



ALTERNATIVE HORSEMANSHIP WITH SAMANTHA HARVEY  
 HOOFPRIENTS & HAPPENINGS NEWSLETTER©  
 VIA THE EQUESTRIAN CENTER LLC



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### TEC Summer Recap

What a summer! I jumped into the season re-opening The Equestrian Center for the 15<sup>th</sup> year with horses arriving from around the country. It is interesting to see the wave of horses that arrive for training; this year a majority of the focus was directed towards mentally and physically rehabilitating older horses.

From Alaska to Minnesota, from Canada to Texas they arrived and each one received a "clean slate." These troubled horses were the epitome of what constant and continual pressure can do to a horse. Later in the newsletter is a recent article I wrote on the topic of "Pressure and Release."

Snickers showing me how to get on the mounting block.



One of the core aspects I teach is for both the human and horse to be adaptable. Scenarios such as clinics, due to weather, new locations, and factors out of our control, can be a challenge for what most folks would consider as a "productive" clinic.

I see so often the primary focus of clinicians is "selling" riders on the idea of task accomplishment versus prioritizing the quality of the conversation between human and horse first. By having quality tools to communicate, presenting tasks using clear and specific aids to help the horse, everything presented to the horse can become an opportunity to help build his confidence and achieve what is being asked of him rather than "challenge" him through a situation.

In past discussions with other non mainstream professionals, we've all admitted that usually what the public "wants" and what the public *needs* tend to be very different.

Many people get into horses for it to be a fun, mental, emotional and perhaps social outlet or "down time" as a reprieve from the rest of life's demands.

Here is where riders approach the fork in the road; there are those who ride solely for the sake of what their personal goals or desires are. And then there's the group of folks who ride to create a partnership with their horse. Aesop's Fable, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, could be applied to the type of training methods applied to those looking to hurry up and win the race, or those who would like to experience the journey.

The overly quoted but little practiced cliché, "Life is a journey, not a destination," can be an exciting aspect of horsemanship as there is no "end point," the journey can be a positive, limitless one.

Often once folks start working with me, I hear that a lot of my "horse training" philosophies, really are about the human, their decisions, awareness, sensitivity and what they are projecting into the world way before the horse is addressed.

In other words, the approach I use with horses is the same thinking process that could be applied to the rest of life's challenges. The training and lessons are not just focused on behaviors or experiences with the horse, who offer an honest reflection on an emotional level, but rather things like proactive leadership and decision making.

This summer has been an influx of folks who found me after years of being involved with horses, without ever considering the horse's needs. Multiple new students, with varied backgrounds and years of experience have voiced, "Why didn't 'THEY' ever tell us about any of this *before* we ever..."

When the student has no "agenda" it allows me to share what I consider the most missed part of the ride; the human becoming aware of themselves.

Few things in life require the level of mental presence and honesty the horse asks of us. This inspires me to try harder, learn more, believe them sooner, hear them more clearly, and work *with* them, which leads to amazing possibilities. All skills I am relish sharing on a daily basis with students of all levels and abilities.

Sam

## Remembering Great Horse People

This summer the horse world lost legendary horseman Walter Zettl... The following are wise words any horse person should integrate in their training methods irrelevant of the discipline.

"The biggest enemy to the partnership of Dressage is impatience and the human nature to dominate other creatures." Walter Zettle

Trust and respect are two-way streets. We want the horse to accept us as leaders of the herd, to guide them safely and to provide protection and comfort. In return, they will give us their respect, and willing submission to our ideas about what to do next, and when and where. But this respect can only be based on well deserved trust.

Walter Zettl

WWW.STOREMYPIC.COM

Sally Swift is another legend who passed away in 2009. Here is my favorite quote from her:

"Remember, the conversation between you and your horse must never be dull or inert. It should be, "Ask, receive, give. Ask, receive, give." Ask with your body and legs; receive through your body into your hands; give primarily with the hands, but also with your body and legs, so that you can ask all over again, receive again, and give again. The give is your thanks. If you don't give, you must ask harder the next time, and even harder after that, until you end up with a dead or resistant horse. I have heard Major Hans Wikne, coach of the Swedish dressage team and head of the Swedish National School for Instructors, say so many times, "For everything you ask from your horse, you must give back a little more. The give is more important than the take." Riding is much more than a push-me-pull-you between leg and hand."

