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Experience Horsemanship From the Heart!

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*Harry Whitney Clinic participants (Left to Right)  
Joan Marie, Bill (auditor); Evelyn (auditor);  
Helen, Harry, Julie Carpenter; Stella; Mike,  
Susan, Kati (auditor) & Julie K.*

MMR changed the format of this year's Harry Whitney Clinic. It went from individual one-hour sessions each morning and two five person classes each afternoon, to seven riders for the entire two weeks. Auditors were asked to commit to a week too. (This is how Harry structures his week-long clinics in Arizona.) It meant fewer people attending and less access. But from a participant's point of view, it went from short hectic sessions splitting Harry between 14 people a day, to a relaxed focused atmosphere where everyone took the time it takes to truly progress with their horses.

The change was magical. The small group shared questions, moments of enlightenment, and funny stories mixed in with insights on the heavy duty learning that went on.

It was just like Julie's clinics. "You just hang out and work with your horse with Harry's guidance, and then watch each other and ask questions," notes Susan. "All of a sudden you realize that you learned something and are doing things better. You don't even notice the point where it all comes together. It just happens."

As Harry puts it, "We come to a clinic to work on the pieces of a dance, and then practice putting them together." Whether it's your first time or 50<sup>th</sup>, each person contin-

ues to add new and more intricate steps." MMR owner Julie adds, this is why she rides with Harry at least twice a year. It is part of a lifetime of improving our equine dance.

### Awakening:



*Left: Helen rides with no hands in order to help her get the feeling of moving with Regalio instead of sitting on him and pulling his head.*

One of the biggest changes in the clinic was for **Helen & Regalio**. This was her first clinic with Harry. She had owned and ridden Reg for two years and even participated in endurance rides with him before becoming frustrated that something wasn't right – or safe – in their rides. Her friend Mike got her signed up for the clinic. The first thing she learned was that her horse was not paying attention to her.

## Harry Whitney Clinic:

### A Two-Week Equine Thought Experience

"Being aware of what my horse is feeling and focusing on makes all the difference for me," Helen says. "Now, I have begun to see the difference, and can help my horse feel better about what I am asking.

Helen elaborates on her realization that many horses are doing everything their owners are asking, but they are worried that they might end up dead because of it. So they hold back in order to always be ready to preserve themselves (ie: check out, bolt, startle, buck, or run home). "I think there are a bunch of people riding bunched up, worried horses. But they think they are collected."

Harry explains that this happens because the horse's thought is not with its rider and it doesn't feel good to the horse. "A horse has to turn loose of all his own thoughts before he can have room to listen to and go with what we might be asking," Harry says. "Horses don't have to be troubled by what we are asking. They won't if their thought is here with me. But I have to ask for that and wait for him to get with me.

**"We need to notice and fix the spots where our horse's thought leaves us. It leaks out the gate, or over to another horse," he explains. "If we don't stay aware of where their mind is and get it back, our horses won't stay with us mentally."** We do that by asking her to give to a rein, or sending her forward or directing her elsewhere. We have to offer a chance to go with our direction.

## Harry Whitney Clinic (continued from p.1)

If your horse is not with you, your requests become an annoyance that they brace against, even while doing what you want. That resistance can make them get tight and use themselves incorrectly. Tightness leads to many physical issues including a weak, swayed back, pockets behind the shoulders, and often a bumpy ride for the rider.

### A Thoughtful Habit

Although **Mike & Shaw** had attended another Harry clinic, he also advanced his understanding of focus. "Until now, I was mainly concerned with *what* my horses were *thinking*. But if you consider *where* your horse's thought is instead, it is a whole different focus."



We need to wait on our horses to find correctness. "That means I might have to abandon my planned line and wait for the horse to get correct in his response to my rein," he says. The key is to make sure what is happening *now* is correct. A horse needs to know how to yield to the rein and be correct. We want to direct the horse, not pull or lead him. **Direct the thought, not the horse.**



*Stella and Angelique take their first trotting steps together.*

The good news is that it is easier than you think to get the thought to go where you want it. But it does take the rider's focus.

