

“...Why keep him tortured, chained and mad  
And dungeoned from the daylight’s gold?  
*His blood’s the best we’ve ever had,  
And all his stock are sound and bold.*

Maybe. - I crossed the sunlit lanes,  
And only saw, with eyes a-brim,  
The torn brown breast, the trebled chains,  
The broken heart; and wept for him.”

[From “Banshee”, by Will H. Ogilvie]

“There are things in life we cannot see, taste, smell, hear, touch, or understand. But we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they exist because our heart tells us so. For the heart possesses a wisdom far beyond that of the intellect and a vision far grander than that of the mind.”

This site offers an opportunity that is not available anywhere else in the world. The beliefs, perceptions, philosophy and truths offered here are yours to examine, evaluate and utilize to grow and learn and thereby enhance your knowledge and abilities. Or, you may discard them as you choose.

In either case, they will test your ability to assimilate contradictory and oppositional beliefs and practices of horse training to its very limits. For never before in the history of mankind, has any method of interaction between human and horse been offered that is more oppositional to the very core beliefs of “horse training” than Friendship Training.

\*To be told that there is a definite probability that something you sincerely believed to be right and best for your horse might have been “wrong,” can certainly seem offensive anyone. There is absolutely no intention to diminish anyone’s love and efforts to give their horse what they think is best for them. But this site does reserve the right to cast the light of simple logic and truth upon the dark shadows of traditional horse training with the hope that enlightenment will persevere over preconceived notions. Hopefully, those who read this will not take it as offensive to their core beliefs but realize that if we are to continue to make any appreciable advancement that benefits both horse and rider, we must first gain an understanding of how the horse views our actions and interactions with him.

After all, there was a time when brandishing hot irons on a horse’s rectum and tying small wild animals to their tails were considered highly acceptable methods of “horse training.” But we have grown and matured as a species to regard those methods as, at the very least, archaic, abusive and counterproductive. As we continue to grow and learn, our present day methods of using restriction, comfort/discomfort and physical

punishment as essential tools of “horse training” will soon be regarded with much the same regard as those archaic, abusive and counterproductive methods of long ago.

A well-established, highly reputable equine magazine in Germany published the following article in December of 2003. It was not intended to be a “Monty bashing” article. Equine experts from all over the world simply gave their independent, objective analysis of “Join Up.”

The imperative, highly significant point to remember is that there is actually very little (if any) difference between Mr. Robert’s training format and all other training formats. If you pause for a moment, if you look very carefully beyond the expertise of extremely proficient marketing specialists and sales experts, you will see that they all use restriction, intimidation, comfort/discomfort, force, pressure and/or physical punishment in varying degrees. In reality, what was once a handful of knowledgeable horseman sharing their knowledge has become a highly profitable corporate race to see who can promote the most successful advertising campaign and thereby increase “sales.”

Think for just a moment. Every horse that was ever born was born a **perfect horse**. We have had 6,000 years to “practice” with the same Equine Perfection. Yet horse magazines and periodicals as well as the Internet are continually filled with same problems that have plagued each generation of horse owners 6,000 years. It is obvious even to those that have never touched a horse that the problem cannot possibly lie with the horse. And there is only one other party involved in the Human/Equine relationship....

Sincerely,

*Chuck Mintzblaff*

**\*Reprinted with full permission of Cavallo Magazine**

Article from Cavallo magazine, December, 2003.

((Introduction))

When a horse in a round pen is chewing and licking its lips American trainer Monty Roberts rates this as proof of the success of his work, that will gain him the respect and the trust of the horse. Robert's interpretation: The chewing and the licking is a sign of respect and relaxation of the herbivore horse. This theory is one of pillars of Roberts' allegedly non-violent Join-up method.

How do equine ethologists and behavioural scientists interpret the chewing and licking? Does it always signal relaxation? How gentle is Join Up really?

