

THE COUNTRY COB

CONTENT . COMMUNITY . CONNECTION . COLLABORATION

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The Green Issue



Welcome to the Green Issue! Spring has sprung and it's that time of year when we see a marked change in season. The final stray strands of unwanted winter coats are floating off in the breeze and the green shoots on trees are reminding us of a new cycle of life that is beginning again. Butterflies abound!

Speaking of green, spring and butterflies - there are two things that always excite - new beginnings and transformations. Spring is the season of new life which comes with increased activity and new projects. With a surge of growth and fresh starts also comes the adjustments to horse husbandry that the change of season requires. These include health care

routines (pg11) and nutritional requirements. (pg18)

There are a growing number of people becoming more aware and adding value to the quality of horse's lives - rescuing, rehabilitating and retraining (pg6) Not to mention the effort going in to learning improved ways of understanding horse behaviour (pg3). With so much of an awareness growing in heart based horsemanship (pg9) I think we should pause, take a breath of spring air and reflect on just how far we have come!

If you like what you read and you wish to receive The Country Cob on a quarterly basis you can easily subscribe at www.horsetalksa.co.za If there is a topic of interest that you feel needs to be covered or you would like to contribute please email info@horsetalksa.co.za

Happy Reading and Happy Riding 🐾

The Contributing Team



HEALTH LAURA SCHILLINGER

As a qualified body worker, Laura has advanced her expertise in Biomechanics and Rehab Training. She offers a holistic approach that incorporates various healing methods to address trauma, support functional movement in horses and reconnect horses with their spirit and body.



HORSE CARE MARIKE KOTZE

A fully qualified advanced Bit and Bridle Fitting Consultant and certified Equine Therapy Specialist, Marike has also completed an Equine Behaviour course through the Ethology Academy. She hopes to improve the lives of both horse and human and to share the beauty of the horse-human connection.



HOLISTIC ANNE SCHARLOW

is an animal communicator, healer and spiritual guide, she offers a holistic approach to supporting animals and their guardians to achieve balance and harmony in their relationship. Anne uses her unique abilities to communicate with animals to help solve behavioural problems and enrich relationships.



PSYCHOLOGY LARA SNYMAN

is originally from Germany, where she studied Animal Psychology. She has learned and applied many horse training techniques before listening to the horses and following their model instead. She helps humans and their horses at her Ibalansi Horse Centre in Gordon's Bay, Cape Town.

COVER IMAGE Pickpik images



TRAINING GAIL VENECOURT

A horsewoman for 55 years, Gail has ridden in multiple disciplines including her great love, Dressage. She has trained her own and other people's horses. She has developed three of her own horses to Prix St George level and as a certified equestrian coach has also assisted pupils to reach this level.



EDUCATION STEPHEN WOLF

Hooked on horses as a child growing up in Jhb, Stephen is now a qualified Instructor, Certified Equine Therapy Specialist, Certified Assessor and Equitation Judge. He is passionate about teaching and growing professionals in the industry with a focus on harmonious horse and human connection.



CONTRIBUTOR EMMA WEITZEL

is the founder and director of Equitots™ cc an Internationally recognised framework for Equine Assisted Learning for children and adults. Emma is internationally recognised as an expert in her field, she has been invited as a speaker to international conferences in Europe and the United States.



REAL STORY MEGAN STUART-STEER

Megan is the proud partner to her heart and soul horse, Al-Shama Sharif. She has been 'that horse girl' since the age of three and is on a life-long learning journey to improve her ability to connect with horses.

Disclaimer: Please note that any opinions expressed by writers and contributors are theirs alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of The Country Cob or HorsetalkSA.

SIGNS of an (un)HEALTHY horse

THROUGH TRAUMA AND HARSH TRAINING HORSES CAN SHUT OUT IMMENSE PAIN AND ENDURE INTENSE CONFUSION. WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?



Have you seen these bombproof horses which seem to tolerate anything and everything without even blinking an eye?

Maybe look a little closer at the horse's face:

- Are the ears lowered, where the distance between ears increases at the base?
- Is there a contraction of the muscle above the eye? This is also called the inner eyebrow raiser and looks like a triangle shape above the eye.
- Does the horse seem to have a tense stare in its eyes?
- Are the facial muscles tense? You will see how the clenched jaw leaves lines along the head. This will unavoidably lead to the development of a headache!
- Are the lips pressed together and giving the muzzle a hard, edged shape?
- Are the nostrils dilated?

These are just a few indicators that may reveal a horse is in pain or a horse that is shutdown. The correct scientific term for a shutdown horse is "learned helplessness". This happens when a horse experiences prolonged or intense fear. Pain or confusion lead to neural pathways being temporarily disrupted and the horse becomes non responsive to stimuli altogether.

While most of our training methods involve at least some form negative reinforcement, (the removal of pressure when the correct response is given), ill-timed pressure removal can lead to demotivation and increased internalisation of emotions. As a horse gets less motivated to respond to pressure, it shuts out painful stimuli. A horse, once sensitive to the leg, may now need intense spur aids and even then, may not respond appropriately. The same will happen to a horse in constant pain or fear; not even the sharpest bit will stop a horse with severe kissing spines or a horse that has just gotten the fright of its life.

Horses can get very dull to painful stimuli if they are shutdown but they may even become disinterested in positive offerings. A study

horses that suddenly spook or act aggressively out of the blue - emotions have to get out, one way or another!

The other way of emotions being released is through the body. Many stressed, shutdown horses develop ulcers. Recent studies suggest over 90% of racehorses and up to 70% of horses in general have ulcers. They are extremely painful and lead to a vicious cycle of unwanted behaviour and more pain. Ulcers are not the only outcome of bottled-up emotions.

The constant tension in the horse's body leads to acidic muscles which are painful to the lightest touch. Additionally, the nervous system can become overstimulated. The horse's immune system and healing abilities are much lower due to the constant presence of cortisol,

or recurrent fear, pain or confusion needs to be avoided.

Start by checking your horse thoroughly for pain:

- Ulcers are more common than you think, so get your veterinarian to do gastroscopy to determine which type of treatment is necessary.
- Check your saddle fit with a properly trained saddle fitter and even then, check the saddle for smooth, even flocking and fit yourself!
- Have your horse's teeth checked regularly by a qualified equine dentist and in-between regular visits if your horse shows signs of pain. Cracked teeth or other injuries in the mouth can happen at any time. Sharp edges leave ulcers in the horse's cheeks which are painful and hard to ignore when a noseband is tightly strapped over them.
- Get X-rays taken of your horse's spine! Many horses have a degree of kissing spine or inflammation and calcifications in the spaces between the vertebrae. Palpating the back alone, by your body worker/ physio/ chiro cannot determine if your horse suffers from kissing spine. Each horse shows pain differently, and shutdown horses especially, might not show signs of pain to palpation alone.
- The wrong kind of feed and roughage can lead to high acidity and painful bloating in the gut, which is especially sore in canter transitions.
- Your horse's lymph system might be slow due to the depressed state of mind, which leads to a build-up of tissue fluid throughout the body. This creates pockets of painful areas under the skin.
- Mares require special attention to their cycles and hormonal behaviour. Your mare might suffer from ovarian cysts, or other hormone-related abnormalities that can lead to pain and erratic behaviours. Often these behaviours are undiagnosed so be sure to check with your vet for any suspected irregularities.

