

## The Masterson Method

### Learn to massage your horse

by MaryAnna Clemons

If you have ever had your shoulders rubbed, even by a child's hands, you know that the simple act of massage and contact can help to relax even the tightest muscles. Your horse's muscles are the same as yours. They get tight and overused and will benefit from even the most rudimentary of massages. But why just rub when you can massage away the stress correctly? Jim Masterson has been the equine massage therapist for the United States Equestrian Team (Endurance) at the 2006 FEI World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany, and at the 2008 FEI World Endurance Championships. His methods of massage, response and release have been used by him and others on U.S. and International equine competitors in Grand Prix, Nation's Cup, Pan American and World Cup events.

You can benefit from his years of knowledge with his DVD *Equine Massage for Performance Horses*. Within the 75-minute program, you'll learn how to look for signs of soreness in a horse such as behavioral issues, shying away from touch, muscle atrophy, being head shy, uneven gait, lameness, problems bending, lost seconds in competition and more. Masterson shows viewers 24 specific techniques for addressing muscle tension, spasms, scar tissue and more in the video. His methods merge acupuncture, neuromuscular release, stress point massaging, stretching and flexing.

Masterson teaches a four step method of treating your own horse: Search, Response, Stay and Release.

Entering into a massage with a horse is not something that should be hurried, Masterson says. Otherwise, you're likely creating more stress in the horse, as the horse is not sure what is expected of him. While the horse doesn't need a table, low lights and scented candles, he does need your time, your patience and a commitment to him that you'll try to find and release his tension.

As you *search* for tension with your touch, you'll look for signs of *response* that your hands are finding the right areas (twitching, moving away from your hand, licking of the lips) and then you'll *stay* where you are to work through the tension and finally you'll look for the *release* that tells you the horse is able to relax. Signs of a horse letting go and *releasing* tension are blinking of his eyes, sighing or heavy breathing, shifting of weight from side to side, licking, chewing, yawning, sneezing, shaking head, snorting, stretching and more.

Most behavioral issues, Masterson believes, start from some level of discomfort and that most, if not all, horses have (at the very least) tension in the poll that needs to be released in order for them to move the way the rider would like for them to move. If, however, you have learned from the video and still are

not achieving the results you think your horse needs, it may be time to call in someone who does massage as a profession.

Massaging your horse can help in the poll area by easing front end pain, past strain injuries, mental or competitive stress and prolonged flexion in that area. As you move to the neck/shoulder and wither area you can relieve front foot pain that may have resulted from incorrect shoeing, navicular or laminitis. As you move toward your horse's lower back you are likely helping him with any pain he may have from his legs, stifles, or any pain he may have from compensating for a bad saddle fit, an unbalanced rider, or any muscle imbalances within the horse.

During the massage you'll move your hands over the areas looking for a response. If your horse pulls away or gives you another signal as a response, it's likely you've found a spot that needs more work. This does not necessarily mean that you dig in with both hands and start gyrating the muscles around like your Uncle Leroy might want you to. Instead, stay in that spot, but keep your hands light and work the area in circles, giving enough pressure to squash a grape. Work the area until you see a sign of release from the horse.

All horses are different. Just as all people don't just jump into a massage situation, neither do horses. Respect their differences and be aware that some horses may try to act out before they settle in to enjoy the process. While a horse doesn't need massage every day, it's a nice addition to the grooming ritual before you ride.

For more information visit [www.mastersonmethod.com](http://www.mastersonmethod.com). The cost of the DVD is \$34.95 plus shipping.

