

Thomas Herding Technique

Discovering the Communicated Equine

A View From The Hoof

The Psychology of Motion and the Race Horse, my own opinion...

By:

Kerry M. Thomas

Founder of Thomas Herding Technique

*The following was used recently as a note on our Thomas Herding Technique Face Book Company Page

I'm very often asked about and truly quite often see the high level horse that is seemingly an underachiever when it comes to crossing the finish line ahead of their peers. Seemingly happy to be anywhere but ahead of the others physically; this is actually, because they truly are. We cannot hope to change the way a horse learns nor can we alter the ways in which the individual horse interprets stimulus in motion and translates that into physical movement; managing position, speed and pace. We have to work within what is natural for the horse as a species, and as an individual Emotional Conformation.

If we think about these facts; that a horse sees the world nearly in a circle removing any real sense of left and right, front and back, that the primary source of high level communication is intent and presence, 'feel', and that high level horses naturally seek to conceal themselves from any action that will draw the eye of the predator, we are left to coach the horse within the rules of their game, and not the wishes of ours.

High level horses are quite often happy to let the herd move ahead of them or around them during the initial burst of movement, sometimes this happens in stages; there is the initial quick physical burst, then as the motion protracts some horses will settle back and begin to interpret the motion and the other horses' movement... and then the longer the Time-In-Motion quite often the high level horses will "make a move forward" and 'stair-climb' their way forward. This is because in nature, the three stages of motion are in place to keep the high level horses safe; the settle in aspect is the most definitive because this is the most common form of movement at speed and doesn't last too long a Time-In-Motion, however, the longer the motion the more anticipatory "need" there is to usurp the position in front not to continue the motion, but to slow it down.

Thomas Herding Technique

206 Homeville Road Cochranville, PA 19330

Telephone: 610-593-4889

Email: stablemaster@thomasherdingtechnique.com



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This is why you will sometimes see a horse out front seem to allow themselves to get caught, or slow down... this is because they are and it's natural. The longer and faster Time-In-Motion is happening, the more likelihood of making a wrong move or getting ambushed by a predator. The overall job of the leadership is to protect the herd survival. Have you ever seen a really capable race horse who seems to be willing to simply let themselves get overtaken or "not know how to handle a lead"? You will not change this aspect by whipping or pushing, you cannot change this affect consistently by altering the distances or putting on headgear to try and "get the horse to focus". I don't think so; I rather think we have to coach within the rules of nature, and develop the mind ahead of the body.

There is a key survival component to each horse which is profound in the higher level horses, and this is their "Anticipatory Response Mechanism"; the longer Time-In-Motion, the more anticipated the movements will become to give the best chance of not getting hurt, mentally coaching the horse forward over Time-In-Motion means creating an anticipated sense for the need to move forward.

The Emotional Conformation, the "who" (psychological horse) that is managing the "what" (physical horse) takes over more and more control as Time-In-Motion protracts. Training and preparing the mind far in advance of the body's physical motion in a manner we use at THT called "Retraction Training" allows for optimum efficiency and balance between mental interpretation and physical speed, pace and position. Feel free to contact us and ask about how we can help you and your horse, but I will not place your horse into a program, I will build a program, around your horse.

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