“The correct scientific term for a shutdown horse is “learned helplessness”. This happens when a horse experiences prolonged or intense fear.”

has shown that horses have the same behavioural marker for depression as humans: anhedonia (the loss of pleasure). A reduced sucrose intake is a classic measure of anhedonia. Scientists tested this hypothesis by hanging flavoured sugar blocks in stables and found that the most withdrawn horses ate the least sucrose, suggesting a depression-like state.

There is a dangerous limit to the dull and “bombproof” state of mind. A horse can only internalise its emotions up to a certain point and then explodes unexpectedly in seemingly normal situations. They suddenly launch into the air, buck or bolt or even come at you with teeth and legs with little or no warning. I have experienced this in a lot of ex racehorses or harshly trained (traumatised!)

making them more likely to get ill and recovery and wound healing very slow or even dysfunctional. These horses need to relearn healthy coping mechanisms and how to ground their emotions safely. In nature horses are experts at emotional agility! They can get a quick fright and return to grazing a few seconds later. They recognise emotions as warning signals, act accordingly and go back to their zen like state - grazing.

We can help them by modelling grazing mode in our own bodies: breathe out, relax your muscles and lean down. Your horse will slowly synchronise to your breathing and energy.

But how can we stop any of the above from happening?

We need to ensure that the horse is mentally, emotionally and physically healthy. Prolonged

Secondly, check your horses living and training environment for fearful stimuli:

- Because they have evolved to feel safe within their herd, horses stabled on their own may feel vulnerable and experience increased stress levels. The results are often stereotypical "vices" such as weaving, wind sucking, crib biting, stall walking etc.
- Your horse might be in a beautiful herd livery but still experiences stress if it's a non-functional, unstable, ever-changing group of horses which compete for food, water and sleep spots.
- Make sure your horse gets adequate nutrition and the correct minerals to work optimally.
- If roughage is not available most of the time, horses get stressed and fear for survival. This kickstarts ulcer formation and is also expressed through a "grumpy" attitude when worked.
- Reassess the way you train your

“Lead by example and create the safe herd that your horse naturally seeks...”

horse. If it's a constant negative reinforcement relationship, then change to praise for the smallest of achievements from your horse.

- Adjust the workload - is your horse fit enough with adequate musculature to do what you are asking of him?
- Make sure your horse is worked in an appropriate body frame. Young horses and horses that need to build muscle should work in a forward down (long and low stretch) frame. This conscious stretch position also leads to a content and calm mind. Once your horse builds strength and ability to straighten up and balance, you can ask for a more collected frame. Ensure that your horse is not behind the vertical. He cannot see where he's going and it is physically damaging. There are beautiful ways to gently

desensitise and habituate horses to our crazy, loud and fast world. Start at a point where your horse is still comfortable and slowly make the scary thing come closer or get bigger step by step while giving lots of praise. Let your horse chase the scary object and gain self-confidence and control.

Let your horse grow through your training instead of fleeing to its internal safe space and shutting down. Lead by example and create the safe herd that your horse naturally seeks; always endeavour to be calm, confident, empathetic and uplifting.

Our horses are wonderful and incredibly peaceful creatures that give us their all. Let us not forget their constant sacrifice of their own pleasures to satisfy ours. 🐾



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HORSES FOR LIFE

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Gail Venecourt's OTTB project horse. Affectionately named Miss Maggie May.

Training GREEN

WHEN WORKING WITH GREEN HORSES IT IS IMPORTANT TO WORK ON THE BASIS THAT THEY ARE PREY ANIMALS. THE NEED TO BALANCE THEIR FLIGHT RESPONSE MAY BE PARAMOUNT

I recently bought a young thoroughbred filly off the racetrack. Miss Maggie May, as I renamed her, is a tall, striking, athletic horse with a large personality. Maggie has reminded me that the horse's journey from young, fearful horse to an accomplished, safe riding horse is rooted in understanding the essential nature of the horse.

FOUR THINGS BECAME CLEAR WITH MAGGIE'S PROGRESS OVER TIME

- 1 - A horse is a prey animal
- 2 - Horses find security in their relationships with other horses (they are herd animals)

3 - A horse's learning is rooted in their emotional processing of the sensations they perceive from their environment. They can learn very fast, or not be interested in learning at all

4 - Horses are flight animals, but also conservative with their energy

Fearful horses show three main reactions to frightening events: flight, fight or freeze. A horse in flight mode will not stop to think before running. They panic first and only once they feel safe will they, perhaps, investigate the fear-inducing object. This way of behaving has kept them alive for thousands of years!

Our first job as a horse trainer is to teach our horse that when we are around, we as their humans are the safest harbour in the environment. From a training perspective, we need to take time to introduce the horse to each new thing so that we do not trigger their flight response. Our second job is to make sure that our horses move and stop only when we cue them to do so. This is what will keep them and us safe in the end. The time this takes

“Horses exist in a world of sensory overload... they are always aware of “out there”, but to be a safe horse to ride or play games with, a horse needs to keep their attention on us at all times.”

may be far longer than we anticipated, especially if the horse is in a new environment.

During her racing career Maggie was housed in a stable 24/7 so naturally, the stable was the safest space she could relate to. She appeared very calm and amenable to whatever people wanted to do with her, behaviour that I would describe as shut down or dissociated. She was basically in “freeze” mode. It took about six weeks for her to fully unfold an awareness of her surroundings, of other horses; in other words, to behave like a hyper-aware prey animal. While she remained willing to interact with humans, they commanded less attention than other horses. Her safety seeking transferred from stable/humans to other horses. Did this make handling her easier? Not at all, because she was not yet under “cue control”.

The key at this point was to only ask of Maggie what she could cope with, without triggering her flight response and safety-seeking-with-horses behaviour. Sometimes that meant always having a companion with her, sometimes only leading her up and down a safe space with her herd-mates in sight, sometimes only repeating actions she was comfortable with, like being tacked up. She was flighty about random movement (that we were not even aware of) in her environment so she got ponied on walks around the farm by my steady older horse. Maggie needed to learn how to regulate her emotions despite the influx of sometimes overwhelming sensory stimulation from the environment. She made good progress.

