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Tez Chinner from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Rebecca Knudsen" <rebeccaknudsen@bigpond.com>
Date: 30 May 2011 9:22:58 AEST
To: <tezza1@sprinthorses.com>

Your barrel racing horse is an extension of yourself.

The 5 P's

Prior preparation prevents poor performance!

(Ian Francis)

There is a lot to be said for the 5p's when it comes to anything in life.

I'd like to address how I relate this to my barrel horses being well broke from the ground up.

There are great theories on keeping a barrel horse correct and everyone loves to know the next new exercise that they can apply to their horse in the effort to create 'that perfect run'.

Personally my training for the perfect run begins well before I have saddled up and stepped aboard the horse.

Regardless of how talented your horse is or how long you have owned him

I believe that you can be ahead of many other contestants spending as much consideration educating your horse on the ground as you do in the arena.

We all enjoy the horse who loves to be our friend, the one that likes to snuggle and be petted.

Many believe that this is a key to the bond that brings out the best in a competition horse and granted for some of the greatest individuals that may be the case.

However consider this...

How does your horse differentiate between being allowed to encroach on your personal space to having to maintain discipline while under saddle.

Why, if he is allowed to lean into you on the ground, can he not lean into a barrel or your leg?

Why, if he is allowed to drop a shoulder toward you or be unresponsive to touch on the ground should he be expected to yield lightly and responsively from your leg pressure when you are on his back?

If he will not be mindful of you and his surrounding or be light and soft on the ground why should he be different any other time?

If you only make him mind you sometimes should he be expected to be consistent in his job as a barrel horse all the time?

If your horse is not entirely responsive on the ground what happens when you add speed?

Will his reactions be inconsistent? Does he respond to you quicker due to the faster pace?

Does he respond as half hearted as he behaves on the ground, causing you to knock a barrel?

Or when pace is added does everything just fall apart?.

Is it fair on your horse to create these double standards?

After all we do create this.

A mare educates her foal from the first day of birth about boundaries.

The mare makes her foal be mindful of surroundings and if you have the opportunity to observe they also educate them about personal space.

Obviously there is always room for tender moments but horses amongst others do not allow affection to turn into disrespect.

The same can be observed from an unhandled colt, they are well aware of their boundaries in relation to objects and space.

It is us loving owners who alter the barriers and desensitise our horses, unintentionally encouraging them to break down their awareness of such things in the effort to create a relationship.

Do we confuse our horses?

Do we create the bad habits associated with the barrel pattern by how we allow our horses to behave on the ground?

Its worth thinking about!

Why we certainly would not be surprised if a child found it confusing or difficult to sit stately at the dinner table in a restaurant if within their home they were allowed to slouch and be unconscious of their behaviour.

Some children become so offended by such alteration that they may rebel and protest not unlike a horse that becomes sour and defensive.

My horses are aware of their surrounding and behaviour at all times.

They know their boundaries on the ground and are respectful of this.

Therefore If ever there is an object to pass, a narrow alley or a gate way to walk through they are well aware that this needs their attention.

They have learned that it is their business to be aware of obstacles on the ground and negotiate safely and in doing so they are at the same time taking care of me as their rider.

They negotiate the barrel pattern in the same way and inturn if they were ever caught out of position I find it very common for them to jump right back over to where they're meant to be of their own accord.

This is because I have maintained clearly and consistantly that each horse know their job and be aware of their boundaries from the ground up.

They must take responsibility without needing to being constantly cued.

By being a responsible educator I have made those horses mindful and responsible for what is expected, what is correct and aware of the difference.

This does not require a rider with a severe hand or a passion for raking up ones ribcage!

The horse does not need to be constantly antagonised to get results or maintain them.

When a horse is aware of what is expected and everything is clear and consistent they do not forget.

They can then relax and get on with the job at hand.

When everything is clear and consistent ...

When your horses are well maintained and soundness is not an issue...

When you are fortunate enough to draw the good ground...

There should not be too much room left for error.

I pet my horses just as much as the next girl would do so but at the same time I am sure to maintain control of their mind and their body in the working situation.

In the paddock or stable your horse should know that this is a resting place where you can love and pet as much as you like.

I try to give my horses as much relaxation and pleasurable activity involving my company as possible so that he is aware that I am not all just about work.

After all we do not send out applications and say “do you want a job as a barrel horse”?.

These horses are given absolute attention and full care.

In return for this when I catch my horse to remove him from his enclosure it is time for work, regardless of what we do when he steps through that gate he has a very important job at hand.

If you are like most barrel racers you put a lot of effort into your horse and it is important for you and he to remember that “he actually works for you!”

Be careful that you don't fall into the category of the girl with the “spoilt barrel horse”.

It is not advantageous and certainly not well respected amongst our male competitors and might I add with good reason.

Contrary to some belief they are not jealous of your horse they can often just see that you are creating a problem for yourself!.

Your body language and mental connection with your horse should tell him what is going on – work, fun, exercise time for loving or serious competition time.

If you have previously put into place the work on the ground and set a good level of communication with your horse he should know what is expected, how he needs to behave and how he needs to react.

A horse with an even temperament educated such as this will often not get flustered on an exercise day or in the warm up prior to the barrel race.

A horse prepared like this will also know when its time to clear their airways and prepare their body for a competition run, they become lighter and more responsive in all areas of their mind and body.

By setting boundaries with your horse on the ground and maintaining them at all times you should eliminate bad habits from forming and develop a consistent, solid partnership for lasting enjoyment & success.

Best wishes,

Rebecca Knudsen