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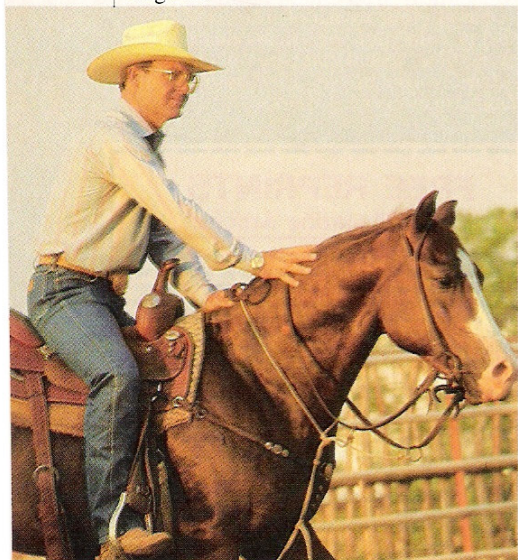


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Bill Freeman puts Sweet Lil Lena through her paces in the practice pen. See "All the Right Moves" beginning on page 42. Photographed by Kathy Kadash near Rosston, Texas.

You may have seen a rider whose show horse performed poorly in a class punish the animal severely afterward. No matter that the misbehavior is long over, and that it might have been the result of improper or rushed schooling. The rider ignores these facts as he vents his frustration with crop or spur.

On the other hand, perhaps you've ridden with someone whose horse gets

away with murder. The horse picks its own gait, from a deadheaded walk to a flat-out run, at will, and pauses to graze whenever it chooses. The rider shies away from giving the horse a well-deserved swat, maintaining that physical punishment is cruel.

A horseman knows that proper discipline is not cruel or abusive. In fact, for a well-trained, reliable horse, it's absolutely mandatory. You must walk a fine line to maintain proper discipline. Cross over one side and you are punishing the

horse too quickly or too harshly without analyzing the reasons for its misbehavior. Instead of physically venting your anger, find the cause of the problem. Usually it can be solved by patient reschooling.

Cross to the other side and you risk winding up with a spoiled brat. Like a child, a horse must have limitations on its behavior, and those limitations must be consistently enforced. Teaching and reinforcing acceptable behavior should begin when the horse is a foal and continue throughout its lifetime. If the horse

Walking the Fine Line of DISCIPLINE



Horses give each other immediate and outright discipline. They understand the same from human companions.

**A SPOILED BRAT OR A WELL-MANNERED MOUNT.
WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE?**

BY BARBARA LESNIAK

is allowed to develop bad habits, they only worsen over time. The longer the horse is allowed to get away with murder, the more difficult and unpleasant its re-training will be.

Just like the child whose mother allows it to run wild and unsupervised, the horse that is spoiled and never disciplined when appropriate will have a hard time later in life. The horse will be in for a rude surprise when a trainer must break the bad habits the lack of discipline brought on.

A horse is, by nature, a herd animal. In its mind, the horse must accept that humans are dominant members of the herd. Otherwise, there will be continual conflicts as the horse keeps challenging its riders and handlers authority.

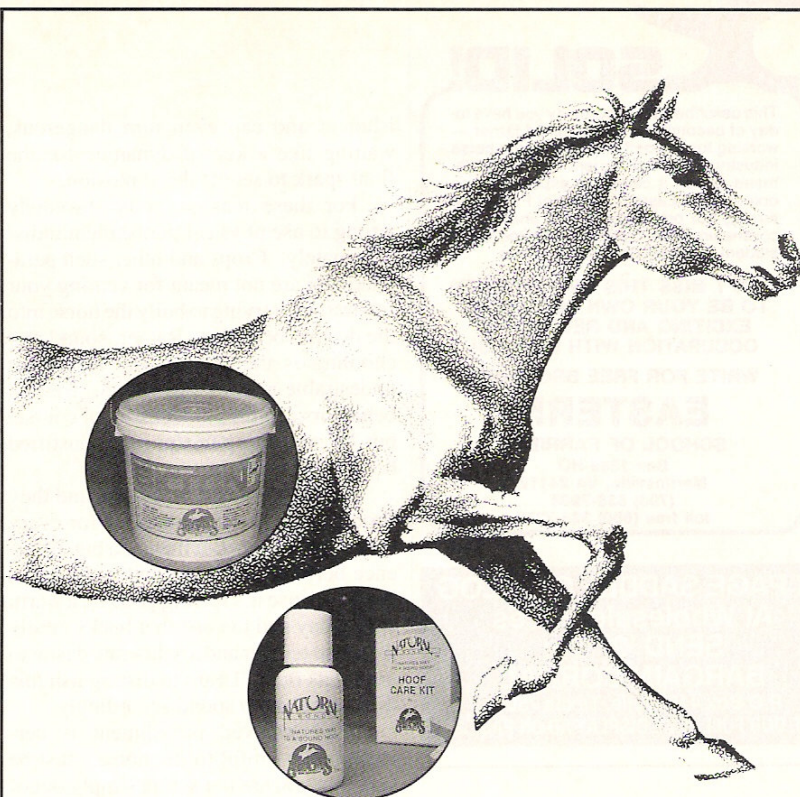
For this reason, you must always be firm and consistent with your horse. When a problem arises, you must demonstrate that you are the one in charge. For example, if the horse balks at walking through a mud puddle, you have to persist until you emerge as the victor, no matter how long it takes.

If, instead, you dismount in frustration and lead the horse across or allow it to go around the puddle, you have inadvertently rewarded it and reinforced its improper behavior. The next time you ride, the horse's resistance will probably be worse than before. It has learned that you can be bullied into giving in.