Her lack of social skills within the small herd, led to her getting kicked and she needed 10 weeks’ rest. This impromptu holiday allowed Maggie to rekindle her “horseness”, the sense of awareness or mindfulness that horses use to assess their environment and to socialise with other horses.

Compared to humans, horses exist in a world of sensory overload. Their hearing is similar to ours except, like dogs, hear higher pitch than us. Their eyes see 330 degrees around their body, with only a two blind spots right in front of their heads and directly behind them. Their sense of smell is as good as, if not better than that of a dog! They are always aware of “out there”, but to be a safe horse to ride or play games with, a horse needs to keep their attention on us at all times. Refining her social skills with horses helped prepare Maggie to also pay attention to humans as a source of information, as beings who wanted to interact and

communicate with her and paying more attention to cues from her handler. Amazingly, within three days of returning to work she picked up on her lessons as if she had not had a break.

Essentially, although she has been racing and winning too, she has no real understanding of moving forward from a cue, maintaining a steady speed, either in walk, trot or canter, based on cues. After being off the racetrack for six months, almost all of her work is designed to help her learn to move forward from a cue, maintain the forward movement until requested otherwise, all while maintaining emotional regulation.

Horses are exceptionally fast learners about what is life threatening and what is not. It behooves a prey animal to instantly learn how to escape death! Learning non-life-threatening things takes many repetitions, many rewards and eventually repeating the learning in many situations. Humans are great generalisers, meaning we are able to group like objects easily. We easily learn that a cup, a bowl, a bucket or any other hollow shaped object can be used for similar purposes. Horses are not good at generalising. Thus, teaching a horse to stand at the mounting block to be mounted is a different experience for the horse to standing next to a log in the field to be mounted, or to be mounted from the ground. As Maggie’s flight response is slowly becoming more controlled, and her behaviour comes more from the cues she is given, we can begin to expand her knowledge of how to generalise. This involves exposing her to small, new, but similar experiences, like taking a different path on the farm, while still expecting her to allow herself to be led, and not barging ahead of her handler, taking over control of the situation.

Horses use fleeing to distance themselves from danger and appear to be highly energetic creatures. But the horse is also in a state of emotional dis-regulation while fleeing. While certainly, well fed, fit, healthy horses can enjoy expending excess energy, for most of their lives horses are quite sedentary, using energy very conservatively, and Maggie is no exception. She runs, rather than paying attention to the person on the ground with her, or the person riding her, before stopping to look once she feels a safe distance away.

Maggie shows weekly improvement and at this point she is well on track to have a healthy, long second career. 🐾

From Race Horse



The Western Cape Equine Trust 

LOOKING OUT FOR THE FUTURE OF EX-RACEHORSES

To Riding Horse

COMPETITION

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The call to **CONSCIOUSNESS**

CONSCIOUS HORSEMANSHIP IS A CONNECTED WAY OF BEING WITH AND RELATING TO HORSES. THESE ARE RECURRING THEMES I HAVE EXPLORED IN MY MANY ENGAGEMENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE HORSES THROUGH THE YEARS.

RESPECT THE BIRTHRIGHTS

A lot has been written about the 3 Fs: Freedom, Forage, and Friends. These are not nice-to-haves but the birthrights of our horses. My heartfelt invitation is that we constantly work towards the ideal setup: a minimum of 16-20 hours of roughage and herbs and free movement within a herd environment. I encourage you to not settle for the fancy arena or the comfortable distance to your home as the primary reason for choosing a yard. Your horse spends 24 hours a day with your choice and possibly only a few hours per day with you. Let the 3Fs be a beacon for your choices.

HORSES ARE BEINGS OF NATURE, NATURE IS CONSISTENT AND SLOW

To us as humans, it feels like we just woke up one morning and everything had turned green in an instant. But consider how the new spring grass actually pushes slowly through the earth, awakening to the new season of growth. "You are too fast! Slow down" is a message I constantly receive from horses. How does this relate to

conscious horsemanship? How can we apply it to our everyday interactions with our horses? Consider the following: When you visit the yard, how long are you giving yourself to greet and just be with your horse? Are you just walking up to him/her, giving them a treat, halter on and off we go? Or do you allow a moment to just feel each other out, being unattached to the task at hand and just giving yourself some time to be together before asking for the halter to be put on?

Slowing down and breathing more deeply is a huge step towards a more harmonious relationship with your horse. Each horse has its own pace. Only when we are in harmony with that pace, can we be partners, and this almost always means slowing down. The best way to gauge this is to observe your horse in its natural environment. How does it engage with herd members? How much time is between input (e.g. an ear-pull from another horse) to response (e.g. yielding). You'll notice that almost nothing is in "human time", so when asking anything of our horse, we should

“Horses form conscious relationships with humans... It is important to share that none of it is random, but a divine alignment of souls, with your evolution at its core...”

allow for “natural time” Anything faster than the horse’s natural pace will create tension and an imbalanced nervous system. This will show itself in health issues and strong behaviour over time, something that I as a therapist experience on a daily basis.

SHARING A LIFE PATH - ARE YOU ALL-IN?

Horses form conscious relationships with humans. We are essentially sharing a life path, with all its beauty, adventures, and joy but also challenges and hardships. It is important to note that none of it is random, but a divine alignment of souls, with your evolution at its core.

When a challenge arises, be it in training, health or even money issues, don’t immediately go into “make it go away” mode. Instead, ask questions like: What can I learn from this? What am I not seeing? What needs more clarity so we can move forward? Where do I feel the discomfort (e.g. being out of control, scared, worried)? Can I accept this situation exactly as it is and then move forward from a place of trust?

There will always be a next step, even if receiving clarity for it takes time. Each challenge is a teaching moment and when we rise to the occasion we’ll often discover a silver lining and gifts along the way. It is not always easy, but life isn’t easy. We are here to learn! When we take the time to learn, our horses will benefit from our learning.

GUARDIANSHIP - DO YOUR HOMEWORK AND HONOUR THE RELATIONSHIP

We as humans, are horse guardians, not owners. We decide where our horse lives, which friends, which food, which therapist, which exercises, which medication, etc they have in their lives. The list is long. There is very little choice in a horse’s life, and the more confined the horse, the fewer these choices become. We are taking responsibility for another life.

