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“Horses Just Want to Have Fun”

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PHOTO COURTESY T.E.A.M.

Horses Just Wanna Have Fun

As traditional training methods receive unprecedented scrutiny, equestrian pioneers such as Pat Parelli, Linda Tellington-Jones and Dennis Reis are forging new programs to cement the human/equine bond with startlingly effective results.

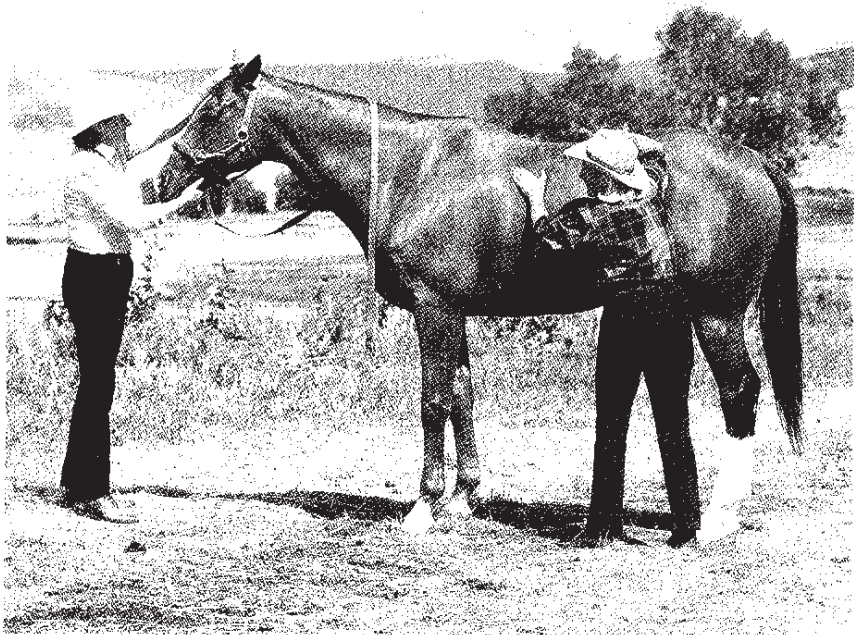


PHOTO COURTESY T.E.A.M.

The T.E.A.M. training method of hand massaging the horse relaxes muscular tension, and creates trust and a means of communication between horse and handler. Massaging or "the touch" establishes a basic foundation in a horse's training.

BY SHARON RALLS LEMON

WHEN YOU REACH the pasture and call to your horse, your trusted equine companion raises its head and nickers softly. Even though the entire length of the field separates you, your horse comes toward you at a smart trot, drawn to your call as though by a magnet.

After your horse arrives at your side it stretches its neck out for a friendly rub. You happily comply and then swing open the gate. Without benefit of a halter or bridle your 5-year-old mare walks at your side to the tack room. At your request she stands quietly while you brush her and retrieve your tack.

In the midst of your routine an old riding chum drops by to say hello and you can't resist the temptation to show off a bit. Accompanied by the friend's open-mouthed stare you drop to your knees in front of your horse and hold out the bridle.

Your mare lowers her head into the headstall, but after she's bridled you change your mind and take it off. "I don't think we'll bother with a bridle today," you say, placing a neck rope on the mare.

As you swing into the saddle your speechless companion finds

her voice and asks incredulously, "Isn't that the same crazy mare who wouldn't stand still even with three people at her head six months ago?"

"Sure," you reply, "this is Moppet. Want to go for a trail ride?"

"Without a bridle on your horse? Are you crazy?"

"Why, not at all. We've just been practicing some new training programs."

You pause as your friend's horse spooks violently at a low-flying plane passing overhead.

When her horse bolts while yours stands stock still, you can't resist saying, "Maybe you and Peaches should give them a try."

NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP

Does the above scenario belong solely to the active imagination of a juvenile fiction writer completely taken with—but entirely uneducated about—horses? Goodness knows it couldn't occur in reality: a horse that comes when called, follows without a halter or lead, stands without restraint and can be ridden without a bridle.

Complete fantasy? Not at all, replies Pat Parelli, trainer, clinician and proponent of natural horsemanship.

"In the next 10 years," says

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Parelli, "I predict that you'll be able to walk into a tack store and find three major categories of goods: English, western and natural horsemanship. And maybe all the garbage—cavessons, martingales and tie-downs—will be gone."