CAVALLO asked leading experts from all over the world. Here are some

excerpts of their answers:

**Dr. Barbara Schöning, Specialist in Animal Behaviour from Hamburg, Germany.**

From a very early stage the foal shows chewing and licking, the head can be lowered at the same time and the legs bend - similar to the suckling at the udder. Later this eating behaviour becomes a social behaviour that signals submission and appeasement during conflicts. Behaviourists believe that the empty chewing (bruxism) not only restrains the adversary's aggression but also calms and relaxes the chewing one, in the sense of a so called displacement activity. If a horse shows this kind of behaviour, there is a reason for it: it feels threatened, which means it is stressed and therefore shows a behaviour that in its opinion is adequate in order to avert the threat. As it is impossible to flee in a round pen it is left with the options to attack, to surrender or to appease.

That is where drama comes into play: situations like those that Monty Roberts creates are for most horses incomprehensible. Why (from the horse's point of view) does an unknown person put on massive pressure in a situation where nothing important, in the understanding of the horse, is at stake?

Generally this means double stress which in my opinion brings it to the limits as regards animal welfare. I don't think humans should only be very gentle. Pressure is necessary every now and then during the training - but it has to be reasonable, graded and above all comprehensible for the horse. Then it won't suffer stress as it learns how it can resolve a certain problem.

Monty Roberts is neither gentle nor non-violent in the round pen – unless gentle and non-violent is defined as "the absence of direct corporal punishment/manipulation".

To me psychological violence is also relevant.

**Dr. Sue McDonnell holds a PhD in psychology and physiology and is Head of the Equine Behaviour Lab at the University of Pennsylvania. She is one of the leading experts for Equine Behaviour in the USA.**

Most behaviourists have concerns regards the naturalness of these natural horsemanship methods. Many horse owners who have been exposed to these methods contact our Institute subsequently for help. This indicates that they often encounter complications or even failure. Join up is a weird and ever growing changing combination of procedures that has very few if any practical applications beyond the "show".

Same results can be achieved in much simpler ways, though not as entertaining perhaps.

Now in the US it seems that Monty is going out, I haven't heard much lately about Shy Boy or any of his materials. The methods people have learned in join up type clinics can be fairly rough and border on inhumane and can cause psychological wrecks long-term.

**Dr. Francis Burton, Brain Researcher and Behaviourist at the Institute of Biomedical & Life Sciences of the Scottish University of Glasgow.**

I think the horse is already stressed by the time he is "licking and chewing". This action is caused by a previous adrenaline release. The simple physiological explanation goes: being made to flee - increase in circulating adrenaline - dry mouth - licking. This means a horse may lick and chew following a fright, in which situation it surely cannot mean "I'm a herbivore, and if I'm eating I can't be afraid of you" – the interpretation given by Monty Roberts in join up. I've tried "join up" with three horses with whom I already had a trusting relationship. One joined up "classically" and followed me around meekly.

The other two displayed signs of being irritated by the procedure, one showed increased aggressiveness towards me. I was left wondering frankly what the point of the exercise was and realized that the driving away had a detrimental effect on the trust that I already had built up. > It is not a technique that I would consider using myself, or recommending to other people.

**Lesley Skipper, Equestrian author from the USA. Author of the book "Inside your horse's mind - A Study of Equine Intelligence and Human Prejudice".**

**She owns eight Arabs, Hanoverian and Draught horses.**

I have often observed chewing and licking in horses who are anxious about something as evinced by their body language. In some cases it may simply indicate that they are thirsty. This illustrates the need for caution when attributing specific meanings to particular gestures or facial expressions as these can vary according to context. To be fair, Monty Robert's pupil Kelly Marks does inform people that licking and chewing can signify anxiety, and she also warns that join up is not suitable for every horse.

The problem I have with many so-called natural horsemanship methods is that it seems to be based on some very limited observations of free-ranging horses and much of it pertains to stallions rather than mares. The result is that the training methods adopted are based on very simplistic assumptions, which are not necessarily correct.

**Mary Ann Simonds, Wildlife and Range Ecologist, Equine Behaviourist and Therapist. In 1987 she wrote the Guidelines for Managing Wild Horse Stress for the American Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and she is the founder of the Whole Horse Institute in Vancouver/Washington.**

In working with many wild horses, I have observed that at first their lips are tight and they are fearful. As they start to let go off their stress, they often will lick and chew - this is however more a sign of relief than of relaxation. But horses will lick and chew, too, when they are in a high state of stress with eyes rolling back, sweating, pawing. But in this situation it demonstrates, I believe, just a way for the horse to release some of the built up stress.