Horses rely on us to do our homework and to make all decisions, big and small, with as much consciousness as possible. I encourage you to take inspiration from all available resources, be it the vet, your own research, animal communication, trainers and yard managers - but most importantly: yourself and your horse. Essentially you know your

horse best, you have a feeling for your animal. So whatever decision you need to make, get the information, assess everything and then balance it against your heart and intuition. No-one holds the key to the relationship, except for you and your horse. For example, if a certain appointment, such as with a farrier or a trainer, is always stressful for you because your horse shows strong behaviour, consider this as feedback. Notice the discomfort and don’t settle for “well it is what it is”. Maybe it is time to change the approach, the trainer or the farrier to someone you both feel more comfortable with. Be open to change, do your homework and ask around. A solution will always be available. It could be a conversation with the farrier which suddenly changes the game or you may discover a trainer which you feel drawn to. Allow yourself to make necessary changes along the way. Don’t settle for “we have always done it that way”. Be mindful of your responsibility. You both deserve to feel safe and at ease. 🐾

A MESSAGE ON RIDING

I WISH TO SHARE A MESSAGE I HAVE RECEIVED DIRECTLY FROM THE HORSES:

“The riding is a gift which may or may not be offered as part of the relationship. Nowhere in nature does one being sit on top of another being, telling them what to do - please contemplate this for a moment. Just because we offer this, doesn’t mean that it is always the right thing to do. Yes, some of us enjoy being ridden, for the reasons of bonding with our human and exploring nature together. Few of us are also real athletes and love the attention the “riding success” brings. But not all of us. Most of us just mainly wish to be horses, no strings attached.

We wish for a time when horses once again can be free with humans. When riding is no longer the primary reason for sharing a life, but soul growth and evolution are. A time when we are seen for our healing abilities and responsibilities for the planet. It’ll be the time when the ride emerges naturally within the relationship as the most intimate, heart-felt connection two beings can explore. There won’t be much tack needed because the heart is all there is. Being free with humans also means for the humans to feel free in themselves. For centuries we have helped humans evolve, and we will continue to do so. But not in the form of ribbons and Olympic medals, but through pushing them towards fully opening their hearts to remember their deep connection to Nature and all of Life. One fine day... The times are changing.”



SPRING IS A TIME WHEN ENVIRONMENTAL ALLERGENS INCREASE, TRIGGERING INFLAMMATION. A CRUCIAL TIME TO MONITOR YOUR HORSE'S BREATHING MORE CLOSELY.

Spring can pose significant challenges for equine respiratory health. As pollen levels rise and environmental allergens increase, horses are more likely to experience respiratory irritations and exacerbate pre-existing conditions such as asthma. The change in weather can also lead to dustier environments in stables and pastures. These factors can trigger allergic reactions and inflammation, making it crucial to monitor your horse's breathing during this season. Regular checks and preventive measures, like keeping stables clean and avoiding high-pollen areas, can help mitigate springtime respiratory issues and maintain your horse's well-being.

The lungs are essential for delivering oxygen throughout the body, fuelling every cell and ensuring optimal function. Adequate oxygen is critical for a horse's overall health, performance, and vitality. The respiratory system not only facilitates gas exchange - providing oxygen and removing carbon dioxide, but also plays a key role in regulating pH balance, thermoregulation, air humidification, and voice production. Breathing issues in horses are often overlooked

but can significantly impact performance. A holistic approach is essential for evaluating your horse's health and detecting respiratory abnormalities. Checking your horse's respiration rate is as crucial as assessing for lameness and is also known as an unsoundness.

HERE'S HOW TO DO A BREATHING CHECK

Hand test Place your hand in front of the nostrils to count breaths and check for sufficient airflow.

Flank observation Observe the flank area to assess if breathing is effortless or requires considerable muscle effort.

Diaphragm feel Feel the extension of the diaphragm for any irregularities.

Auscultation Use a stethoscope to listen to the heart and lungs to detect any abnormal sounds.

RESPIRATORY ISSUES

CAUSES

Viral and bacterial infections Conditions like equine influenza or strangles.

Parasites & worms Internal parasites affecting respiratory health.

Trauma to airways Injury or irritation in the

respiratory tract.

Exposure to dust & gasses Poor stable conditions or environmental pollutants.

SYMPTOMS

Coughing Persistent or frequent coughing.

Reduced energy levels/depression Decreased stamina or lethargy.

Struggling to build muscle Difficulty with muscle mass maintenance.

Long recovery time after riding Prolonged recovery post-exercise.

Nasal/eye discharge Abnormal discharge from nostrils or eyes.

Flared nostrils while resting Nostrils widening more than usual.

Increased breathing effort & elevated heart rate Noticeable effort in breathing and higher heart rate.

Respiratory issues in horses can also become apparent during exercise. Observing your horse's overall facial expression and the use of breathing muscles while riding can provide valuable clues about their respiratory health. Pay attention to signs such as flared nostrils, strained breathing, or visible effort in the flank area. Additionally, using a heart monitor can help detect if your horse's oxygen supply is limited, as it may reveal abnormal heart rate patterns or increased effort during exercise. These observations can guide you in addressing potential breathing problems and ensuring your horse maintains optimal performance and comfort. Regular checks on your horse's breathing before riding are advised to ensure they are in good health and are able to perform what is asked of them.

“Lungs are the unsung heroes of vitality; they perform the vital process before the process, delivering the oxygen that fuels every function and movement.”

THE ROLE OF BODY WORK

Body work can significantly assist with breathing issues by addressing muscular tension and imbalances. Techniques to releasing muscle tension can alleviate tension surrounding the respiratory system, including the diaphragm and ribcage. Assessing muscle development helps identify overworked or improperly used muscles affecting breathing and if required body workers can recommend veterinary examinations if further investigation is required. Body workers can advise on practical tips for minimising strain during riding to help create a supportive environment for the horse's breathing. In general, incorporating body work can enhance your horse's comfort and breathing efficiency, improving overall performance and well-being. 🐾



HERE ARE SOME EFFECTIVE BREATHING EXERCISES FOR YOUR HORSE

1 DIAPHRAGM MANUAL GUIDANCE
Place one hand on top of the diaphragm and the other below it. Gently push hands outwards during exhalation and inwards during inhalation to encourage deeper breaths.

2 NOSTRIL COVERAGE
Cover one nostril with your hand, leaving fingers slightly open. This encourages deeper breaths through the open nostril.

3 SALT INHALATIONS (FOR SEVERE CASES)
Consider salt inhalations to help clear mucus and improve lung function. Always consult a vet before using this method.

4 BREATHING ALONGSIDE YOUR HORSE
Practice deep breathing alongside your horse. Mimicking deep breaths may help them adopt better breathing patterns.

These exercises can support respiratory function but should be part of a comprehensive care plan that includes veterinary advice and proper environmental management.

Regularly monitoring your horse's respiratory health, including checking for common issues and evaluating girth tightness, is crucial.