### Focus on the Feeling

**Julie Carpenter** chose an especially resistant horse to work in the clinic. **Cassie**, a big quarter horse, had a lifelong habit of pushing people around. Cassie's owner **Bill** audited the clinic. He was happy with how much better his

Harry agrees. "Too many people are just sitting on top of their horses," he says. "Most people think that riding should not be hard. But **you need to be present for your horse to help them understand what you want.**"

**Joan Marie** brought her new Halflinger, **Muffin Man**, and a young Lusitano to start on groundwork. She has worked with Harry for years and owns some of the most finished horses of the group's riders. Yet she adds "when I change my focus from what their feet are doing, to what their thought is doing, it's a whole new game."

Harry expands that thought, "**The mechanical move is the request, but having it be the horse's idea to perform that move is more important. If you don't get the thought then the mechanical movement doesn't matter.**"

I prefer a horse *bend* and *want* to move (instead of *yielding* and being *forced*) so that the horse takes responsibility for finding his own balance and straightness and physical correctness. Otherwise he will never learn to balance and think through the movement himself and we will always have to do it for him.

**Left Above:** Mike and Shaw wait for Harry's direction after Mike forgets to ask Shaw for a soft head before giving the release.

**Above & Right:** Harry and Julie work with Cassie to help her stay relaxed and focused on her rider, and to resolve her dislike of other horses being near her under saddle.



**Above:** Harry and Joan Marie watch as auditor Madeline helps show why Muffin Man needs to know the advanced "haunches in" movement in order to pull a cart safely.

**Right:** Harry tells his favorite travel stories around the table after an evening BBQ. The story of the evening was about Tennessee the muleskinner.



horse was after a month of Julie working with her. But on day one of the clinic, as soon as she was asked to do something, everyone could see this was still a dangerous horse. She stuck her nose up and looked for ways to escape. After observing her resistance, Harry took the lead rope and asked for her attention.

"This horse doesn't know she doesn't need to feel this bad around people," he explained. "It may take a lot to get her to understand that's just not necessary. It may even get a lot worse before it gets better."

Of course Cassie laid back her ears and threatened Harry. That's when Harry got really big, and Cassie got really mad. She squinted her eyes and snaked her neck and tried to back and to lunge and rear; everything she could think of to get back to her own thoughts.

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## Harry Whitney Clinic (continued from p.2)

Even though Harry got big with his requests, he never directed any pain at her. He wasn't correcting her for feeling the way she did. He cracked a whip on the ground, but not at Cassie, explaining, "I get big to get her to search for a different way of feeling."

And he rewarded her smallest attempt to feel better. He got quiet when she looked at him with a quiet eye instead of a wild white eye. He stopped asking her to move when she offered an ear in his direction. Eventually the release came when she lowered her head, then when both eyes turned softly in his direction. The resulting change was dramatic. Cassie finally stood quietly facing Harry and following his direction.

### Calm Doesn't Mean Focused

"It really struck me as I watched Cassie, that (minus the animosity) these were the same issues I was facing with my young, bomb proof horse **Taz**," says **Susan**. Taz would face up and follow her like a puppy wanting attention. But she had developed so much self confidence lately that she just didn't have much need to listen to Susan when riding. "She felt better with herself than with me," Susan admitted. So they worked on helping Taz feel better focusing on her owner.

Harry explains sometimes horses that are calm by nature are actually harder than those with a lot of 'flee' instinct. "Ones who are fearful by nature will hunt up their person sooner than one that is more self confident," he says. "The fearful ones quickly come to see their owner as a source of calmness and protection." That's not bad, but Harry would rather see a horse be OK in any situation and just **want** to be with their human.



