

Compassionate Training

These days, you hear a lot of people talking about being passionate about ‘compassionate’ training – about putting the horse first and considering the wellbeing of the horse above all else. Well, I share that passion, but I believe you have to put the passion into compassion to have a successful relationship with your horse. That means learning to see things through the eyes of the horse, always.

I may be better at understanding the horse from his perspective, but I also believe that we don’t necessarily teach horses – they teach us. That means you can learn from your horse, just as I’ve learned from all the horses I’ve worked with. It’s why I believe you don’t need whips, spurs or bits in order to achieve great things – you need a bit of understanding.

This is so fundamental to everything we do with our horses that I thought it was worth looking at what it really means. There is no training approach that can make a difference until you are ready to change the way you look at your horse – and yourself. To begin with, you need a bit of compassion for both yourself and your horse.

Compassion is a universal word, with early references in many of the world’s religions. It is a concept that acknowledges



the interdependence of all living beings; of how we are all part of one another, and all involved with one another.

Compassion is the ability not only to recognise and feel the pain of another living creature, it is an emotional connection that drives you to help. To be compassionate requires that you do something to relieve that pain, even if only in some small way, depending on the depth or 'passion' of the compassion you feel.

Compassion puts you in tune with what another is feeling. It forces you to be entirely in the present. And how often do I talk about that when we're working with our horses?

We have to be 100% in the present and focused on what we are doing with our horses, not worrying about what the horse may have done in the past or may do in the future. Or what bad experience we may have had with the horse in the past or the 'what ifs' that might happen in the future.

Horses live in the present, in the moment, 100% of the time. If you're going to be consistent and give your horse your all, you need to be there too, 100%, every time you work with him. Do that, and your horse will understand and give you the same back, for the rest of his life.

What a present that is. Who wouldn't want to be there!

When you're training, compassion is not a talk of having a love for horses. It is simply a love of horses. You must do more than understand it, you must feel it. Live it.

Now let's look at it from a training perspective. We're all over the moon when our horses do what we want, even though that may not necessarily be what the horse wants to do. Yet, because the horse is such a noble creature, he tries his best not to disappoint us.

Still, the minute the horse does something 'wrong' what happens? Pulling on the reins? Kicking? Maybe using a crop or calling the horse names like lazy or stupid or moody?

Compassion is also about understanding. To be compassionate is to not jump to the conclusion that the horse intended to do something bad. Compassion lets you focus on the undesirable behaviour, not direct anger at the horse. Horses are not dumb because they don't understand what we ask of them – we need to look at how we present things to them and give them the time they need to understand. When we tell the horse, there is no time for understanding.

I often ask people I work with whether they had a teacher they didn't like very much. Almost always the answer is 'yes' and it will be because the teacher always told them what to do and scolded them harshly when they didn't give the right answer or didn't get it. Favourite teachers were remembered well, because they worked



I was so proud of Sai and his willingness to let these strangers touch him. That generosity of spirit is what helps us change ideas about how horses think and feel.

with them, helped them to work through the problem, corrected them gently when they were wrong and gave them time to understand what had been asked.

Which teacher would you want? What sort of teacher do you think your horse would want?

Recently, I did a demonstration at the very first Be Kind to Animals Week (www.bekindtoanimalsweek.org), a wonderful initiative of Edgar's Mission, a farm sanctuary in Kilmore, Victoria, which is caring for over 200 rescued animals. I took Sai, my young horse, to help me show people how they can help their horse to be confident, even in strange, new surroundings. There were hundreds of people and many different animals. It was a big ask - Sai had never seen a pig before, and Edgar's Mission has more than a few! (See photo next page).

But it's not what we present to the horse - but how we do it that will determine whether our horse will be confident enough to cope. It's also about us being what we want our horses to be - calm, confident, consistent and kind leaders. Someone on whom they can depend when the situation causes them concern. If you think about the horse from the perspective of a prey animal, whose first instinct is to flee from something threatening, there must be a great deal of trust in the relationship for the horse to be willing to stay and work.

And that takes understanding. The sort of understanding that comes from a compassionate approach to our work with our horses.

Pam Ahern, who runs Edgar's Mission, launched the week to:

Honour the animals of this world.

Inspire people to create change to make this world a better place for animals

Educate and promote awareness of some of the issues faced by animals in our community

Encourage kindness to all animals - including humans.