A holistic approach that includes veterinary consultation, environmental management, and tailored exercises can support optimal respiratory function and enhance performance.



A guide to deworming

4 seasons ★ 4 dewormers ★ 4 different actives



Long acting full spectrum dewormer for the control of roundworms, tapeworm and bots. Contains Moxidectin, the only active ingredient to treat encysted small strongyles.



Trusted full spectrum dewormer for the control of roundworms, tapeworm and bots. Contains Abamectin and Praziquantel for general deworming.



Switch dewormer for the control of large and small strongyles, pinworms and ascarids. Contains Pyrantel Pamoate for strategic use to reduce the potential of resistance build up to other active ingredients.



Full spectrum dewormer that treats roundworms, tapeworm and bots. Contains Ivermectin and Praziquantel in a smaller easy to use syringe. Apple flavour.

For foals deworm from 6 to 8 weeks of age and alternate between Pegazol and Pegamax every 6 to 8 weeks. At one year of age use Pegaquest. This schedule serves as a guide for an effective deworming programme. For worm infestations or more individualised deworming recommendations please consult your veterinarian. We also support FEC where practically possible.

CUTIES in Competition

WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS FOR YOUR CHILD WHEN HANDED THE PRIVILEGE OF COMPETING

Many a parent cannot wait for their little one to show off their inherent overdose of cuteness at a horse show. I have done it myself and can't deny the pride and joy you experience as a parent, but I believe that it is important to understand that besides your joy, the pony as well as the child is also having an experience which due to the young age cannot be expressed in words - and here is where the potential problem lies.

As with all things in life there are always pros and cons, even at the beginning stages with little ones entering the show ring on their ponies. One of the negatives is the inherent danger of nurturing an undesirable entitled mindset. An unwanted process that could easily play out if the parent is not mindful about it - even when having the best intentions.

An entitlement mentality is defined as a sense of deservingness, or being owed a favor when little or nothing has been done to deserve special treatment. Entitlement is a narcissistic personality trait which according to research may have its roots in the following:

- > The environment the child grows up in
- > The way parents or adults treat the child
- > Whether adults solve problems for the child
- > How children are treated by authority

It is plain to see how the current trend of oversized rosettes and seemingly generous prizes can easily nurture such an undesirable character trait as entitlement, if it is not carefully guided and explained by a parent. Parents need to be mindful of such silent processes that can play out in the background unnoticed which have the potential to

“The sad truth is that once a child has learned to believe that they are special and entitled to glory they often also learn that the rules of getting there don't apply to them.”



cause long-term damage. The sad truth is that once a child has learned to believe that they are special and entitled to glory they often also believe that the rules of getting there don't apply to them. It is important to understand how serious the long-term effects of entitlement actually are.

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH ENTITLEMENT SHOWS UP IN:

- > Conflict in relationships
- > Unhappiness
- > Disappointment
- > Depression

Feeling entitled to something and the accompanying disappointment that follows when you don't get what you want reinforces entitled behaviour which typically leads into a vicious 3-step cycle:

- 1- When children are entitled, they are always vulnerable to the threat of unmet expectations.
- 2 - When their expectations are not met, it can lead to dissatisfaction and other emotions like anger and a sense of being cheated.
- 3 - When they are distressed, they try to fix the situation and console themselves. This results in self-reassurance that they deserve everything they've ever wanted, which reinforces the very same entitled behaviour.

By no means is such ugliness always the case when a child enters a show ring but it is important for parents to be aware of the possibility that this could go the wrong way and hopefully they will guide their little one with wisdom and kindness to a place where the event is experienced with gratitude and an awareness of the HUGE PRIVILEGE it is to take part in a horse show. 🐾



HAVE YOU EVER HAD YOUR BRIDLE FITTED BY A PROFESSIONAL BRIDLE FITTER? ARE YOU SURE IT FITS YOUR HORSE CORRECTLY? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

As equestrians we only want the best for our horses. We would never knowingly put our horse's welfare in jeopardy. So, how would you even know when your bridle is causing your horse discomfort or pain? According to independent bit- and bridle-fitter, Emma Busk, something as trivial as your horse being in a hurry to scratch his head when you remove the bridle, may indicate that it is causing him discomfort

WHAT YOU PUT ON YOUR HORSE'S HEAD AND IN ITS MOUTH MATTERS

The actions of the bit can affect several parts of the horse's head and mouth. These include the tongue, the corners and bars of the mouth, the palate, the teeth, the poll and the chin, depending on the choice of mouthpiece and sides. Potential pressure points caused by an ill-fitting bridle can be found in front of or behind the head piece, on the midline over the poll, underneath the browband attachment, on the nose, or on the horse's jaw.

The head is the seat of the brain, and many nerves, arteries and veins that run quite close to the

surface of the skin on the horse's head and face. Structures that can be affected by an ill-fitting bit are the attachment of the nuchal ligament, the back of the ear, the wing of the atlas, the tongue, the hyoid apparatus, various nerves in the face, and the temporomandibular joint (TMJ).

There are dozens of small muscles in the TMJ which is an important nerve centre controlling the horse's balance and proprioception (his ability to balance and stay upright). If these small muscles and nerves are pinched, by excess bulk or pressure in this area, the horse will not be able to move properly as he will be uncoordinated and unbalanced. This may cause a horse to lean on the bit. Pressure points caused by an ill-fitting bridle can significantly affect the quality of the horse's movement.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN FITTING A BRIDLE

The poll and the back of the ears are very common areas where bridles don't fit. The space between the back of the ears and the first cervical vertebrae, the atlas, needs to be wide enough so that the headpiece doesn't cause pressure here or it will be pushed forward into the back of the ears

“Signs of a painful bit can be as subtle as a missed lead change, a dropped shoulder or a horse showing resistance during transitions. More obvious signs can include headshaking, mouth gaping, tongue-lolling or a general refusal to perform.”

or the TMJ. When the headpiece catches the wing of the atlas, it could irritate the horse and cause it to not want to bend or flex.

A browband that is too short, will pull the bridle into the back of the ears, leading to pain and discomfort. A noseband that is too tight will not only put pressure on the jaw, but also pull down on the poll, causing excess pressure on this sensitive part of the horse's head. When fitting a shaped or "anatomical" bridle, it is important that the shape of the bridle fits the individual horse's head. If you have a noseband that goes through the headpiece, the points where they connect may actually cause more pressure than what they relieve. Check the location of the buckles. Are they pressing against the facial crest or are they so high as to cause pressure on the TMJ? A problem common to many commercially available bridles is that the browband is too small and the cheek pieces are too long.