According to Parelli, a many-times show ring champion and former rodeo rider, natural horsemanship "helps every horse reach its potential. It's an attitude for positive, progressive change. We put principles in front of goals.

"So many traditional trainers ruin 20 horses to come up with one champion. Our goal is to make 20 out of 20 winners. With natural horsemanship you don't have to be really talented. Everyone can get great results with our program. Every horse can reach its potential, even horses that can't make it with traditional methods—even horses people want to get rid of because they are considered mentally and emotionally unsalvageable."

Sounds great, but can it work?

If Parelli's schedule is any indication, natural horsemanship not only works, it's taking the equestrian world by storm. He's out on the road teaching clinics for more than 70 percent of the year, and the rest of his time is spent teaching spring and fall courses at home as well as writing and shooting videos. He doesn't claim to have the only answer to working with horses, but he makes an excellent case for rethinking traditional methods.

EAGER TO LEARN

"There has been a shift in the past five years back to what the horse really is. The things that make [a horse] a horse." While Parelli believes there hasn't been enough improvement in training programs, real advances are being made.

"When I'm overseas the top experts are the ones coming to see me. They are eager to learn. They come out and they are attracted by what we do. In the United States people measure your effectiveness by your show record. In natural horsemanship effectiveness is measured by self-adequacy.

"You can draw a parallel



SALLY KLEIN

Behaviorist trainer Pat Parelli believes that people should enjoy horses in their natural capacity and respect their equine natures. By learning to work with the horse's behavioral instincts, Parelli hopes the need for tack such as cavessons, martingales and tie-downs will be eliminated.

between boxing versus martial arts. With natural horsemanship, you don't punch. It's a holistic treatment. Your treatment does not cause effects. There are 10 levels in natural horsemanship. The levels are like belts that let people know where they are.

"At the first level, you can get your horse to load in the trailer while you sit at the fender. You can bridle your horse while you are on your knees. At the sixth level your horse works at liberty—flying changes without a bridle, lying

down when asked, sliding stops."

What's at the 10th level?

"I don't know. No one's reached it. I'm just getting an idea of what's possible," he says with sudden, unexpected humbleness.

IMMENSE TRUST

Natural horsemanship and other progressive training programs depend upon complete trust to build a bond between horse and rider. But more than that it hinges on allowing the horse to do what it does best: to play and to do the

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things that come to it naturally. When you harness a horse's play instinct, you have a partner for life.

"A horse does five things naturally," says Parelli. "Running, bucking, jumping, cutting and cow work. Bucking isn't the result of an evil disposition. It's a good sign."

It's obvious, however, that we humans have a lot to learn when it comes to using the horse's play instincts. Parelli points out that, "Ninety-six percent of all race horses fail, 85 percent of all jumpers and cutting horses fail, 90 percent of all dressage horses fail. The human element is the reason for this failure. With natural horsemanship we work with people to teach them not to act like predators so horses don't act like prey."

Leaving behind traditional methods may sound crazy, but if you are bent on building a better relationship with your horse with better communication, then maybe your best bet is to develop a new attitude.

"You have to be ready for it," says Dennis Reis, clinician, trainer and colleague of Parelli, who calls his program "universal horsemanship."

"I used to rodeo with Pat in the days before I became a 'trainer.' I got set up with a ranch and a bunch of clients. Those were frustrating times. I had people drop their horses into an 'enjoyable ride' from the human point of view. Like everybody, I learned through ignorance. It was frustrating for me, the horses and the clients.

"Then, about six years ago, I ran into Pat again and the things he was doing with horses just blew my mind. He invited me to join him on a tour. After working with him on a day-to-day basis, I realized that I wanted to do this type of work full-time: starting colts and passing along information to interested and motivated people."

To say the least, this approach is different than the way Reis used to train. Now Reis wants to work with horse and rider together. Gone are the days when he wanted clients to leave horses for months at a time without their input and without teaching them, too.



GEMMA GIANNINI

Horses are social by nature and enjoy being touched by their human companions. A sponge bath is a treat when given in a gentle and soothing manner.

"I have a different set of priorities now," Reis says. "Now I put the horse first, then the customers and then myself. And I'm more satisfied with my life and my work.

"I try to get things to unfold to show customers how to get things to happen and help people understand why it's happening. If you give him a chance, your horse will communicate with you."

GREEN AND GROWING

"So many people want to feel as though they've made it and they are finished with learning. As though that would make them a horseman. This is how I see it: If you are green you are growing. If you are seasoned, then you are stale. My techniques have eliminated some of my old clientele. That's okay. If you do what you've always done, then you get what you've always gotten."

