



The Power of Feel

Don't become a 'mechanical' horseman using technique alone. Try a little feel and get the most from your horse, says Florian Oberparleiter

Horses and horse people often have very different motivations. The horse's is to be safe, free and have social interaction. The horse person's is often to jump over obstacles, perform a reining pattern or do dressage movements on horse back. These two desires could not be more different.

Different methods show us different ways of how to bridge the gap between these desires. Good horse trainers use proven techniques and great feel in order to motivate horses and we all try to learn from them. However, as horse people tend to be 'practically' oriented, it is easy to just go for the technique and forget about the feel. We enjoy getting practical guides of what exactly has to be done to achieve something with our horse. We want to know when to pull, when to push or when to hold a horse. We want to treat challenges with horses the same way we do with other technical problems - we have a problem, we use some technique and then it is fixed.

BEWARE MECHANICAL HORSEMANSHIP

Using technique with no feel quickly turns into 'mechanical horsemanship.' Our training time with our horses starts to feel empty and both horse and handler start to lack motivation. It shouldn't be this way. Working with horses could be one of the biggest chances we get in life. Horses give

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us the chance to get to know our own minds and bodies, and can sensitise our ability for feeling. We just have to make the decision that we are willing to work on ourselves more than on our horse.

One thing horses show us is that if we get

into their way of thinking and try to experience the world in the way they do, they will allow us to change their behaviour without any resistance. Let's take an example. Say we have a horse that wants to go really fast and is quite nervous. Translating the behaviour of the horse into human language the horse would ask questions all the time. Questions like, 'May I go faster?' A mechanical horseman would answer by pulling on the reins saying, 'No, you may not!' The conversation goes on – 'May I look over the fence?' 'No you keep your head down!' 'May I start running at the lope?' 'No, you slow down!'

All the answers are 'No!' and we even tell the horse to do the opposite. This way the horse might start doing what we want because he is better off – but what kind of motivation does he have to do his best? Everything the horse suggests gets rejected. We try to take all the energy and desire out of the horse. Once everything is shut down we want to make the horse do what we want. Therefore we try to get some energy back

into the manoeuvre we want. But think about it. Yes, you can get back some of the energy that you have driven out before but you loose the joy, the power and the desire every manoeuvre could benefit from.

KEEPING 'LIFE' IN YOUR TRAINING

Compare a so called 'broke' horse performing a manoeuvre under saddle and at liberty on his own. Which movement is nicer? Usually the one he does on his own. Why? Because there is life in it – energy and passion you can feel.

Wouldn't it be great if you kept that life and joy within your training? Wouldn't it be great if these physical exercises didn't become monotonous routines? In order for this to happen the desires of both horse and human have to become aligned.

In the example of the fast and spooky horse we would need to stop telling the horse 'No!' and start saying, 'Yes, go as fast as you

want, but please go to the left.' Or, 'Ok and now you can even run, but please do it to the right.' Then, 'Good! Now keep moving at the speed you want, but please jump this barrel here.' The start of this kind of communication is best done from the ground.

What happens is that you gradually change the behaviour of the horse without ever turning the horse down. Soon the horse will get interested in what you suggest to him and watch out for your signals. It will stop bursting and start asking where it can use its power and where to wait. You redirect the focus of the horse on to you without interfering with his interests.

This is just one example of what can be achieved if we try to experience the world like the horse. Once again, if we just see the technique in it and do not use our feel, we will fail. No one technique works for every horse but there isn't one horse in the world that does not ask for feel.

FLORIAN IN THE UK

Want to learn more about Florian's way of working with horses? Sign up for Florian's first UK course on the 27-28 July 2013 at Oak Tree Stables, Preston Road, Bucks, MK18 4DW.

Florian will help you deepen your understanding of how horses perceive the world and how to apply this knowledge in practice. Learn how to use Florian's simple yet effective ground exercises to develop a profound relationship with your own horse. You will become aware of the power of your body expression and experience how sensitive your horse really is.

Certified Monty Roberts instructor Laura Gold is organising the event. For further details contact Laura 0780 153 8088 / laura@lairagold.com / www.lairagold.com

FLORIAN OBERPARLEITER

Florian is a young, innovative horseman from Austria. He has been fascinated by horses all his life and has studied various training concepts in the United States and other European Countries. He has learnt from a huge variety of different horsemen, trainers and behavioural experts including Dr. Temple Grandin, an autistic professor of animal science at the Colorado State University, and world renowned horseman Monty Roberts, who invited him to produce a video for his Online University.