I have known Monty Roberts for almost 30 years. Many of the "join up" techniques are not natural to a horse and in fact cause trauma. The video made by Monty Roberts with a wild horse given to him by the BLM was one of the most stressed encounters I have seen. The wild horse demonstrated every level of "high stress indicator". Good horse

ethologists or trainers take into account the horse's temperament and level of stress and then design the most appropriate method to help the horse learn with the least amount of stress and fear. Patience, kindness and being able to think like a horse, are the best traits a human educator can have to educate a horse. Join up once started out as a better way to "break" horses, and has just turned into just another way to control horses using techniques they do not all understand.

**Dr. Dirk Lebelt, Specialist for Animal Behaviour at the Horse Clinic Havelland in Brielow/Brandenburg, Germany**

I have some doubts regards the claimed naturalness of round pen training. Even though the control of the movement of a lower status horse by a high status horse is a characteristic of specific equine behaviour. But while under natural conditions the lower status horse is able to evade the aggressions of the higher status animal and may signal its submissiveness, an evasion is impossible within the round pen. In my opinion this explains partly the quick success that often can be observed during round pen training. The horse feels it is at the mercy of the trainer, which is also called "learned helplessness". This leads to quick submission.

How far such a procedure, which surely doesn't correspond with the specific equine behavioural repertoire, is non-violent or not, depends definitely on the empathy and the experience of the trainer.

**Andy Beck from the "White Horse Farm Equine Ethology Project" in Northland/New Zealand studies equine behaviour and training methods on Thoroughbreds and Arabs.**

The drive away in which the horse is put into 'flight' is potentially very frightening. The use of a mask increases the element of panic and the potential for "learned helplessness". While this may create an appearance of "control" it has also been shown to impede future

learning. There is also the risk of producing abreaction in response to repressed emotion (fear, isolation). Horses that have already been well socialised to people become extremely confused by being driven away. The horse has no idea why it is harried and is most likely to experience the method as unpredictable aggression - the last thing a good trainer wants a horse to experience.

One of the most basic tenets of good horse management is that the handler is able to control their behaviour so that they do not trigger the response of blind flight as a predator would do.

**Professor Katherine Houpt, Behavioural Psychologist and Physiologist at the College of Veterinary Behaviourists, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA**

I have seen Roberts use the Dually as punishment - jerking on the nose rope and forcing the horse to back up. He doesn't call it punishment, but it is. His method is not suitable for every horse. Very aggressive horses will charge. And it is not suitable for every horse owner, as some simply exhaust the horse. To drive the horse away is just a form of negative reinforcement - doing something unpleasant until the horse does what you want. That is not too different from kicking the horse until he trots. I don't think this method has anything to do with herd behaviour and I don't know how often horses are permanently cured of their problem if Roberts isn't there. Round Pen training is not miraculous.

**Dr. Natalie Waran, Expert for Equine Behaviour at the Royal School of Veterinary Sciences of the Scottish University of Edinburgh**

In the UK we are rather getting tired of the join up method especially as this method is not new at all, but the Gyro (a round pen) was used for training horses in Roman times. If the horse is placed in isolation and in an unfamiliar environment and powerful psychological techniques such as those in the join up system are applied, you have to question the effect that has on the animal: The handler becomes an unpredictable dictator and the horse learns to become helpless, activity is reduced and the horse shows licking and chewing - all signs of stress.

**Dr. Sharon Cregier, Equine Ethologist, former Lecturer at the Canadian University of Prince Edward Island. She has published many books and articles on equine behaviour and animal welfare.**

I have never liked the "predator - prey" application to horse training. The horse is a social animal, seeking security and reassurance with trusted herd mates. An ill horse is driven from the herd and it is forced to try to survive on the edge of the herd where it is prey. Therefore it must be confusing to a horse to be continually driven from its source of security but unable to flee. The round pen, notes veterinarian Robert Miller of Thousand Oaks, California, inhibits the horse's natural flight response. The free horse flees a predator in a straight line.

