

# MASTERTSON METHOD CLINIC REPORT

by Bonnie Moothart, Washington, IA

The Masterson Method of Integrated Equine Performance Bodywork Clinic, by Jim Masterson, was held in Fairfield, Iowa, on May 24-25, 2008. My husband and I attended day one of the week-long Masterson Method Certification Clinic, along with our horses, JR and Dusty. Dusty was a "Demo Horse."

I have to admit that I was initially skeptical, but my expectations were so far off base that I have to giggle about it now. (What did I expect? A long table with a sheet and a scented candle? Well, sort of.)

Instead, I was introduced to a technique that should be studied by every horse owner. I learned so much about my horses and myself, that one article cannot begin to cover it. My hope is to inspire readers to try the clinic for themselves.

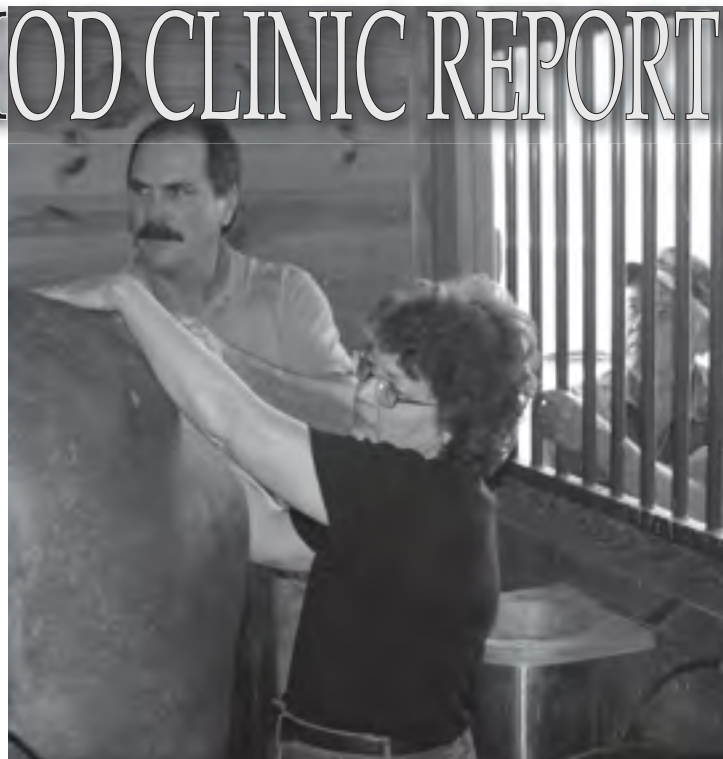
Jim Masterson is a "master" at communicating with and teaching, both horses and owners. His delivery is sequential, easy to understand, and hands on in a VERY tactile sense. He is also caring and very knowledgeable about horse behavior, and helped us to understand that, although the process was taught sequentially, it must be flexible and adaptable to what the horse will accept or even ASK for (yes!) at any given time.

Jim Masterson approaches horses with gentle, expert ease. Next, he skillfully moves his hands over the horse, and within minutes determines areas of discomfort and/or pain in the horse. He responds to the most subtle of cues; signs that most people would not even notice or acknowledge. A gentle blink of the eye tells him volumes, and he watches intently for any slight response such as twitching the lips, or sighing. Sometimes the more obvious responses, such as licking and chewing, weight shifting, and fidgeting, occur in response to a touch in a sensitive area. He then performs various massage and flexing techniques that help to soften tight muscles and joints, and the horse will almost always respond with signs of release such as yawning, shaking the head and neck, sneezing, and voluntary flexing.

Most of the horses wanted to TOUCH Jim as he worked on them. As an example, my JR (who needs time to trust **any** new person), kept his lips on Jim's arm most of the time, and at one point he placed his lips over Jim's head like a hat! Jim calmly allowed the touching without reacting and never once asked the horse to quit. Jim does not work on HIS timetable...he insists that the horse be allowed to establish that, and to tell Jim when he is open to the processes, and also when he is finished and needs to "soak." Many times, when the therapist steps back, the horse will release in some way and then walk toward the therapist in search of further interaction.

Jim Masterson taught us that a horse cannot let go of tension, anxiety and pain on his own. Even long after the trauma of an injury is gone and the bandages are taken off, the horse will still have tension and tightness, most typically in his poll, neck and shoulders, and/or the lumbar region. Also, the sensitive areas are often indicators of larger issues, either brewing or in process. As an example, our horse Dusty is having issues currently with front foot lameness, and he has been through a thorough examination and evaluation by our veterinarian, complete with x-rays. The evaluation showed thin soles on his front feet as the pathology. Shoes, gelpads, and bute for the inflammation have helped Dusty's outward pain and lameness, but he is still out of sorts and is more touchy than ever about his head.

Dusty attended the Masterson Clinic as a demonstration horse, and the evaluation by Jim and the certification candidate students showed that he has a tremendous amount of tension and tightness in his poll and neck and in his left lumbar region. Regular massage of the poll, atlas and TMJ, as well as along the neck under the vertebrae, should help Dusty to feel better and relieve the tension



Jim Masterson teaching Bonnie Moothart the "feel" of the sacro-tuberous Ligament Push, on JR. Photo by Terry Turner.

he has been holding in his poll, thus relieving his headache and anxiety. Lateral cervical flexion should also help. Massage and flexing in his lumbar region and hip/stifle should help to overcome the pain he is feeling in his pelvic/lumbar region from compensating for his front hoof pain. His overall demeanor has already improved, and we look forward to a happier, less stressed, and more balanced horse.

As good horse stewards, we must understand that our equine partners have their own way of communicating. We need to learn and respond to their cues on as many levels as possible. They are not invincible. Horses get aches and pains and twinges just like we do, and the difference is that they can't whine about it. Instead, some horses stoically deal with their pain, and some act out with what is perceived as poor behavior or disrespect that may (sadly) be punished.

Visit [www.mastersonmethod.com](http://www.mastersonmethod.com) for further information and a calendar of the upcoming weekend seminars and clinics.



JR thoroughly enjoys Jim Masterson's massage of the muscles of the poll and atlas in the "head up" position. JR was very "telling" with his lips. - Photo by Bonnie Moothart