*Joan Marie teaches her young colt to back when she pulls his tail. She begins by standing safely behind and to the side, and supports her request with a rope to which he already has*



*Above: Julie K. enjoys some focus and speed on Bendito. After working to get more in tune with him, Julie finds that he can turn on the speed without getting tight and worried. Left: Harry helps Stella teach Angelique how to execute a correct change of direction without stopping on the circle.*



*Above: 5 year-old Taz doesn't feel she needs to focus on her owner or Harry. She resists a long time before deciding standing relaxed and quiet with Harry is the best idea. Once she does (Right), she releases tons of stress with big yawns, licks, chews and deep breaths. Her experience is similar to many during the clinic.*



*Once Taz feels good focusing on her owner, many other behavioral issues clear up on their own. Right: Under saddle, Susan focuses on being clear in her requests and directing Taz's thoughts to where her feet need to go. Firm follow-through (not nagging) is what this self confident horse needs.*

A horse can have confidence in himself, his environment or in a human. If it's in the human, then what happens when you're not there? If it's in his environment, then what happens when things change? If it's in himself, he can be OK anywhere in any situation. "Our job is to help build their self confidence overall so they can do OK in any situation."

The time we spend with our horses affects them the rest of their lives, Harry reminded people. That lesson had sunk in for **Stella & Angelique**. Stella had done all the prep work, but saved her first rides on Angelique for this clinic. Angelique was perfectly happy to stand facing Stella for hours. But surprisingly, her big issue was the same as Cassie and Taz. She wasn't really focused on Stella. As soon as that got cleared up everything else became easier.

Getting forward was another recurring theme for every horse and rider. Forward has to come from inside, Harry emphasized. The feet may go on the trail, but we also want their thought to be with us. If it is not,

we're just along on their ride. And if they don't feel good riding, their feet can get pretty heavy.

**Julie K.** captured the thought perfectly, "If their thought isn't with us, then the feet don't count."

Even though her Peruvian, **Bendito**, was always rushing, he was really just rushing to *anywhere that might feel better*.

"That's exactly right!" Harry exclaims, "You've got it. You just need to help him send his thought to where you want his feet to be. Help him focus on where you want him to be."

Julie K. adds she has learned to stay more aware of her horse and how they are together. "Some of the clutter of riding just fell away and I can see why I need to be there and how to put it all together better."



## Harry Whitney Clinic (continued from p.3)

By the end of the clinic Julie K. had made notable progress with her horse. "Julie made a great change and improved her seat even though we didn't work on that," Harry explained. "She is finally starting to ride the horse that's under that saddle, and her horse is with her now."

### It's Just Common Horse Sense

Difficult horses are often what brings an owner to the natural way of practicing horsemanship. But this kind of awareness and partnership is just as important for people who have horses who have checked out mentally but go through the motions. It is equally as important for the horse to be with the rider as it is for the rider to be with their horse.

Harry smiles big: "Once you get that communication going, the joy and the freedom you both get is the most rewarding thing a person could imagine!"



*Above:* Early in the clinic, Harry helps Helen learn how to ask for softness and correctness in her normally tight and worried Arab, Regalio.



*Above:* Participants and auditors watch an owner work with their horse in the round pen. Even though each individual's time with Harry and their horse is limited, participants learn just as much through watching what happens with the other participants. Time outside the round pen reinforces and broadens the understanding of what they learned inside.

*Left:* Julie K. smiles as Bendito bends softly at her request. Real progress has been made.

## Auditor's Thoughts on the HW Clinic

**Bill** – It's been a real eye opener. I hadn't understood the importance and value of getting the horses' mind and keeping it with me – both for me and for the horse. Get the mind and pretty soon you are working together. I thought my other horses were with me, but they are not.

**Evelyn** – I understand now the need to be careful of getting the horse going through the motions. I see they need time to work through what they need to in order to truly be with me.

**Kati** – The new format is more supportive of my learning. I feel like I have more knowledge in me. Now I won't be lost in a lot of places I might have been before.

**Cherie** – I always thought more is better. But in a very short time watching, everything changed for me. Before, my riding was reactive. Now I am looking for him to be with me. Now I can feel more in control when I am riding.

## Harry Whitney's final thought for the clinic...

*A little bit of really good is a lot better than a lot of mediocre.*

*Right:* On the last day of the Clinic some of the auditors saddled up to join the group in a final ride with Harry. Left to right: Evelyn and Callie; Harry and his black Morgan; Susan and Autumn; Julie and Cassie; Stella and Voltans; Julie K. and Bendito; Joan Marie & Muffin Man; and Kati and Chip.

