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Introducing Carlos Tabernaberrí and Training through the eyes of the Horse

www.whisperingacres.com

Scenic Rim Local Horse Magazine is proud to introduce a new article series from the man making waves in traditional horsemanship circles.

Carlos Tabernaberrí, who has been called the next generation of horsemen, the horse's horseman and the gentlest horseman yet to touch a horse, travels regularly throughout Australia and overseas to empower people to be successful with their horses without bits, spurs, whips or force – just a bit of understanding.

Now he'll be writing regularly for Scenic Rim Local Magazine, helping readers to develop the confidence to work successfully with their horses in a way the horses understand. Regardless of your discipline – dressage, eventing, showjumping, western or hacking – the results you can achieve together with your horse are remarkable. Just ask those who have been lucky enough to work with Carlos – or visit his website at www.whisperingacres.com and read more about Carlos and his work! Your horse will love you for it!

In this first article, Carlos shares the basis of his approach – borrowed from the horses themselves – that will help you see training – through the eyes of the horse.

Let me start by saying whether or not you will be successful with your horse doesn't depend on how long you've been around horses or how many books you've read or videos you've watched. Horses do not read résumés or books or watch humans on videos. What horses do watch for is whether you are a Confident, Consistent and Kind Leader to whom they can give their Trust, Obedience and Respect.

This simple concept is the foundation for absolutely everything I do with horses. Each letter in the formula (CCKL = TOR) is essential, because if you don't demonstrate all of the behaviours on the left of the equation (Confidence, Consistency, Kindness, Leadership), your horse will not demonstrate the behaviours on the right (Trust, Obedience, Respect).

Many horse owners believe success with their horse depends on having the horse's respect. That's one element, sure, but before you get that respect, you must build a relationship through confident, consistent and kind treatment, that establishes trust and shows you to be the sort of leader your horse wants to follow. He will demonstrate the respect you seek by yielding and moving out of your space and by paying attention to your requests.

Confidence

So what is a confident leader? One who is matter-of-fact and uses assertive but not aggressive, body language that the horse understands. Horses with strong personalities may push passive or hesitant handlers around, knowing instinctively that the verbal or physical message is inconsistent with the intent. One of the most common ways I see handlers demonstrate a lack of confidence is to look back at the horse when leading him. No horse leading a herd looks back to see if the rest are following – what better way to tell the horse you have no idea where you're going.



To get frustrated if the horse challenges, and push the horse around, only proves what the horse thinks – that the handler is a poor, untrustworthy leader. We already look like ugly predators to the horse, with our ears pinned back and eyes in the front of our heads. I want to speak the horse's language and become a leader on which he can rely, always, in good or bad situations.

Consistency

Horses are 100% consistent, 100% of the time and they look for the same in us. Consistency leads to understanding; inconsistency confuses the horse and creates stress that leads to undesirable behaviour. Many people describe their horses as 'good to ride some days, but not others'. I don't believe horses want to misbehave. These horses simply reflect inconsistent handlers. And by inconsistency, I mean something as simple as correcting a horse one day for nibbling your arm or walking ahead of you and not the next. Something is either okay or not okay, every minute of every day.



Kindness

To me, kindness is not feeding my horse twice a day or buying him a rug. Feeding my horse is my responsibility. Kindness is about understanding the horse's nature and working with it. It's about providing good leadership, being completely consistent, asking the horse (rather than demanding or telling the horse what to do) and then giving him the time to work out what is being asked of him. It's our responsibility to know the horse – not his to understand us first.



Leadership

Good leaders present clear requests to the horse in his language in an assertive, consistent and matter-of-fact way. Good leaders are also willing to learn from the horse, prove they have the right leadership qualities and then demonstrate those qualities every single time they work with the horse.

Trust

Horses will either trust you or not. You can't force it, but you can demonstrate whether or not your horse should trust you every time you handle your horse. That said, it's terribly easy to give your horse a reason to lose trust in you and very hard – sometimes impossible – to restore that trust. Horses are very forgiving by nature, but they don't necessarily forget bad treatment. Most, given time, can learn to trust again and accept a kind handler.

Obedience

Through confident, consistent and kind leadership, your horse will learn to trust you and develop the calmness and focus that means he will not be easily distracted or confused. He will follow you into difficult situations (think about water crossings or introducing spooky objects) because he will know that you are there to help him. He will know that you will work to put your requests in a way that he understands, or try different approaches until you find one he understands, and always reward even his smallest attempts to do as you ask.

Respect

Once you have your horse's respect, based on confident, consistent and kind leadership, he will have no reason to react to you in self defence, even if you need to nurse a wound or give an injection. Horses don't reason – they can only interpret your actions. And actions speak louder than words, even soothing words, to the horse.

We expect our horses to respect us – but think on this. How do you show respect to your horse? Try a few of these ideas and see how your horse responds:



Cleaning hooves – instead of just walking up and grabbing a foot or pinching a chestnut to get your horse to lift up his leg, rub the horse gently to give him a chance to see you don't intend to hurt him before you reach for his leg. Then, when he gives it to you, give him a reassuring rub on the knee (or hock, if it is a back leg). Hold the hoof low and gently put it back on the ground when you're done, rather than just dropping it with a thump.

Never walk under your horse's neck – it's a terrible invasion of his space. We don't allow the horse to bring his head over ours or knock a hat off. Of course we need to control the horse's space in order for us to be on top of the pecking order. But there is no need to abuse your power – it's not all right for you to crowd your horse but not for him to crowd you. Crowding is about dominance, rather than creating a relationship by respecting the horse. It takes very little extra time or effort to walk around him or gently yield the side of his face so that you can put yourself on the other side without moving your feet.



Tightening the girth – rather than tightening the girth immediately, pull it up and let it down several times before initially fastening it. Doing this, I've never had a girth horse. Then ask the horse to walk a few circles and tighten it again. Then I gently lift his foot, bending my knees to save my back, and slowly let the horse find his own stretch. If the horse wants to drop his foot, let him do that and start again. It's important that he find the stretch and that you don't pull on his leg. In human terms, it's the difference between doing a hamstring stretch at your own pace, or having someone put your leg in a straight position and yank it towards your head! Do each of the horse's front legs to ensure the girth isn't pinching and that his elbows and legs can move freely and naturally.

In the next article, we'll look at a very common problem – the hard-to-catch horse – and a better way to meet him in the paddock.

Until then – good riding and God bless! Carlos