YOUR BIT AND BRIDLE IMPACTS YOUR HORSE'S MOVEMENT

The structures on the horse's head are especially sensitive to pressure themselves, but the connection doesn't end there. The head connects via nerves, muscles and fascia (the thin membrane of connective tissue around every muscle and organ) to the rest of the body and problems with an ill-fitting bridle or bit can have far-reaching effects on the whole body of the horse and the way it moves. Pressure on the horse's tongue can affect the muscles that link the hyoid apparatus to the breastbone and forelimb, as well as the muscle that flexes the neck and brings the forelimb forward. During dissection, applying pressure to the horse's mouth or jaw, which causes the hyoid bone to move up and/or back in the jaw, restricts the hindlimb, indicating a direct link from the tongue/jaw to the movement of the hind legs.

Through these muscle and fascia chains, excess pressure on the tongue or the poll means that the horse cannot engage its core, and therefore cannot lift off the forehand or lower the hindquarters to bring the hindlegs further underneath the body. The horse's strides will shorten and its back will hollow. This also interferes with the horse's natural brakes and may lead riders to try stronger bits, increasing the pressure and exacerbating the problem. Signs of a painful bit can be as subtle as a missed lead change, a

dropped shoulder or a horse showing resistance during transitions. More obvious signs can include headshaking, mouth gaping, tongue-lolling or a general refusal to perform.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN FITTING THE BIT

The most important thing to remember is to fit the mouthpiece to the individual horse's mouth anatomy. Factors that need to be considered include the height of the palate, the presence and position of canine teeth, the length of the horse's "smile" and even the width of the lower jaws.

The mouth cavity is filled completely by the tongue and there is very little room left for a bit. On average, horses have room of about 14mm for the bit, so despite physics telling us that "thicker is better" this is definitely not the case here. A horse with a low palate, or a thicker than average tongue, will have even less room for a bit and will be subjected to pressure points. Even a ported bit needs to be carefully fitted to the horse's mouth anatomy so as not to cause pressure points on the palate, or the bars of the mouth.

It is important to note that the "two-wrinkle" rule can be misleading to the layperson and if a horse has a very short or long "smile", following this rule could place the bit at the wrong height in the horse's mouth, leading to the bit hitting either the canine teeth or the front of the pre-molars. A bit and bridle that fits well will go a long way towards improving not only the way your horse moves, but also the relationship of trust between you and your equine partner. With a comfortable bridle and a bit that fits correctly, along with a pair of soft, listening hands, you will ensure that you and your horse can communicate effectively! 🐾

ADJUSTMENTS TO YOUR BRIDLE

Be mindful when adding padding under the bridle as instead of relieving pressure, this may unintentionally move the pressure points to different locations. Anything placed under the headpiece of a well-fitting bridle such as sheepskin, fly veils and ear muffs, will cause excess pressure by inadvertently making that bridle too small. These can also cause extra pressure points under the bridle along their edges - make sure to re-check your bridle fit with any of these additions.

WIN

1 OF 3 BIT AND BRIDLE
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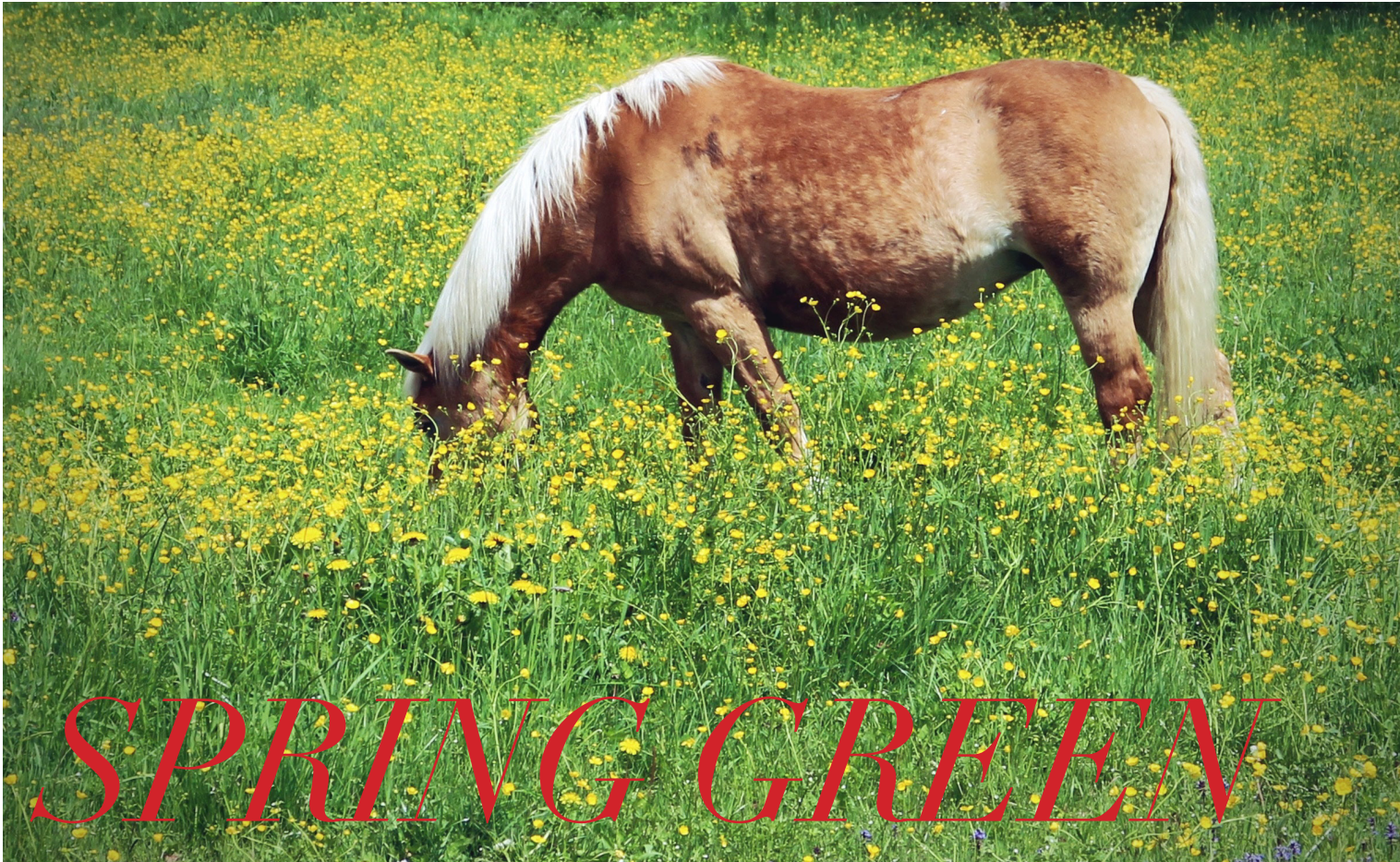
What is the most common
problem with most commercial
bridles? (See pg 16 for answer)



A fully qualified Advanced Bit and
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Kotzé has studied through Horse
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Send an email with your answer to
info@horsetalksa.co.za

Entries close **15 October 2024**



SPRING GREEN

AS THE SEASON SHIFTS FROM WINTER TO SPRING AND FEEDING CONDITIONS CHANGE, WE NEED TO ADJUST OUR HORSES' DIETS TO ENSURE A SMOOTH AND HEALTHY TRANSITION.