— Sally Swift, Centered Riding

## Winter Preparations

Here are some helpful links to ideas how to make the transition and duration of winter easier for your horse.

Equus <https://bit.ly/2MzidEN>

Equisearch <https://bit.ly/2nPT9vC>

SmartPak <https://bit.ly/12kpBJG>



## The new "normal"...

Another summer, another round of smoke. For the third summer in a row that the inland northwest has experienced horrendous fires and smoke for months. TEC has been surrounded by fires on all sides. There are health warning for folks not to go outside or do many activities, but what about the animals who never get relief from the haze and poor air quality? How educated on you if a disaster happened in your area and you have to evacuate the animals?



I took the above picture was take just north of Sandpoint, ID, during the second week in August.

This podcast is an excerpt from our [Ask TheHorse Live Q&A](#), "Protecting Your Horse Farm From Fires." Dr. Rebecca Gimenez of Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue and Alayne Bickle of Horses for Clean Water tell you how to get started. [Listen to the full recording here.](#)

You can also test your emergency preparedness with our [special interactive feature](#), "Natural Disaster: Are You and Your Horse Ready for Emergency Evacuation?"

## Pressure and release... The missing language of a quality partnership

A majority of unwanted horse behavior stems from the animal responding with defensiveness towards any form of pressure. Spatial and physical are the most common types of pressure people use to communicate with horses. If there is a physical resistance and mental distrust towards pressure, this can lead to a wary partnership between horse and human.

The horse presenting himself to be haltered, working at liberty, walking past a scary location or object are all forms of spatial pressure. Tasks such as standing tied, tacking up, being mounted, and rein/seat/leg aids are all examples of physical pressure.

An overlooked factor in creating a quality partnership is the rider recognizing the horse's efforts by offering a release. Think of the release as an acknowledgement or "thank you" towards the horse for his effort. It is the only encouragement the rider can offer to horse to inspire him to keep trying.

The timing of the release is crucial and can be offered in a multitude of ways. It can be physical, such as decreasing the use of an aid or slowing the pace; a spatial release could be encouraging a horse to "think through" a scenario. A rider lacking sensitivity and awareness, unintentionally creates constant pressure towards their horse.

Mistrust can begin when the horse complies with the initial pressure, and a rider continues to "take" or demand more of the horse. Eventually the constant pressure with no release is too much for the horse, who then begins displaying resistant (fussy, busy, defensive) behavior. If the horse's movement still appears "manageable," his concerns tend to be ignored, or worse, the rider's response is to create MORE pressure in an attempt to "make him" do something or to contain his resistance.

What does this vicious cycle teach the horse? That every time he displays he has a problem, he is going to have more pressure applied to him. Eventually the horse has had "enough" and uses his size and muscle to get bigger, stronger or perhaps more intimidating. The obvious unwanted physical behavior is often the symptom, rather than the root cause.

A common practice is to mask the unwanted behavior, with quick and easy "fixes" such as using more severe tack. Adding equipment, working the horse harder and longer, all forms of pressure, lead to increased resistance from the horse.

Instead it should feel like a respectful conversation between the rider and their horse, not a screaming match. The rider should ask something of the horse with minimal energy and effort, through clear and specific communication. The horse can and should respond in a polite and willing manner.

The reality is that many riders feel like they are begging for the horse to acknowledge them. Other folks' approach is to "make" the horse do something through physical dominance; this fuels the horse's defensiveness. Then there are riders who learn to work "around" the horse, limiting what they ask of them to avoid potential resistance or conflict.

None of these methods contribute to the horse or rider's confidence, trust, respect or partnership. So how do we fix it? With young or inexperienced horses, my philosophy is it is easier to prevent something from happening, than trying to fix it after-the-fact.

Horses are born sensitive, alert, aware and curious. But often by the time you see a horse that has been ridden for a few years they have "lost" a lot of those traits. So what happened? Through no ill will or bad intention, rather a lack of quality equine education, many folks have handled their horses in a manner that has unintentionally taught the horse to ignore them, to be fearful of the human, and to feel defensive towards people in general.