It will be held, each October, to coincide with several important days for animals – 2 October is the birthday of humanitarian and animal advocate Mohandas Gandhi and >>

Carlos Tabernaberry *Compassionate Training*



Have you ever stopped to consider how an audience, like this, could look like a bunch of predatory lions? Well, to a horse, it can!

4 October is World Animal and the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals.

In the meantime, let's do what we can to make every day, from 1 January to 31 December, Be Kind to Animal Day. Strive every day to make a difference – in your life, in your horse's life, in the lives of others. Be the change you want to see. Become what you want your horse to be. And the next time you go to take anything out of your horse, remember to be patient and wait for it to be given to you.

Help the Bumbies Wristbands

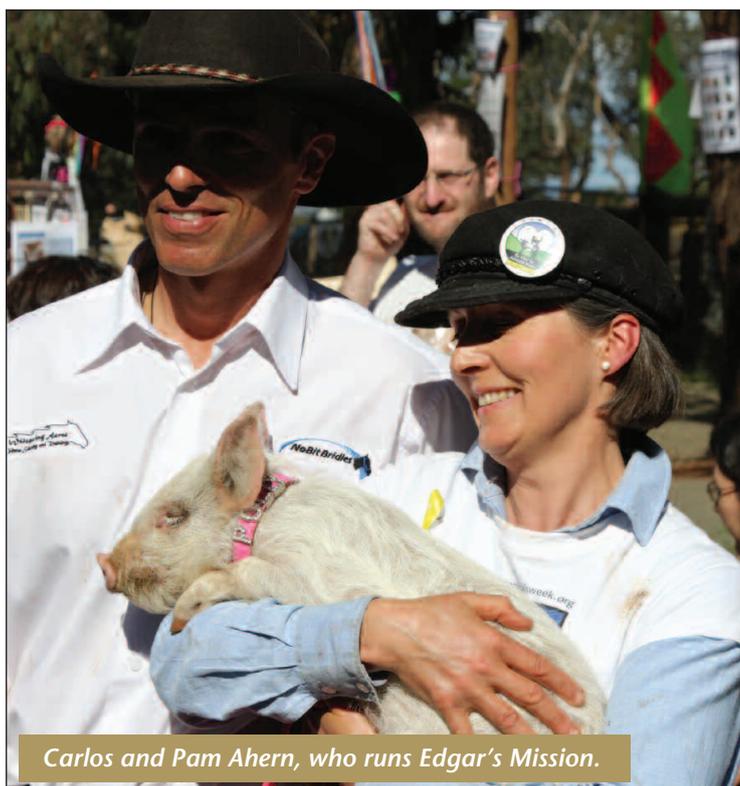
On a separate note, I want to thank those of you who, by buying a wristband, have helped us to care for the brumby foals who are heading to new homes in Victoria and Tasmania. Nankali and Levi are currently here with me at Whispering Acres, along with Spinifex. Tempe and Sapphire have homes in country Victoria, not far from here. They are wonderful examples of how compassionate training has been able to help them understand how to cope in a strange new world.

WIN a copy of Carlos' new DVD!

For those of you who have been asking, my next DVD *Understanding • Under Saddle* will be available in time for Christmas! In it you'll see real horses, with real issues – establishing balance, straightness and rhythm; going from hollow to rounded; taking horses from explosive to responsive, and runaway to relaxed. We start with some bareback basics, work with some youngsters and show you my idea of a green horse. There's bonus footage from a clinic, showing you how this all comes together. I hope you'll enjoy it – and that it will help you and your horse deepen your relationship.

HW has FOUR, personally signed copies of Carlos's new DVD to WIN this Summer! To go into the draw to win, in 200 words or less, Carlos would like you to tell us why you think all horses should be treated with 'compassion'. You can use examples from Carlos's article OR you can tell us about your own experiences with horses and 'compassion'. Simply post your entry to: "Carlos Tabernaberry Competition", c/o HorseWise Magazine, PO Box 260, Pambula, NSW 2549 or e-mail your entry to 'mail@horsewise.com.au'

Entries close Jan 15th, 2010 and the competition is open to all readers in Australia and New Zealand. Winner's names will be published on www.horsewise.com.au in late January and the four winning entries will also be published in the Autumn 2011 issue of HW! Good luck!" HW



Carlos and Pam Ahern, who runs Edgar's Mission.