive to my requests, lowering her quarters and instantaneously using her body correctly, rather than being forced through the mouth by the use of a bit. Yet, look at the slack on my rein.

Do I need a bit? Or whips or spurs?

