

Becoming **Aware**

Melbourne-based trainer Carlos Tabernaberi is known worldwide for the remarkable results he achieves with foals, starting young horses under saddle, retraining horses and rehabilitating abused horses. Carlos has been described as the 'gentlest horseman' yet to touch a horse. His absolutely gentle approach uses consistent, confident and kind leadership to develop trust, obedience and respect in the horse, regardless of riding discipline. Visit Carlos' website at www.whisperingacres.com.au to read stories from some of the people and horses he's worked with.

I'm really looking forward to sharing a bit about what I've learned from horses with you each issue. Let me start by saying you don't need to come from a long line of horsemen or women to have success with your horse. The first person to ride a horse almost 6,000 years ago had to learn by studying his own horse and the horses around him...and by trial and error. (Because most horses ridden are geldings, I'll keep things simple and refer to horses using 'he', 'his' or 'him' unless I'm talking about a specific mare.)

With so many techniques and methods being sold, it's no wonder there are so many confused riders and horses. I like to think of my training not as a 'method' but rather as a philosophy that makes sense to my horse and to those I educate and re-educate.

Confusion leads to misunderstanding, lack of trust and respect and therefore poor training, or no training...or both.

Undesirable behavioural problems are the end result.

Just like you and me, your horse is an individual whose training program may have to be continually adjusted to suit his or her learning ability and speed. Don't make your horse fit the program.

As a trainer (and remember, you train your horse every time you handle it, for good or bad) I come across hundreds of horses that have been forced to fit a program. While most of these horses, because of their forgiving nature, may unwillingly adjust to the program, along comes your horse who by disposition or previous handling, is not as forgiving. In time, that horse becomes like a hand grenade with a saddle, waiting to go off. Slowly, the safety pin is coming out and sooner or later...BOOM! This is when we say, "Gee, my horse has never done that before!"

To have a great relationship with your horse, you first have to have a great relationship with yourself. Get to know how you think and act, what your body language is saying and what things you focus on. Think about the questions you ask yourself and most importantly, the answers you give. They all have an effect on you and therefore on your horse. If you haven't had a great relationship with your horse in the past, think about what you can do to change the present. After all, you must be

on horse time too...in the 'now'.

Like anything we want from our horses, we must first become it ourselves, so if you want your horse to be

responsive, be responsive yourself. Want your horse to focus on you? Focus on him. Want a soft and supple horse? Then become soft and supple yourself. Suppleness to me starts in the rider's and horse's minds and that leads to suppleness and softness in the body.

To do this, you need to develop a few tools; feel, timing and balance but first you need to develop your awareness.

You have to know where your horse is at mentally and physically, then you will also know where his feet are. When you have this awareness, you'll be on the way to having the feel, timing and balance you need to be able to work with your horse in a way he understands. More importantly, you will have taken care of your horse's mind, body and spirit.

The awareness you gain by becoming a thinking rider will alert you to your own—and your horse's—actions and reactions. This will let you make positive training adjustments to suit you both. It's the basis of a true 50-50 partnership but you must first (and always) give 100% of your half of the partnership. Most programs or systems are 90/10 propositions. We give 10% and expect a true partnership. It won't happen.

Be aware...pay attention to your horse and adjust your ways until you get it right for your horse. Emphasise a stress-free approach and you will create calmness and positive results and avoid possible wrecks. Recognise when your horse is trying, whether on the ground or under saddle. Allow your horse to make mistakes along the way (you will make them too!) and don't focus so much on the end result.

Let me give you an example: If you are asking your horse to back up, recognise the slight shift of his weight moving backwards through awareness and feel. That's when you



have to use the right timing to give the release. Don't get caught up in the end result. It's much more important to quit doing something at the right time than to wait for the end result before you stop. This is how you keep your horse calm and make sure he or she will understand and be able to learn anything you ask of him.

