



Between the Reins

Forum for the Narrow-Minded and Opinionated

This newsletter is an all-volunteer effort designed to reflect the horsemanship approach taught by Harry Whitney. While Harry will offer his thoughts and ideas, he does not take personal responsibility for the interpretations of the contributed student writings. The goal of this publication is to provide students with additional insights into the principles for creating meaningful relationships with our horses.

Around the Pen with Harry

Interviewer - *Jessy M. Weiss*

Clinic hosted by *Malika B. Coston & Kootenai Creek Equestrian Center in Stevenson, MT*

"For a long time I felt that clinics in general were a waste of money, time, and sometimes even detrimental to one's progress. It seemed to me that they were always pushing somebody's name, their special tack, or their magic techniques. But after attending a Harry Whitney clinic in August of 2009, I became seriously interested in returning for the next one. I was thrilled to hear the 2010 clinic was being hosted at the ranch where I currently work! During the clinic I realized it's not "clinics" that are the issue but rather why, how, and by whom they are done. The clinic was awesome and I will definitely be watching next year! In addition to the assignment of writing a clinic report I also feel honored to have had the chance to ask Whitney a few questions, which I will share with you below. "

Q - How did you get into riding and working with horses?

A - *I was pretty much born into it. I grew up on a ranch, did some rodeo and trick riding, worked as a pickup man. That sort of thing.*

Q - How did you get where you are today?

A - *Well, a lot of what I know now just came from always working with horses and continually seeing the fear, worry, and self-preservation in a horse. I've always had the empathy to help them with that.*

Q - How do you keep learning?

A - *By constantly watching and working with horses and people. I am constantly experimenting and trying new things. Three important things are observing, remembering, and comparing. Seeing patterns in horses or people and exploring why those patterns exist is a great tool. By playing with them I find out new things as well as different sides to things I already know.*

Q - What is something you know now that you would have liked to know before?

A - *Well, thirty years ago it would have been nice to know the depth of the connection between a horse's actions and his emotions and how easy it is to affect their actions through their emotions.*

Q - Do you ever get tired of working with horses and people?

A - *Horses, not really. People, yes. I take breaks from teaching but I am always thinking of new ways to get things across to people, new ways to say things. It takes a lot of patience to work with people. Sometimes I will see someone do something with their horse that they thought I said to do and it works. The funny part is that it wasn't what I meant but it's how they heard it. I learn about communicating with people and experimenting with horses from things like that.*

Q - What changes would you like to see most in the horse world?

A - *Well, I see the horse world making the horse do what they want but not stopping to analyze what the horse is going through. It would be nice to see a change there.*

Q - What would you say is the single most generally misunderstood issue?

A - *How people handle their reins. Most people I see don't fully understand the use of reins. They use them to give general guidance but don't really understand how to use them. If people knew how to use their reins it would greatly improve what happens between them and their horse. If your reins are down and you pick them up, your horse should be there as soon as you begin picking those reins up. He should be there waiting for whatever you may ask of him. The reins are*

Upcoming Clinics

Sept 25 - 29 Floyd, VA
(Bible Hrsmsph Camp)

Contact: Carol Moates
(540) 745-4782

Oct 14 - 17 Lindale, TX

Contact: Cheryl Dodgen
(903) 570-2541

Nov 1 - 5 Salome, AZ

Nov 8 - 12 Salome, AZ

Nov 22 - 26 Salome, AZ

Nov 29 - Dec 3 Salome, AZ

Contact: (765) 339-4826



Pen Continued

important. They are one of your main lines of communication.

Q - What one thing people could change about themselves or the way they work with horses to make the biggest difference in working with their horses?

A - *Well, I would like for them to see the level of fear a horse operates on and helping them to see how to help the horse overcome that.*

Q - Would you like to retire down the road or make a lifestyle change?

A - *No, but I would like to cut back on my schedule down the road. I don't see wanting to trade horses for the beach or golfing though. I plan to continue working with horses and people.*

Next Page: Book Excerpt

“Between the Reins, A Continuing Journey Into Honest Horsemanship”

Author: Tom Moates

Excerpt: Chapter 9, “So Simple”

“So simple, yet so complex,” I thought. Harry was riding a horse and getting a ton done with him. I gazed on, soaking it all in. I stood leaning on a metal fence panel at one end of the arena at Mendin’ Fences Farm in Tennessee and watched. Harry rode a Morgan named, Heyson, owned by Catherine Millard from Georgia. The gelding sported a rather long and curly mane and tail, and was black except for a white right hind foot and a little snip visible when the thick forelock blew to the side. It was Thursday afternoon in a Monday through Friday clinic, and a group ride was going on. What unfolded there with the Morgan was a kind of work I had witnessed Harry do several times before. Harry got through to this horse by riding him, and he made quite a positive change in less than an hour.