Instead of giving up in frustration, use forceful riding techniques. Apply strong leg cues to get the horse moving forward. If the horse still balks and refuses to move, or if it tries to back and stubbornly ignores your cues, a few taps with a crop are called for. However, keep in mind that a crop is an aid rather than a tool for venting your temper. While some riders rely on crops, spurs, tie-downs and other artificial aids to strong-arm their horses into obedience, the horseman who deserves the most respect is the one who can school his horse to obey with the simplest cues and equipment.

Physical punishment is not cruel when used appropriately, but it must be used with discretion. Always use hand and leg cues first and resort to artificial reinforcement only when the horse is completely unresponsive. The crop can then be used to emphasize your cues.

A horse that is controlled through fear is never truly reliable. The rider who relies on whips or spurs in place of sound training techniques will soon develop a nervous horse. The horse will be unable to concentrate on its work because it is waiting for the next blow to fall. Some horses grow resentful of unjustified pun-

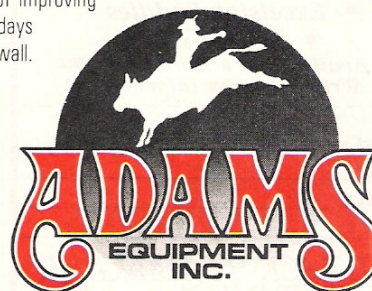


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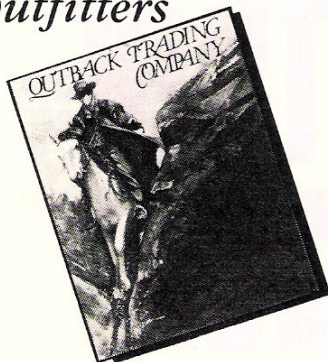
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ishment and can even turn dangerous, waiting like a keg of dynamite for the final spark to set off the explosion.

For these reasons, it is absolutely wrong to use physical punishment indiscriminately. Crops and other such paraphernalia are not meant for venting your frustration or trying to bully the horse into the desired behavior. Rather, sound re-schooling is the proper way to correct undesirable actions and habits. Certain behaviors call for punishment, of course, but be sure the punishment is justified before you apply it.

Also, horses will be horses, and they shouldn't be punished harshly for every minor infraction. But there is a big difference between the horse that kicks up its heels because it's feeling good on a warm spring day and the one that bucks purely from bad temper and a deliberate desire to unseat its rider. Learn to distinguish this difference and respond accordingly.

Well-deserved punishment is certainly not harmful to the horse. Just be sure that you are not acting simply out of anger. Is the misbehavior a result of confusion on the horse's part? Are you pushing too hard in training? Does the horse's tack fit properly, and is the animal physically sound? Is the horse beginning to develop a bad habit that re-schooling could nip in the bud? Look first for solutions that do not involve harsh discipline and physical punishment.

For example, perhaps you are working on a flying lead change, but your horse just can't seem to get it right. As the animal does the maneuver wrong time and again, you can feel your temper building. You can hardly suppress the urge to vent your anger with crop or spurs on the stubborn animal's hide.

But wait...is the horse really being stubborn, or does its actions possibly stem from confusion? Does it need some reinforcement in its previous training before it is ready for this new maneuver? If you discipline the horse at this point, it will not understand why. Instead of correcting its behavior, the punishment will make the animal resentful.

Instead of applying the crop, switch to a maneuver that you know the horse can perform well. This will allow you to end the training session on a positive note. Next time, concentrate on slowing your schooling and asking for new maneuvers only when the horse is ready.

There are always a few horse owners who view their animals as pets and shudder at the mere idea of physical punishment, no matter how strongly deserved. They're the ones who say, "Thunder

would never kick," as their horse plants its hoof in your knee, or croon, "Oh, look how hungry the poor thing is," when the horse stops dead and begins to graze in the middle of a ride.

These people often ply their horses with treats every time they visit the barn. Eventually, they find that they must bring goodies because the horse comes to expect it and will display a nasty temper if its treats are denied.

What such people fail to realize is that they're creating an unruly and potentially dangerous animal. No farrier or veterinarian wants to work on a horse that bites or kicks at will and refuses to stand still for handling. Barn workers don't want to be around a horse that can't be trusted because it's learned that it won't be punished for its misbehavior. Such a horse isn't welcome on group rides; it's very annoying to the other riders when the horse keeps stopping to pluck mouthfuls of grass or threatens to kick whenever someone wants to pass.

If this type of horse must ever be sold, it stands a good chance of ending up at the local meat packing plant. Very few others will jump at the chance to buy a thousand-pound spoiled brat. Any experienced horseman knows that it's easier to train a horse from scratch than to break deeply-ingrained bad habits.

If someone does buy the horse despite its attitude problems, the retraining process will most likely be unpleasant. Harsh methods are often required to teach a spoiled horse the respect for humans that it could have learned easily and painlessly from the start.

It's certainly all right to bring your horse occasional "goodies," but it's better not to make it a habit. Otherwise, rewards of special treats won't mean as much because the horse will take being lavished with apples and carrots as a matter of course.

Also, insist on obedience. Being ridden is a horse's work. Its time card is punched when you climb in the saddle, and it should be expected to concentrate on the job at hand. If you allow it to consistently have its own way, it will become a spoiled animal that resents attempts to make it obey. Rather than being enjoyable, riding such a horse becomes a chore.

A disciplined, well-mannered horse is a joy to own and ride, while a spoiled brat equine is annoying at best and potentially dangerous at worst. Be a responsible horseman and learn to walk the fine line of discipline. Both you and your horse will benefit from it. 🐾