

Thomas Herding Technique

Discovering the Communicated Equine

A View From The Hoof

Behavior on the Move... Parts I & II

By:

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I

THT's Theory of Relative Motion

A true understanding of how the horse views time in motion begins with a simple equation: *Time-of-Activity is relative to Time-of-Inactivity*. Thus, added pace and speed cause each to accelerate or decelerate in relative unison. Mental conditioning therefore must supersede physical ability in order to maintain both pace and accelerated levels of motion, *speed*, in smooth transitions. This is because the time afforded the horse to interpret stimulus is diminished relative to the speed at which he or she is moving. The ability to maintain *pace over distance/time-in-motion* is thus dictated by the mental capacity or *focus agility* that is within the Emotional Conformation of the horse. This synergy defines conceptualized motion allowing the horse to accelerate or decelerate without injury.

Physical ability and mental capacity are separate parts of the horse. For example physical ability in a Thoroughbred can be measured by the speed over which a distance is covered, where mental ability is measured by the pace of the time in motion. Full potential cannot be reached from training only existent properties (the physical horse) and dismissing the emergent properties, (the mental horse) which ultimately allow the horse too safely and quickly identify the stimuli that are experienced in rapid form as speed increases.

Assuaging mediocre performance or even breakdowns that can be falsely misinterpreted as *surface issues* or other extenuating circumstances of activity means training the horse forward; because the horse interprets speed and distance as *time-in-motion*, (speed for a horse is relative to circumstance, which is governed by *perceived need*, or *environmental influences*), it is necessary to account for and train for, both physical and mental.

Training Forward physically is conditioning the body for speed over distance. I want my horse to run a mile; I train him or her for physical fitness to achieve this goal successfully. However, this does not

allow for training of pace. To prepare the horse properly on a mental level, the horse has to maintain mental focus agility over a sustained period of *time-in-motion*, which we see as pace. If the horse needs to be in accelerated motion for two minutes of competition, the horse then should be trained to maintain focus for four minutes. Motion should not here be confused with speed; they are not trained or elevated in the same manner. The ability to maintain focus while in motion is not governed by the speed of motion but only by the time-in-motion. Therefore walking the horse for four minutes that competes for two minutes while applying variable degrees of mental stimulus is as effective a mental training tool as the horse physically working out at a distance beyond that at which he will compete.

Hesitation stems from a lack of mental agility and focus, hesitation at a high rate of speed is inherently dangerous as this allows for Behavioral Overcompensations, *theoretically speaking*.

II

The Psychology of Motion

The true *psychology-of-motion* operates primarily on the basic principle of *initial concept*. This means that which is initially experienced by the horse will be associated in similar circumstances and lend itself to a triggered response. The triggered response is first put into action by way of Behavioral Overcompensation because physical reaction is here governed by mental focus and decision based upon the sensation of perceived or experienced stimulus.

The easiest way to make sense of it all might be to liken this experience to ourselves walking on ice. The *ice* being the *surface* and how we move over it being the *psychology of our motion*, a conscious effort is made not to fall if we are initially aware of the ice under foot, thus the ice is not met with the same trepidation as it is when we are unexpectedly on it.

If you are walking along and you suddenly hit a patch of ice and you slip a bit, you feel your heart race and a rush of anxiety running through you as you catch yourself. Now fully aware of the sudden change of surface (initial concept) you pace with more purpose, overcompensating in the area of your feet to *feel* your grip, your senses piqued. If you change direction, or pace, or get bumped, you will immediately recognize the sensation under foot and compensate accordingly, so as not to fall. Likewise, you will use all senses available to you in securing your safe motion over this surface until you feel once again that you are back on secure ground, which is also reflected by your interpretation of stimulus. Likely, you will *feel* that you are off the ice; however you may remain on high alert for a



period of time. This is because once a stimulus is experienced physically and reacted too; the perception of it can override the need for a physical response. If you were scared out of your wits by a friend in a dark room who had hid around a corner and jumped out at you, you will be wary of this happening again and thus you may indeed jump out of your skin at any *trigger* in a similar circumstance, or moreover, recognize the circumstances and simply make an effort to avoid it. You have *learned* from experience.

This makes mental preparedness vital to physical performance. The key to training the equine or successful transitioning from one environment to another, (adoptions/changes) starts with an understanding of where the horse is mentally; their Emotional Conformation. To avoid pace altering reactions to physical stimulus in motion, the horse must be mentally prepared. The use of THT's Variable Stimulus Training, protocols designed for the specific horse's mental conditioning serves to elevate the psychological confidence so that sudden changes of surface or other physical stimulus will be met with far less overcompensation. The horse thus prepared will draw on a wide array of associated experiences that smooth transitions in motion can be achieved with little or no loss of pace. *Physically capable of a given task does not mean mentally prepared to achieve it.*

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