As the seasons change, and the green, spring grass starts to grow, we depend less on our stored winter roughage which primarily consists of hay. Since hay, being lower in sugars and proteins, is typically less nutrient rich than spring grass, it may require added supplements to ensure that the horse's nutritional needs are met. The nutritional benefits of spring grass are clear, and the nutrient density of grass changes as the seasons progress, highlighting the need for a seasonal dietary adjustment.

Spring grass offers a wealth of essential nutrients that can

benefit your horse's overall health. As spring pasture grows it becomes rich in vitamins, minerals, and proteins that may have been lacking in winter roughage. Key nutrients found in spring grass include Vitamin A, Vitamin E, and beta-carotene, all of which contribute to maintaining a healthy coat, strong immune system, and improved energy levels in horses. The high protein content in spring grass also supports muscle development and recovery, making it a valuable food source for horses in work. However, all things in moderation are healthy and access to too much in a short space of time can severely affect horse health.

The shift to fresh spring grass brings a significant change in nutrient intake, particularly in sugar levels, which need to be managed carefully. Another major difference between winter forage and spring grass is the digestibility. One of the advantages of spring grass is its high moisture content. This is particularly beneficial after winter, when horses have been consuming drier, more fibrous hay. Spring grass is much easier for horses to digest than dry hay, which can be more fibrous and harder on their digestive systems. This can lead to an increase in nutrient absorption, providing horses with increased energy levels. Fresh forage is also more palatable, encouraging horses to eat excessively which can lead to serious health issues.

Given these differences, the transition from hay to spring grass must be done gradually to prevent digestive disturbances. Understanding the difference

between spring grass and winter forage, allows you to make informed decisions about how to adjust your horse's diet and grazing time. One of the most important steps in managing spring grazing is to introduce your horse to fresh grass gradually. Starting with short grazing periods of 15-30 minutes per day, depending on the richness of the grass and then slowly increasing the time over several weeks.

THE RISKS OF SPRING GRAZING: LAMINITIS

Particularly in the early growth stages, contains high levels of fructans and sugars, which can overload a horse's system, leading to Laminitis, an

inflammatory condition affecting the laminae of the hooves. This is often triggered by the high sugar content (non-structural carbohydrates (NSC)). This condition can cause lameness, pain, and in severe cases, permanent damage to the internal hoof structure. Early detection of laminitis is crucial, so it's important to monitor your horse closely for signs of discomfort, heat in the hooves, or unusual shifting of weight. Horses with insulin resistance, Cushing's disease and those that are overweight are vulnerable to laminitis during this time of year.

WEIGHT GAIN

Another common risk associated with spring grass is rapid weight

gain, particularly for easy keepers or horses that are already prone to obesity. To prevent this, it's important to monitor your horse's body condition regularly and adjust their grazing time accordingly. It may require limiting access to pasture during the times when sugar levels are at their highest, or reducing grazing time altogether. Additionally, continuing to offer hay in combination with restricted pasture access can ensure your horse gets enough fibre without consuming too many calories from grass. Making sure your horse gets enough exercise by implementing a consistent exercise routine during the spring is another effective way to manage weight gain. 🐾

A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE TO SEASONALLY ADJUSTING YOUR HORSES NUTRITION

KWAZULU-NATAL

With its humid, subtropical climate, KZN sees lush pastures during the spring, especially in coastal and midlands regions. Horses here often benefit from increased access to rich grazing, which can be high in protein and sugars. However, this can also lead to metabolic issues such as laminitis in sensitive horses. It's essential to manage grazing time, particularly for easy keepers, and balance their diet with lower-calorie, low-NSC (non-structural carbohydrate) feeds to mitigate the risk. A change to, or the inclusion of, Spurwing low NSC Paddock Plus 11% ration during these months could be an option. Paddock Plus is a great option for maintaining energy levels without adding excessive sugars or starches. It offers a balanced blend of fibre and controlled energy to support horses during this time of abundance.

GAUTENG

Inland and less influenced by coastal weather patterns, Gauteng's spring brings unpredictable rainfall, affecting pasture availability. Some areas may see a quick flush of grass, while others remain drier. The inconsistency means horse owners often need to supplement more heavily with good quality hay or concentrate feeds. Adding fibre-rich products or hay replacers can help ensure that horses receive enough roughage during leaner months. A feed that offers a balanced vitamin and mineral profile is crucial to fill nutritional gaps caused by variable

pasture quality. Feeding Spurwing HI5 in the Gauteng region is ideal for ensuring horses maintain their condition and energy levels when grazing is insufficient. The multiple fibre contributions, along with the fully balanced vitamin and mineral profile are especially useful for horses that require a steady source of energy without the need for large quantities of feed.

WESTERN CAPE

Known for its Mediterranean climate, the Western Cape experiences a transition from wet winters to drier summers. As pastures start to dry up, grazing becomes less nutrient-dense. This region's equines often require additional feeding during this time to make up for the declining grass quality. Feeds higher in fibre and fat, like lucerne, can help maintain weight and condition. Electrolyte supplements may also be necessary as horses adapt to warmer, drier conditions. During the spring months, adding Spurwing Lucerne Conditioner Mix to an already balanced feeding regime is recommended. This increase in high quality, nutritionally dense fibre, as well as the increased fat profile from Omega rich Full Fat Soya, acts as the perfect 'top-up' to the springtime meal.

Adjusting your horse's diet to the change in season needs to take into consideration the area in which you live, as well as the risk factors to which your horse may be prone to ensure a healthy transition.

roughage reinvented

Good quality roughage is crucial for your horse as it maintains digestive health, aids in proper nutrient absorption, and supports optimal gut function. Supplementing feeding and grazing with high-fibre sources ensures a balanced diet, reduces the risk of digestive issues like colic, and promotes overall well-being for horses.

LUCERNE CONDITIONER MIX

PROTEIN: 19%
FIBRE: 49.5%

A meticulous blend of premium-grade lucerne, high-quality full-fat soya, and essential nutrients, this product is designed to supplement your horse's balanced feeding regime by elevating their nutritional intake of fibre, protein and conditioning calories.