Regards the "chewing and licking" it has not been clear to me whether Monty Roberts is referring to the grooved "suckling" tongue or the nervous attack on, for example, hay in a trailer when a horse is under stress.

**Dr. Willa Bohnet, Biologist and Expert for Equine Behaviour at the Center for Animal Welfare, School of Veterinary Medicine Hannover; Germany**

To do a join up with an aggressive horse in a closed round pen is highly dangerous. The method on its own is not suitable for the behavioural therapy of a problem horse. For such a therapy it is necessary to combine, depending on the diagnosis, various methods (for example conditioning, systematic desensitization and anti-conditioning in cases of fear and phobias). Under certain circumstances Join up may be suitable to establish the relationship as regards dominance between the trainer and the horse as a basis for further training. Horses that are generally ready to accept the human being of higher status and to work with him, would be completely confused if they were chased away by the trainer without knowing how they had triggered this behaviour. I once attended a Join up demonstration by a book writing trainer during which he wondered why the mare he was working with would only follow him a few steps.  
(continued)

What did the good man do wrong? Every few steps he looked over his shoulder to control if the mare was following him. Every time the

mare turned around and ran away. Why? In the horse's language looking over the shoulder right at someone is a threatening gesture, to which the mare responded correctly. If Monty Roberts really refers to predatorial behaviour he wouldn't have understood the background of his own method. A threat by an attacker causes fear and the flight response. If the horse unable to flee, panic arises. The best learning result, what a good educator aims at, is achieved in a relaxed atmosphere. If Join up is practised gently and not in a way that the horse stops running at some stage being sweaty all over and completely exhausted, then it can be used for some horses and in certain therapeutic approaches. But for heaven's sake it is not a method suitable for everybody. Due to Monty Roberts public demonstrations people get the impression that you only need to chase around your horse properly and it'll be as meek as a little lamb after max 30 minutes and all problems will be resolved. Fallacy!

**Dr. Evelyn Hanggi, Equine Behaviourist and President of the Equine Research Foundation in Aptos, California.**

Round pen training and Monty Roberts are not one and the same. Proper use of a round pen by a good trainer is not nearly as stressful as what you see with Roberts. He uses halters that create pain. He uses a buckstopper and right there he loses any credibility of non-violence. Horses do not learn well when they are fearful or in pain.

**Dr. Marthe Kiley-Worthington from the Eco Research & Education Centre in Devon, UK, is the Grande dame of Animal Behaviour Research and she founded in 1959 the Research Stud Druimghiga.**

It is awful that Monty Roberts refers to the behaviour of a predator. I have seen some shocking results of this. It is madness to frighten a frightened horse. This daft idea of "dominance" comes from the male competitive cultural society in which we all live. The fact of the matter is that the equine societies do not need to be based on dominance or competition, their food etc is either available for every one or no one, only at sexual times there is need for competition between males, and even that rarely occurs in the wild, as the mares rather like their own stallion and are not prepared to put up with intruders.

Dear old Monty does not seem to understand learning theory if he rejects totally feeding as a reward. There needs to be some positive reinforcer to make the horse learn. If Roberts only works with negative reinforcement - that means stopping to chase the horse

around as a reward, this does not work as well as behaviourists know already for quite some time.

**Andrew McLean, founder of the biggest Centre for Equine Behaviour in Australia, and member of the International Society of Applied Ethology. He trains problem horses, rides Dressage and Military and is completing a PhD thesis on the mental processes of the horse and its consequences for training.**

It has been clearly demonstrated by researchers that unlike other behaviours, fear responses are not subject to extinction. Any fear responses that are provoked by humans (like e.g. chasing it around a round pen, the editor) will indelibly etch on the horse's memory - the horse associates fear responses with the perception of humans. The trouble is, these associations are not always evident immediately, they come back to "haunt" the relationship at a later point when stress levels are raised. All sorts of chasing horses should therefore be questioned.

In our early training and in the rehab of horses at our centre, we avoid all forms of chasing such as driving or lunging especially when the horse is fearful.