

# Team

# Work

At Equitana  
Asia Pacific!



*So far, we've talked about feel, balance, confidence and focus, and how important these fundamentals are in the training of any horse—and rider, for that matter. Even though you are most likely not a horse trainer, it's important to remember that every time you work with your horse you are essentially training him or her, for better or worse. I want to help you make sure that it's for better—every time.*



finished, highly trained horse, the crowd had the opportunity so see first-hand, the things that I always talk about.

It was important to me that those watching the sessions had the opportunity not only to see just how calm, confident and focused a young, green horse could be in a totally foreign environment, under bright lights, surrounded by boisterous crowds and bombarded with all sorts of strange...and often loud...noises (including a hailstorm), sights and smells. But also how, by giving my horse a say and helping him to cope with the huge request I was making of him, he could rely on his relationship with me and stay focused on what I was asking.

To illustrate this, I used some of the things we've talked about here, things that many people would not want to try at home, let alone in such an environment. But since you can't take the horse out of any of the environments in which you are working, it just serves to emphasise the importance of the underlying relationship you build with your horse—from the ground up.

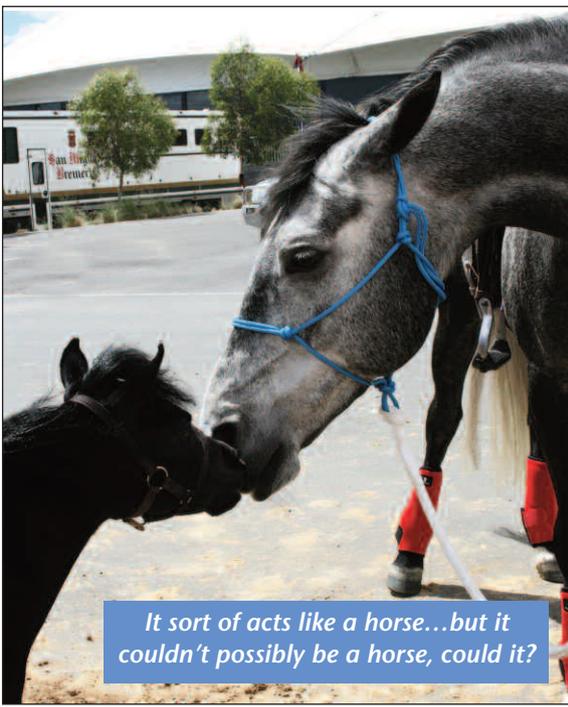
I started with the very same groundwork exercises I use each time I work with a horse; leading, lateral flexion, forequarter and hindquarter yields, and circle work. As we worked, it was easy to see how Sai's focus moved from sights, sounds and smells of the environment to return to what I was asking and because he is a young horse with fairly minimal formal training, I was able to show how I correct a horse through understanding, not force.

Just think about it...if I had become uptight, anxious, or concerned about what the crowd thought of my skills if Sai didn't do exactly as I asked, I would have lost focus and would not have been able to provide the leadership that Sai needed to be able to rely upon. If I then had become frustrated or angry with his lack of focus, it would have only escalated the anxiety that Sai was feeling in such a strange

**A**s an educator at Equitana this year, I asked Sai, my young five year old appaloosa cross to help me introduce the crowd to the way we approach these concepts in a way that would leave a positive and lasting impression on those watching.

Those of you who know me will know that as a horse trainer, I get paid to work other peoples' horses, not my own. That said, I always say that it's the quality of the time you spend with your horse, and the space in which you leave him after each session, that's the most important.

I felt the challenge of taking a young, green horse into the Equitana environment would prove to be key to what I wanted to share with those who came. Instead of seeing a



*It sort of acts like a horse...but it couldn't possibly be a horse, could it?*

and highly charged environment, proving to him that I was not a worthy leader and he should be worried.

Instead, I needed to ensure I was giving consistent requests in a way that Sai understood. Above all, I needed to ensure that I remained calm and focused.

Because of that, I was able to do a few things that really surprised the crowd. like fire off a pair of cap guns while standing in Sai's blind spot, take a chainsaw to him (not literally, although I did offer to make a few 'quarter' horses for people!) and even stand on his back with a big Aussie flag.

Now I'm not for one minute saying you need to be able to stand on your horse with a flag. What I wanted to do was impress upon people, in a memorable way, just how good their own horses could be.

Then I wanted to demonstrate how gaining my horse's focus helps me to ensure that he is tuned in to what I am asking, allowing me to ride using my seat and legs first, and hands last, allowing my horse to be incredibly soft and responsive. It gave me a chance to speak about why I ride with a halter, which is not because it's trendy, but because I believe it provides me with the sort of communication I want to have with my horse. It also allowed me to show how even the halter is not necessary if I have established the trust, obedience and respect of my horse in the first place. Even in an environment as unnatural as Equitana.

By the end, Sai was more than ready head home, having certainly given me more than I had asked for and, I hope, giving the crowds who had the opportunity to see our demonstration, a lot to think about. I know I was happy to have had the opportunity to share how I work with so many of you who read these articles and so many who were new to it. Thanks for stopping by the *Horsewyse* booth to say hello. It was great to have the chance to meet many of you and hear how you're getting on with your own horses. Keep up the good work!

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*Unfortunately we ran out of room for the reader's question this issue, but you can find Carlos' reply to Emily about her Standardbred, Sweetie's floating problem on [www.horsewyse.com.au/askcarlos](http://www.horsewyse.com.au/askcarlos)* 🐾

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