

PERFORMANCE HORSE DIGEST

A man wearing a tan cowboy hat and a blue long-sleeved shirt is riding a brown horse with a white blaze on its face. The horse is in motion, possibly performing a sliding stop or a similar maneuver, as it is kicking up dust from the arena floor. The background shows a metal fence and the interior of a large arena.

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Hip Control BY LES VOGT

ON THE COVER & PAGE 3

RAYMOND SUTTON
QUARTER HORSES AND PAINTS

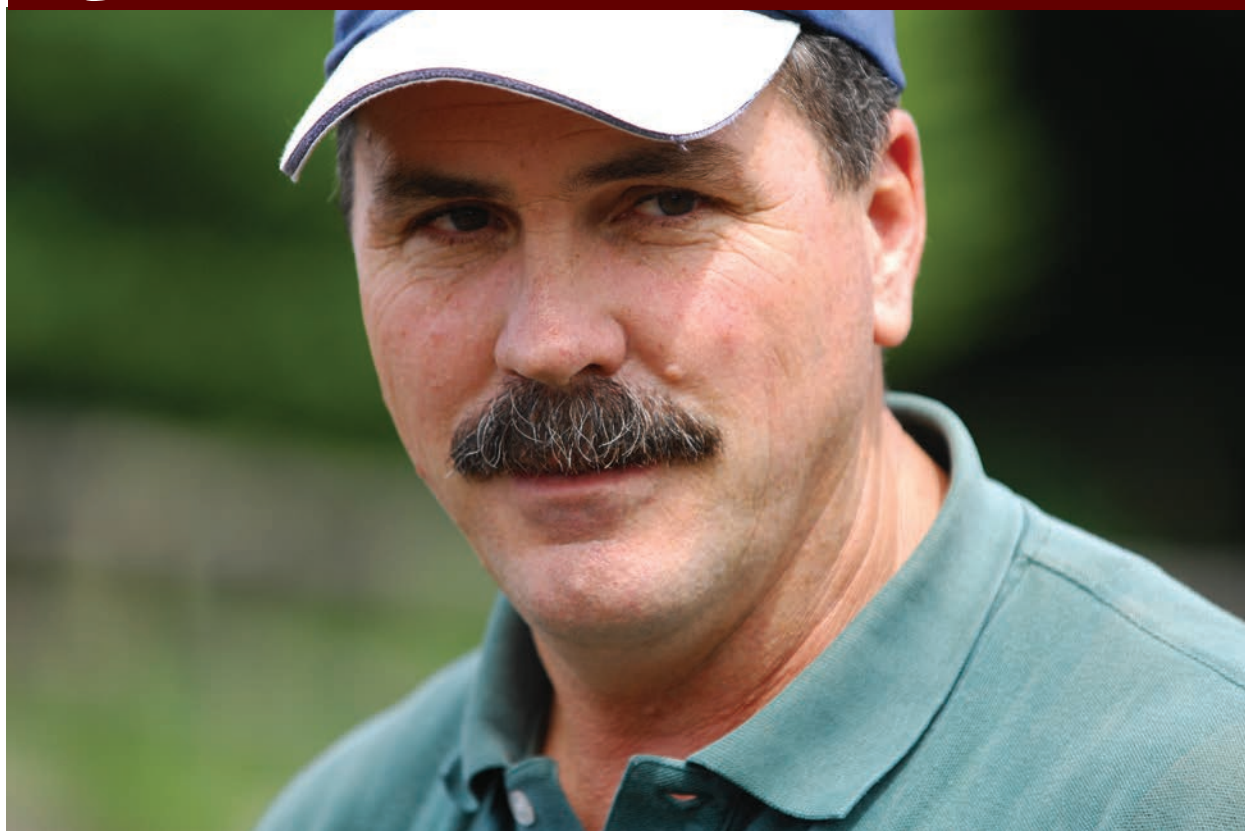
MENTAL CONFORMATION

BY DICK
PIEPER

ALSO FEATURING ARTICLES BY

AL DUNNING, BARBRA SCHULTE, CLINTON ANDERSON,
CRAIG CAMERON, DOUG LINDGREN, JIM MASTERSON,
DR. JULIET M. GETTY, LYNN PALM, PAT & LINDA PARELLI,
MARTHA JOSEY, MONTY BRUCE, RICHARD WINTERS, SANDY COLLIER, AND MORE!