(continued →)

(Pressure and Release continued)

How does this happen? Contributors that tend to quickly create mistrust, misunderstanding and concern for the horse can include but are not limited to:

Professionals who prioritize quantity of task-accomplishment with the horse, rather than quality and confidence-building training practices.

Trainers who feel time/financial/ego pressure to produce results and rush colts or inexperienced horses too fast or hard in their initial education, creating a fear of the unknown.

Trainers sending inexperienced horses home to inexperienced riders who “don’t know what they don’t know,” therefore the rider asks things of the horse that are overwhelming or over-face the horse.

A rider’s general lack of correct usage of aids, creating a constant heaviness (all pressure and no release) combined with continual mixed signals and passive communication.

A lack of physical release from the rider contributes to a mental disengagement from the horse. This is what I consider as overly desensitized horses or mentally “shut down.” They aren’t interested in participating, and they are only tolerating the human, leading to continual resistance towards the rider.

So what if you aren’t working a young horse, but an older experienced one, can he “come back” from the mental stress and physical pressures created by people? Absolutely. It does not take long for the horse to recognize the immediate difference in a “conversation” focusing on refining his interpretation of pressure and release, defining clear boundaries and standards as to what behaviors will work and those that don’t. The more the horse realizes his efforts lead to a release, the more curious he becomes about what is being presented.

Horses can be incredibly forgiving animals, and can quickly adapt to positive, clear and specific communication. Re-sensitizing the horse to being soft on the lead rope, leads to a softer response to the rein. Following-the-feel and softening to pressure, should feel like the horse is “melting” towards wherever you first direct his thought, then his body, whether you’re on the ground or in the saddle. The horse should feel like putty, waiting for you to mold him however you’d like. Being a herd animal, he can be very willing to comply and adapt, if the rider is willing to educate themselves and learn how to support the horse through scenarios, rather than solely critique his efforts.

### Winter Adventures Abroad...

Over the past few years I’ve had the amazing opportunity to blend my love of world travel with equine related activities. Several years back riding with the vaqueros of South America, another year working with island horses in St. Vincent. This upcoming winter I’ll be heading to the south pacific islands, seeking out horses and offering my Alternative Horsemanship teaching and training theories to an international group of equine enthusiasts.

Tentatively in 2019 I’ll be resuming clinics in Hawaii after a nine year hiatus from teaching in the islands. Plus there have been recent discussions for me to return to the southern tip of Chile in the winter of 2019/2020 to offer several Full Immersion Clinics along with a colt starting clinic. Where in the world might our paths cross next?

### CA Clinic Winter Series

Mark your calendars- Sam will be teaching six clinics over the winter offering individualized one- hour private sessions for all level horses, riders and various disciplines. FREE auditing!

Hosted by Oakzanita Ranch in Descanso, CA. Most participant spots are filled but [email](#) Ginny for session availability and to get on the wait-list.

2018

October 24-29

November 7-12

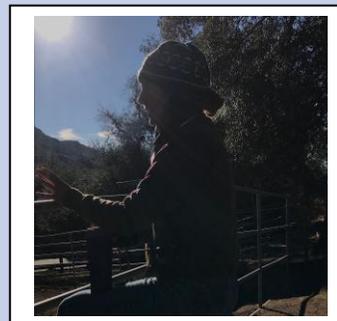
2019

January 23-28

February 13-18

March 13-18

April 3-8



## Confidence and Communication for the Trail Ride

This time of year equine enthusiasts are excited to take advantage of the good weather and to enjoy the amazing scenery while riding in nature. One of the many emotional draws towards the freedom of riding is to escape the stresses and realities of jobs, family and daily responsibilities... Because of this draw, folks tend to approach riding trails as a time for relaxation, which in turn can cause them to unintentionally offer passive, after-the-fact communication with their horse.

"Passenger" style riding can appear successful during uneventful circumstances. The "wait-and-see" approach also is used in a variety of scenarios when the rider realizes the horse might be concerned with something. Folks quickly realize that their lack of communication and inability to influence their horse's behavior under stress causes them to feel at the "mercy" of how ever their horse chooses to respond to a situation.