HAY PRESTO

PROTEIN: 7%
FIBRE: 35%

A conveniently bagged mix of the highest quality oat hay, cut to optimum digestible length and lightly sweetened with molasses to provide a highly palatable roughage supplement. This rich, fibrous supplement promotes healthy digestion by aiding in the movement of food through the gastrointestinal tract, preventing issues like colic and impaction.



HI5

PROTEIN: 11%
FIBRE: 55.3%

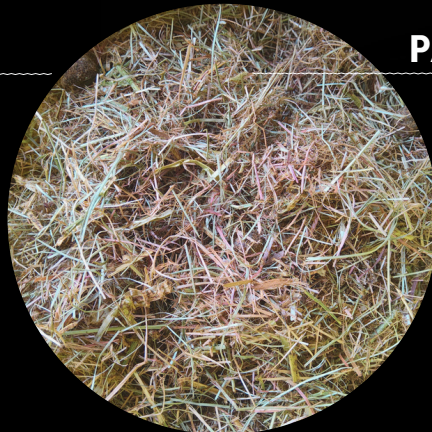
Hi5 is an optimal 11% blend of multiple fibre sources providing diverse substrates for fermentation in the hindgut, supporting a more robust and diverse microbial population, crucial for maintaining good digestion and a healthy microbiome. Hi5 can be fed as a fibre supplement or a fully balanced ration.



PADDOCK PLUS

PROTEIN: 11%
FIBRE: 36%

Ideal for dietary-sensitive horses, those in restricted work or those needing non-heating nutrition while in full work. This low NSC, balanced ration can also be used as a high quality fibre supplement for horses during periods of restricted grazing or poor hay quality.



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A CHILDHOOD OBSESSION WITH HORSES AND A FAIRY TALE ENGAGEMENT LEADING TO A ONCE IN A LIFE TIME RELATIONSHIP WITH HER HORSE. MEGAN TALKS ABOUT HER JOURNEY FINDING BALANCE AND VALUE THROUGH HORSE AND HUMAN CONNECTION.

I can pinpoint the exact day I fell in love with horses. I was three years old and we were on a family holiday in Scotland - on a trail ride in the beautiful Scottish Highlands. My arms wrapped around the chunky neck of a scruffy mountain pony and in that moment, my life changed forever!

Back home, we couldn't afford formal lessons or leasing, let alone buying a pony, so my journey started with me grasping at absolutely any horse or pony related opportunity that came my way. I would do anything I could, just to spend time with horses. In the beginning, this meant helping out with pony rides at the craft market on Sundays. Whilst my mom browsed the market stalls, I could be found happily leading ponies up and down the market until it was time to go home.

Later, I joined a riding school and I was ecstatic to be given the opportunity for lessons. Eventually I leased a beautiful bright bay mare, called Cola, who became my best friend and weekly obsession. These formative years developed in me the importance of relationship building with horses. Subsequently the most important aspect of riding to me has always been the bond between rider and horse. I developed an interest in learning to dance with them leading me to take dressage lessons. Sadly, this journey was cut short when

“I have found my happy place in the horsey world. Another horsey girl who wants nothing more than to be with her horse. This is a great privilege.”

Cola suffered a heart attack and tragically passed away. At a young age I had developed a strong connection with Cola and I was deeply affected. It took me a long while to process this loss but with the help and support of friends, I was able to work through and process this grief. The elusive dream of owning my own horse remained, however, still out of reach and only changed when I was in my thirties. The human love of my life was planning on asking me to marry him. “You had better plait the ring into her horse’s mane!” everyone joked. The message was clearly received. My now-husband surprised me by buying my heart and soul horse, Al-Shama Sharif, and by proposing to me at the summit of our favourite mountain ride.

Owning my own horse was a steep learning curve. My collection of ‘take whatever you can get’ experiences had not prepared me for the practical realities of caring for a horse on my own and I had no formal horsemanship training. Thankfully, I am blessed with an incredible tribe of supportive people at my livery yard. They have taught me the importance of aspects such as balanced and appropriate feeding, hoof care, access to a healthy paddock environment, saddle-fitting, physio and regular body work. To this day, they are my second family and the trusted carers of my beloved Sharif.

From a horsemanship perspective, my desire to learn to be a better human for my horse brought me to seek out more formal training. I would not have said that when we first reached out to an instructor, Sharif and I had any specific issues which we were seeking to resolve. The knowledge and decades of experience in horse behaviour which my instructor brought to the table, however, has helped me identify areas of my relationship with Sharif which I now work on. In the same way relationship counselling works for humans, I am learning to better understand my horse’s perspective and engage with him in a way that makes us both feel safe and heard. We are continually working on improving our basics in groundwork and translating the cues used here to riding. Both on the ground and when riding, my goal is to use the lightest aids possible. I am also constantly working on recognising and acknowledging areas of anxiety in Sharif. By getting off and going back to groundwork basics when issues arise, we are building trust and confidence in each other.

A recent example arose during a trail riding event in which we took part. Perhaps due to his

endurance background, Sharif became anxious when horses passed him and he was no longer able to see them. While before, I would have stayed on and ‘ridden through’ this anxiety (an experience neither of us would have enjoyed), thanks to my horsemanship training I was able to recognise that it was time to get off and ease both of our worries from the ground. We then did some quiet hindquarter yields and in-hand walking. I know from past experience that this turned what would have been a sweaty jog all the way home, to a calm re-mount and relaxed ride back.

The cumulative results of breakthrough moments like this have been everything I have dreamed of since that magical moment I fell head over heels for horses, more than three decades ago. The magic is equally interwoven between the big moments and the more practical day to day wins, which over time have become some of the biggest wins. We have fully transitioned to riding in a halter and sometimes even without one! The times we get to share this ‘no strings attached’ connection are wonderful, especially cantering through the vineyards, truly free and at one with each other. It is also a great indicator of the groundwork and riding skills that needed more attention from me.

Thanks to all the incredible people who have played a part in my journey and all the amazing horses who have been a part of my life, I have found my happy place in the horsey world. Another horsey girl who wants nothing more than to be with her horse. This is a great privilege.

Not all are so lucky to have found such a space for themselves. From first-hand experience, I know that it is very easy to be excluded by your financial position, to get caught up in the ego of competition, to be brought down by people in the industry, and/or disheartened by the mistreatment of horses as currently being highlighted and exposed in the media

What my horse and human tribe have taught me is that mindfulness and empathetic connection are key. We are all dealing with our own, often unspoken, troubles. Presence in the moment, noticing subtle (or not so subtle) signs or byproducts of stress and anxiety, combined with patience and understanding for the horse or human you are interacting with can reveal the other-worldly beauty of true connection. There is nothing more valuable in life, both on the horse’s back and off it. 🐾

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