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SPECIAL FEATURES

Some Thoughts on Equine Touch

From Watermark Farm, a dressage training and breeding facility in Chester County, PA
By Anne Rawle

As host farm for the four-day Equine Touch seminar in March, we were very lucky and honored to have close interaction with Jock and Ivana. What was more of a privilege was to have many of our horses used as practice animals for students in both Beginner and Advanced sessions. We found out that ALL of our horses showed marked improvement when they returned to their usual under-saddle routine, no matter if they were in the low or advanced levels of training.



One of Anne's charges appreciates a student's practice.

What we also found remarkable about Equine Touch was that it didn't matter so much if the student was a beginner, advanced or active practitioner; each of the horses benefitted from their experience with the students. One young horse had had problems with acceptance of the bit, which markedly improved after his interaction with the technique, and has been continuously more pleasant to ride and educate in the more advanced dressage exercises. Another found that he didn't have to carry his haunches slightly to the left as he got tired on a long ride. A five-year-old filly now has her mother's fabulous trot, which had always been something we could see if we squinted, but now it is there in the full light of day! Wow! Even our oldest Grand Prix dressage competition horse found that she could carry her shoulders more straight, really activate her hindquarters and engage her hocks equally in the extended trots in her first big schooling ride after her workup with Jock.

Over the years our family has tried to bring up our own horses and advance through the levels of dressage training without resorting to abusive or violent shortcuts. While many active competition stables require their horses to live "in padded cells" with minimum free time in the field, we have always used a more natural approach. We have always been advocates of massage, chiropractic and acupuncture when the situation called for it, as well as overall sound nutrition and veterinary maintenance. The Equine Touch technique we learned blends beautifully with our philosophy of management and training, and most certainly benefits every animal, whether an active athlete or breeding stock. It is a real treat to have a tool to help "that stiff shoulder" or "this heavy jaw" without resorting to aggressive medical intervention. In the month since their visit, we have found ourselves saying a silent 'thank you' to Jock and Ivana on a daily basis as we work through the list of horses in training.

The show season starts soon. It is not just ribbons we strive to win, but the horse's respect for us. Every training stable begins the year with dreams and aspirations, which should be based on honest knowledgeable systematic training. Using the Equine Touch is a bonus tool for maintaining the horse's confidence and physical comfort. The sequential symmetry of the technique is what aligns it so well with advanced as well as elementary dressage training, and allows it to enhance our training program.

Our work is based on rhythm, relaxation, straightness, and impulsion. It is the inherent nature of every horse to be slightly crooked, i.e. to have a hollow side and a stiff side. All the gymnastic sequences of dressage training are designed to minimize the effects of hollow and stiff, to stretch the hollow side and relax the stiff side. As the horse advances through the levels of training, the gymnastic sequences become more complex and demanding. If a horse gets muscle sore or stiff, its natural reaction is to object. How nice it is to have a systematic technique of intervention to help naturally rebalance the horse and get the training back on track!

We can't wait for the next session! 😊 😊

About the author:

Anne Rawle, who has always preferred a natural approach, is an FEI-level judge who breeds, trains and competes Hanoverian dressage horses.