Reis wants better things all the time. He strongly believes that he doesn't need to show to demonstrate his horsemanship abilities. If current demographic trends in the

horse industry are any indication, he is right. More and more riders are concentrating on improving their horsemanship skills, as opposed to chasing after blue ribbons to the exclusion of all else.

"I've seen horses in the Olympics that had to be held so their riders could get on. That's not good horsemanship as far as I'm concerned," says Reis.

"Anyway, 90 percent of the business out there is not with top trainers and great horses, it's with the backyard people with regular horses. For me, it's most rewarding to help somebody enjoy their horse more and make it safer for them to enjoy. People get into horses to have fun, but often their horses are beyond them and they end up missing the fun part. If I can give their enjoyment back to them, then I'm happy."

INCREASED ENJOYMENT

Humans aren't the only ones whose enjoyment is increased by implementing these programs; the benefit to the horse seems to be at



PHOTO COURTESY DENNIS REIS

Dennis Reis believes the rewards of behavioral training and understanding one's mount outweigh trophies and points in competition. His relationship with horses continues to grow and he enjoys teaching other equestrians the joys of horsemanship.

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least as great. In fact, the horse's enjoyment in "working" without fear, intimidation and pain are the cornerstones of the programs.

Linda Tellington-Jones' T.E.A.M. (Tellington-Jones Equine Awareness Movement) method concentrates on easing pain and tension in the horse's body; teaching the horse how to balance its body and move with confidence are the keys to success.

As Tellington-Jones and coauthor Ursula Bruns write in *An Introduction to T.E.A.M.*, "Our goal is to train a horse to participate intelligently. Having both spent more than half a lifetime teaching riding, we have become committed to this goal for the following reasons: 'Such a horse is safer, because he does not run away or shy in unfamiliar situations; safer, because he has learned to listen to his rider and to seek solutions together with the rider; more of a pleasure, because he gives his rider the feeling of really being one of a pair;

less stressful, because the horse does not have to spend his emotional energy fighting the commands of the rider; a better performer, because he can understand what we want of him and is more willing and able to learn."

THE TELLINGTON TOUCH

Tellington-Jones is quick to point out that although horses do not possess the creative intelligence of humans, they are nonetheless capable of learning and drawing conclusions from their learning experiences."

Ursula Bruns writes, "In my 50 years in the saddle, on travels that have taken me throughout the world, I have always enjoyed most those horses that have been trained to think for themselves."

Most equestrians would agree, but then assert that few horses possess the ability to behave sensibly when relying on their choices. Tellington-Jones points out that most horses need to overcome pain and tension in their bodies and minds to get to the root of their potential. Unlocking a horse's potential depends on using the Tellington Touch.

Tellington-Jones writes, "The Tellington Touch is a completely new method of influencing the horse. Specifically, it can be used to teach the horse to control its instincts for flight and to substitute this with trust to locate and relax tensions throughout the body; to establish a special, nonverbal means of communication between man and horse; [and] to give the horse a greater sense of self-confidence and self-control."

MAXIMIZING POTENTIAL

The Touch is a system of hand massaging that Tellington-Jones developed partially as the result of studying with Israeli physicist Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, who was known for his breakthroughs in treating physical dysfunctions in humans and maximizing their athletic potential. Coupled with T.E.A.M. work (ground exercises), the Touch increases the horse's ability to learn, prevent overreaction due to stress, helps the horse to coordinate its movements and increases trust between horse and human.

Tellington-Jones does not claim that T.E.A.M. is the only effective method to use in working with horses. In fact, she challenges riders to get to know their horses and to combine T.E.A.M. with "any method of training you are currently using. T.E.A.M. is for all horses, regardless of breed or discipline, whether you are a pleasure rider or an Olympic contender. You will find that you and your horses will benefit from any portion of this work. Even minutes a day will bring great rewards.

"Trust yourself, and let your horse be your guide." 🐾

LOCATING THE INNOVATORS

IF, AFTER reading about these equine pioneers' work, you are eager to learn more, you can contact them at the following addresses: Pat Parelli, Dept. HI, Box 39, Clements, CA 95227; (800) 642-3335; Dennis Reis, Dept. HI, 411 Highland Ave., Penngrove, CA 94951; (707) 792-0629; T.E.A.M. Training, Dept. HI, P.O. Box 3793, Santa Fe, NM 87501; (505) 455-2945.