By contrast, in clinics Harry often works horses in the round pen—either from another horse, on foot, or coaches someone else who is working a horse. Often in those instances, one or two troubles get singled out and focused on. Such sticky points get the clinician’s attention because the horse owner notices certain troubles and wants help getting them sorted out. A whole range of additional horsemanship stuff may surface at these times too, but they still tend to follow along a rather narrow path relating to a particular concern.

The instance with the Morgan represents a somewhat different approach, I thought, standing there watching intently. When Harry gets on a horse and rides, especially with some room like in an arena, a wider spectrum of experience occurs between the horse and him. Many times it is prompted by an owner saying, “Harry, ride my horse!” which means just that—no specific problem to work on right then, “Just ride him and see what you think.” This kind of ride is a full contact sport, and you’ve got to be quick to observe even some of what is going on between the horse and Harry.

Perhaps it is not entirely accurate to differentiate between what I witnessed with the Morgan and much of the other work Harry does in clinics. I do see him ride a horse in much the same way in the “more narrowly focused” instances too. Maybe it is all the same thing, but right then it seemed to me that there is a difference. Perhaps the distinction is more in the fact that sometimes, like with the Morgan, Harry takes off and starts working a horse wide open with his own agenda? Or maybe he’s free styling? He just goes for it. It becomes a magnificent example of what this clinician is able to accomplish when it’s just the horse and him without the confines of a specific problem, like being bad to saddle or hard to ride to the left.

The distinction I seek to explain (I think), is that while Harry works a horse just as well all the time, sometimes he breaks it down. That makes it easier for others to catch certain parts of what he is doing. Occasionally, though, he lets loose and enjoys the opportunity to just work a horse wide open to the best of his abilities without compartmentalizing and demonstrating clearly smaller aspects of the whole. It must be a personal joy to him since it flows with a rhythm I don’t notice at the times when the nuts and bolts of horsemanship are demonstrated more individually. A ride like this one unfolds, moment by moment. I feel like I’m watching Michelangelo painting a masterpiece—the master is in the zone and the paint, brushes, canvas, and blobs of color are speaking to him as much as he’s guiding them into inspired forms. Harry likewise guides the horse-blob into a more inspired form. It provides a chance for folks like me to witness what that kind of unhindered talent and proficiency looks like. It’s a goal to work towards.

I remember saying to Harry as he rode that I bet I could write a chart to show what had unfolded between him and that horse, yet when I go to work a horse, I can’t always access and produce that kind of seriously helpful scenario. I said I wish I could “own” the knowledge to do what he was doing just then—that I could have it right there to offer a horse whenever the opportunity arises.

Harry said something like, “You mean get it in your bones?”

“Yes...exactly.”

... Harry mounted and got maybe three steps into the ride before he started backing the Morgan pretty abruptly. The backing served a barrage of purposes. First, the horse’s mind already had left the scene that quickly, and Harry was saying, “Hello, I’m up here and you’ve got the stay with me.”

That mental inflexibility likewise manifested as a dullness (unresponsiveness, or hardness) on the reins. Harry put enough pressure on the reins to get the continued the request until he felt a then released. He’d ask to go would step off without relaxing first) Harry backed him. After Morgan for quite awhile, a change softened and began to relax at the

... put enough pressure on the reins to get the horse backing and then continued the request until he felt a hint of softening in the horse, then released.

horse backing and then hint of softening in the horse, forward, but any time the horse into it (which was all the time at hanging in there with the began to come through. He walk.

This insistence is so simple to see and understand, yet so hard to accomplish for mere mortals with their horses. Think about it, can you consistently always be adamant a horse stays with you mentally and accept nothing less? It’s not always easy to do when leading a quiet horse twenty feet, let alone when riding. And what about when the horse responds correctly to your cues mechanically speaking, keeping his thoughts with you, but without softness? Can you hold out further to get all the pieces of the puzzle you want in a horse at one time? If you’re looking for a horse to be right on with your requests and reacting in a relaxed way, then you’ll need to build that in there too. I saw all this being woven together as Harry rode that horse backwards, forwards, in circles, and sideways.

... Afterwards, the group discussed what unfolded there with Harry and the Morgan. Many of the changes described above were pointed out, and pretty clear. Then Harry made the point that while folks seemed to think a great deal of work went into the session, it only amounted to about forty-five minutes. That amount of time, in terms of a ride for most in the group, constituted a pretty short ride. How true. The time was relative to the task. The length of the ride wasn’t impressive, rather it was the intensity of the work and pretty profound changes that occurred with the horse that made it seem like a long ride.

The owner went straight to the horse when Harry dismounted and climbed in the saddle. She knew from watching that she wanted to experience her horse right then, just after the Harry tune-up. She said so, and grinned wide as she felt her horse in that moment, soft and responsive like never before.



To order this or Tom’s other books, visit www.tommoates.com