Q and A Interview with



JIM MASTERSON

By Writer Shan Boggs

SHAN: What first attracted you to physical therapy for horses?

JIM: When I was grooming hunter-jumpers on the show circuit, trainers and sometimes the vets would often refer equine massage therapists, alternative therapists and chiropractors to their clients.

What got my interest the most when watching this work being done were subtle changes in the horses' behavior as they were being worked on. There were two instances in particular that inspired me to start doing this. One was an older horse chiropractor who'd been adjusting horses for forty years, who'd been trained by another old guy who'd been doing it for forty years. He used very forceful, long-lever techniques and got amazing results, but the thing that got my interest was how close attention he paid to what the horse was telling him during the process; the body language of the horse. He was able to tell by watching the horse when he got a successful adjustment and release of tension. I would follow this guy around whenever the vets brought him in to work on horses, shut up, hold the lead rope, and watch.

Another event that inspired me also involved observing subtle body language of the horse. At a

show in Estes Park, Colorado our trainer had two gals that specialized in massage therapy come work on our show horses. I noticed similar subtle changes in behavior – what I call responses – when softer inputs were applied. These subtle responses to our input is what fascinated me the most. As I wasn't trained in any modality or type of therapy, I started just following what the horse was saying through body language, doing whatever led to a release of tension, also being helped by input from the rider as to what correlated to an improvement in movement. By following response patterns that correlate to things we're doing to the body – from the subtlest to the most obvious responses – we're able to learn from the horse where he's holding tension, how much is there, and when and how much is released.

I began working on our barn's show and lesson horses, then began to take on other clients. As more performance problems or complaints presented themselves, I would get out an anatomy book and learn what was going on in that part of the body, and apply that to what the horse had "to say". It also helped to be working in a competitive performance environment and be able to see what worked and what didn't. And it helped to be exposed to some of the best knowledge as far injuries and veterinary care for performance horses is concerned. I was able to learn what

key areas of the body are most affected by and that affect performance. And it developed into a method that also improves communication and relationship with the horse.

SHAN: What changes have you witnessed in this type of horse care since you came on board?

JIM: Interest in equine massage, bodywork, and "alternative therapies" for horses is growing in part because competitors are realizing that they can improve performance by improving range of motion in their horse's bodies, and in part because of the inter-active way that horses are being trained nowadays, working with the horse's natural instincts. A method of bodywork that incorporates the horse's body language uses the horse's natural survival instincts to find and help him release tension.

Certain subtler alternative therapies such as cranio-sacral and acupuncture can be just as if not more effective on horses than on humans because horses don't have that background conversation going on in their heads all the time that we humans have, and that we often aren't even aware is happening. With horses there is less "static" between what's going on in their body and their brain or central nervous system. They're in the moment. When you're working on a horse

he's not thinking, "this isn't working," or "what's this gonna cost me," or "if I come home to spaghetti for dinner one more time, I'm gonna..."

Humans can spend thousands of dollars learning to be "in the moment," and it can last a few minutes, or seconds at a time. For horses it's natural. And even more veterinarians are incorporating alternative therapies such as acupuncture and chiropractic into their practices.

SHAN: How does physical therapy for the horse help the horse?

JIM: Well for one, horses are similar to people in the sense that they are not perfectly symmetrical. For example, they have a stronger, more predominant side, often a slightly shorter or a longer leg, the same as most people. Under the stress of work, this asymmetry can develop into imbalanced muscle tension patterns that can pull the horse's body out of alignment. Or it can cause the horse to put more weight on one leg than the other, which can lead to the same muscle imbalances, or eventually lameness. When the horse is an athlete this is even more critical. Bodywork can release tension patterns that cause the horse discomfort or pain that eventually impedes range of motion or performance. Throw into the equation other factors such as compensation for injuries, saddle or tack fit, dental and conformational issues, and the horse's body can have all kinds of tension patterns that affect movement and performance.

SHAN: How do you involve the average owner in physical therapy for their horse?