Between inconsistent terrains, unexpected wildlife encounters, herd behavior among multiple horses on a ride, there is a lot for both the human and horse to mentally process. As much effort and energy goes towards logistics in finding new riding trails and planning adventures with friends, the reality is the least amount of time is often spent on what I consider the most important part of the equation- preparing the horse for a quality, "uneventful" ride by building a solid foundation.

Preparing for riding out is not a matter of desensitizing a horse or practicing riding past scary objects multiple times. The old "wet saddle blankets" theory I agree with to a certain degree; if there is quality conversation during those long trail rides, they add to a horse's education and build his confidence. If instead each ride is making the horse feel more concerned, the increased frequency/length of ride will only add to the horse's "spookiness" or reactivity.

A horse's natural defense is to run when unsure, but if he offers this response, there is usually a "fight" with the rider, teaching the horse that every time he feels fear, he gets critiqued. What if instead we taught the horse the unnatural response that when he is unsure, to physically pause, and mentally check in with the rider, and to willingly hear the rider's instructions as to how to handle/navigate the situation?

This approach is not an easy answer, nor a quick fix, and counters the idea that the primary focus of trail riding is social hour for the human. Tolerating mediocre proficiency in the basics such as steering, brakes, and

using a gas pedal that often "sticks," is neither polite nor supportive to the horse, and will add to any insecurity he may have. Rather than feeling like we survived an unexpected moment, if we have effective tools to communicate, we can use it to build our horse's confidence, decreasing the chance of injury and increasing the horse's curiosity every time something new occurs out on the trail.

The ideal response to an aid is a soft and immediate "try" from the horse. Often a rider's aid is received as a critical attempt at blocking a horse's thought or focus, and creates defensiveness in the horse. His mental stress is reflected in excessive physical movement and dramatic behaviors.

While in a safe environment perhaps take a moment and assess the current effectiveness of your aids and communication with your horse. On a "boring" day, what is the willingness in which your horse participates? Does he present himself to be caught (or run away), is there lightness on the lead rope (or dragging- indicators as to how he'll respond to rein pressure), is he mentally and physically quiet while groomed and tacked up (or wiggly, pawing, fussing, chewing, fidgeting), can he stand when mounted (without being contained by the reins), is there sensitivity (or hypersensitivity) towards the rider's seat and leg, is there mental willingness to hear the rider's opinions during a ride, does he try something once and then just quit if asked again?

What if our standard was happy horses don't exaggerate an obstacle like jumping six feet over the six inch stream, don't jig when asked to adapt their energy level to the slower horse in the group, don't paw if left tied unattended for a few moments, are able to stand still quietly, can ride at the front, middle or rear of the group, are willing to leave the group and ride off by themselves, or anything else we might need to ask of them for the sake of practical and safety purposes?

By supplementing trail rides with short, incremental, quality conversations, the horse could begin to recognize how to mentally and physically "stay" with their rider, without feeling contained. Tasks or obstacles can be a tool for teaching a horse to think through a scenario, but presenting one isn't about the physical accomplishment of the task, rather the quality of the conversation that occurs to complete the task with slow, intentional, relaxed movement. If the horse rushes through the task, even though he may have complied with what was asked of him, if it made him defensive, then task would no longer be a tool. Slowing down the anticipation that caused the rushing, presenting a task in pieces, allowing

the horse the time to think, search and try to address the task with quality, builds the confidence he'll need for the trail.

Sometimes in order to achieve the most quality, we have to slow down and perhaps fill some "holes" in our partnership with the horse. Rather than feeling like riding out translates into chaos and hoping to survive the ride moments, the more specific and intentional we

are in what we ask of our horse, the timing of how we ask it, and the sensitivity in how we use our aids to communicate, will influence our horse's physical behaviors and mental attitude towards us while experiencing the real world.

Good Luck, Sam

### What can happen at an Alternative Horsemanship Clinic?

One person might work with a "broke" performance type horse that has been so ingrained with human expectations and patterns, and who has learned to be obedient in order to not be reprimanded, that just by being in close proximity and changing what the horse had anticipated would happen (such as not catching as soon as you enter his pen) and watch the horse's emotional roller coaster as years of pent up obedience and emotional containment are purged...

Another person might work on the nuances of rebuilding a horse's curiosity and trust after years of the human experience causing that horse to mentally shut down and check out causing the horse to outwardly seem physically quiet, but internally is quite troubled.