Give it a go

The best way to experience awareness and feel is to close your eyes. Then you have to rely on your other senses. Have someone hold your horse on a lunge rein or lead rope and drop your reins. Focus on how your horse feels beneath your seat and legs; think about what you're about to ask, which is to back up. When you're ready, have the person holding your horse ask him to take a step backwards. Can you feel the point where his weight first shifts back? Do you know which foot moves first? Second? In what sequence do his feet move when he is backing up? Remember that feeling each time you ask him to back up, then think how you can apply this same principle in other tasks to help develop your awareness and feel.

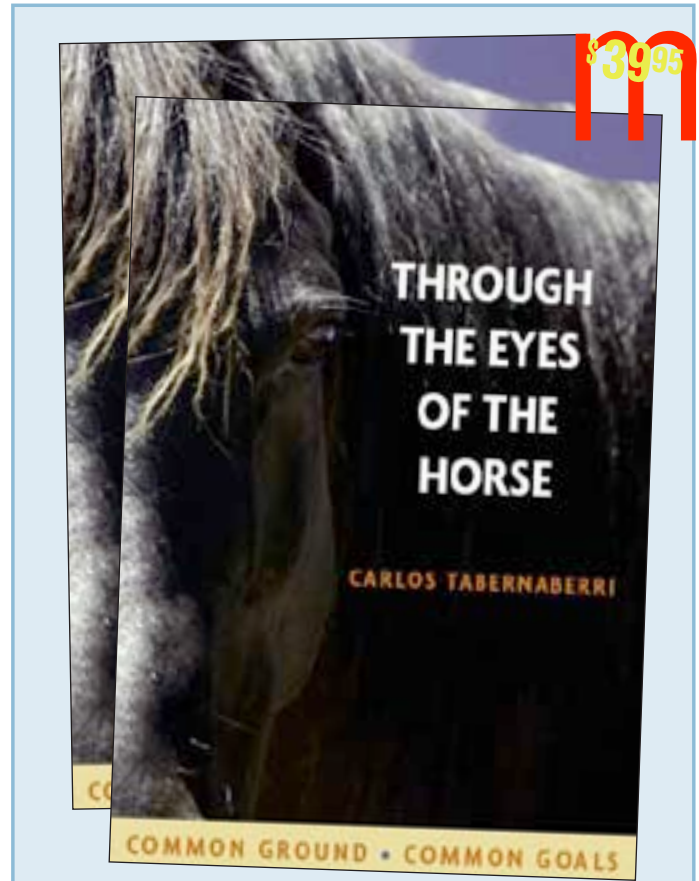
Here's another example. If you are watching the Olympics, it doesn't matter if the sprinter gets off the mark first but a good start is important because it determines how well he or she will cross the finish line. So don't expect the result without first making sure you have a good start. Just give this approach a try in all areas of your training.

I am not saying my way is *the* way, because my way is simply the horse's way...I learned by looking at things through the eyes of the horse. If you are also able to think about things from your horse's point of view, I know your horse will be a willing partner and thank you for your efforts...but only if you are willing to adjust your approach, methods and techniques to be those of your horse. If you put your requests in a way that your horse understands, he or she will know what you want.

In these two pictures I'm working with my four year old gelding. As you can see, it doesn't take a bit or reins to get him to understand what I'm asking him to do. But it does take good communication...and trust.

We'll talk more about awareness, feel, timing and balance in the next issue. Until then—happy and successful training!

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- Understanding how horses learn and how to communicate with them.
- Awareness of how your actions and attitudes influence your horse...and how to change them.
- Horsemanship skills on the ground and in the saddle.
- How to develop feel, timing and balance.
- Tips and insights on how you can better understand your horse.

"I loved Carlos' book...if you care about horses and want to improve your relationship with them, I highly recommend it!" Vicki Sach (Horsewyse Editor).

Send a cheque or money order for \$39.95 + \$3 p&p (payable to Carlos Tabernaberry).

Name:

Address:

.....

.....Postcode

Send to: Carlos Tabernaberry
P.O. Box 97, Whittlesea, Vic 3757

www.whisperingacres.com.au

Email: whisperingacres@iprimus.com.au

Ph 0414 380 396