JIM: One thing that appeals to horse owners, and also therapists, about this method of bodywork is the interaction between the human and the horse, and the horse's involvement in the process. This isn't a mechanical process. It's a process where you learn how to read the horse, and help the horse to release the tension. And the techniques we use to get the horse to release tension are easy to learn and to use. And they open a new level of communication with the horse. When an owner is watching a session, the results as far as the responses of the horse are pretty evident. They see where the horse is holding stress and his responses when he releases it. They are often pretty impressed by how sensitive the horse is to touch, and how easy it is for the horse to release tension when simple techniques are applied. And if the rider can tell a difference in the way the horse moves afterward then it becomes clear to them how effective the therapy is. This particular method of bodywork is very interactive, visual and easy to begin learning so for me it is easy to get owners interested in what's going on with their horse's bodies, and often involved in doing something about it.

Part of working on the horse is to help the owner to find out what might be causing specific tension patterns in the body in the first place, and helping the owner/rider to keep it from developing into a more serious behavior, performance or veterinary problem. For example, problems in the body often come from problems in the feet. If you

can determine from the pattern of tension in the body that a foot issue – one that may not yet have manifested as lameness – might be involved, then by applying local therapy such as ice, topical liniments, supplements, or having a veterinarian or farrier address it, you can a) prevent the foot issue from becoming more serious, and b) prevent the problem in the body from returning.

SHAN: What role does the average horse owner play in the success of the horse's health?

JIM: Since the horse owner is the one who creates the conditions the horse survives in, and is ultimately the one who makes the decision regarding care and repair of the horse, the more knowledge the owner has regarding what to do, or have done to the horse, the better life the horse will have, and the better he will perform.

SHAN: What are some of the other benefits of this kind of one on one communication with the horse?

JIM: In addition to making him "go better", this method of bodywork gives the owner an awareness of how sensitive and reactive the horse can be, and it opens a new level of communication with the horse.

SHAN: How do you think this type of work could change the current thinking surrounding horse health?

JIM: As you can see with the popularity of trainers such as the Parelli's, Mark Rashid, Craig Cameron and John Lyons among many others, there is a huge shift towards "partnering," and "natural" and more resistance-free training in the horse world.

I guess it would just have been a matter of time before the same methods would be used in physical therapies. These same methods that utilize the participation and sensitivities of the horse to get the desired results in behavior or training, can work in physical therapies and bodywork. That's what we hope to teach. And not only that, but that it works.

SHAN: Are there any major surprises or conclusions drawn from your work with horses that you would like to share?

JIM: What amazed me when I began studying this, and still does daily, is
a) that the horse can be so expressive when he releases physical tension in his body, and
b) that when you provide just a little bit of help in the right way, that his body will let go of large amounts of accumulated tension that it would other-wise be difficult for him to let go.

SHAN: What is the best part of your job?

JIM: Without hesitation, it is the interaction with the horse and to see the responses the horse gives you when he has let go of some huge block of structural stress that he wouldn't have been able to let go of on his own. Number two would be introducing something new to an owner about

the horse. Many people's interaction with the horse is on the level of it being a 1200-pound mass of power and muscle that they're relieved to keep within the bounds of control. That is true, but there is another level of interaction with the horse that transcends its sense of protection and survival that we have access to, and it's rewarding to be able to show that to horse owners.

SHAN: Do you have any favorite quotes by famous people that you would like to share?

JIM: Winston Churchill said that there was nothing as good for the inside of a man as the outside of a horse. I might change that to be the inside of a horse.

A couple of other things that were said, and not said, also influenced me in this work.

The fellow I used to watch who had spent over 40 years working on horses was pretty well known because he knew what he was doing and he got results. He is one of the ones I used to pay close attention to, and offer to hold the lead rope whenever I had the opportunity. He played his cards pretty close to his chest as far as giving information out, but he would let one or two nuggets of wisdom slip by every now and then, and just a couple of those are probably what helped me figure out what direction to take in developing my own method of bodywork. One of the things he said that separated him from others was that he didn't quit until the job was finished, and he got out of the horse what he wanted to get out. Meaning he didn't just go through the moves. And, of course, he knew just what he wanted to get out of the horse. The other nugget of wisdom has to do with this last sentence: what to work on in the horse that will get you the best results and improvement in performance. That's one of the cards that I like to keep close to my chest... until, maybe, workshop time.

Jim Masterson has been the equine bodywork therapist for the 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014 USEF Endurance Teams, and has worked on thousands of performance horses, including competitors in FEI World Cup, Nations Cup, Pan American Cup events and the World Equestrian Games. He is the author of the book and DVD Beyond Horse Massage. He teaches the Masterson Method® of Integrated Equine Performance Bodywork to horse owners and therapists around the world. For more information go to: www.mastersonmethod.com.