Someone else may encourage their horse, while at liberty, to learn to mentally search and make decisions, without being "driven", chased or scared into brainless and reactive physical movement, rather instead offering thoughtful and intentional steps.

Another person might practice learning to refine their feel and time while riding, as they raise their standard of softness and clarity towards the horse...

Someone else may be learning how to recognize from how they're sitting in the saddle, where they're horse's feet are underneath them, to offer the clearest aid to influence the ideal movement.

Another might be working with a young horse building a solid foundation of learning "how to learn" with thoughtful intention as new things are introduced, that will be used in future rides.

The horses breeds, ages, experiences are all varied. The disciplines, participants, experience levels, and their backgrounds are even more diverse.

And all the while, it might be blustery wind gusts, freezing temps, peaceful and warm, sleeting rain... The weather is irrelevant... the location doesn't matter... the "accomplishment" of a task is ignored... rather it is all about the conversation between the human and horse. The goal is to offer soft, clear and intentional two way communication.

It is only then that you see the worry and peak lines on the horse's face disappear, the muscles in the horse and human's body relax, and both take a deep, quiet, body-replenishing breath of air, while experiencing a shared peacefulness of being mentally, emotionally and physically present.

### Consultation Call

**What is it?** Don't let distance hinder your learning experience! You have the option of a private half hour or a one hour phone consultation. I will address any equine related questions, videos or pictures previously submitted by you. You can choose from a half hour session or an hour session, payable via PayPal; click here to [register](#).

Once you make a payment, an emailed confirmation will be sent. We will then schedule a day and time to for the consultation. To sign up please click the [link](#).

## Rebuilding reasonableness in spooky horses...

Do you have a "spooky/overreactive/hypersensitive/dramatic/flamboyant/neurotic/destructive" horse? The following are thoughts I shared with a client after her older spooky horse arrived for an assessment:

We had a good first week. The major underlining issue is that your horse is fearful, which creates dramatic and defensive behavior.

However he initially learned added with whatever the human experiences afterwards were, has taught him to be "contained" no matter how worried he is, until the moment he cannot "handle" what is being asked and becomes super chaotic in his fleeing movement.

Basically he can never let down and relax due to the anticipation of what might be asked of him next, and is so consumed with being on high alert, that he literally cannot see or acknowledge the world around him. The moment he finally does notice things, it all is too overwhelming and he wants to flee from it.

The cresty, over bent kink in his neck, his dramatic sewing machine like steps, his constant excessive movement-like taking an extra four steps in order to be able to stop and not fall over, his overreaction/hypersensitivity to spatial pressure/physical pressure of the lead rope, etc. are all signs of his stress and are his coping mechanisms. But he's not coping very well.

So the conversation between him and I has been to physically slow down, so that he can literally start to think, then move. The real goal is that he can finally let down and relax and just be present, happily waiting for what I might ask.

It is near impossible for him to look where he is going before he offers movement; this often comes from conditioning a horse to stare at the human all the time. But when we ride, we can't have a horse who is always trying to turn around and stare at us. For him to initially roll both eyeballs towards where he was about to move was mind blowing.

For him to first think, then move perhaps two or three steps and halt, was also very difficult. He offers 0-60 in his reactions all the time. None of his behaviors are out of resistance or defiance; it solely is based on fear.

He could not rationalize that the constant containment or flee wasn't working. So I broke everything that I asked of him into very, very, very small pieces. First look and think, then move with a specific energy, then halt and mentally check in with me. Breathe, chew, relax, and sigh.

My goal has been that he can stay mentally present, breathe at a normal rate, let the constant worry peaks above his eyes down, relax his jaw and lips which he holds in a constant tightness due to stress, and lengthen his neck into a "normal" position. None of this is actually about his physical appearance, but rather the physical posturing tells you what the emotions and mental status is. We're aiming for boring.

Whether I worked him loose or on the lead, we needed to change how he felt about pressure- his response in getting taller in his posture and to hyperventilate was not making him feel better. He has now started to learn how to gently soften to pressure- this is a hugely important concept- if he's that defensive towards a lead rope, what happens when you go to sit on him or use reins?

Just touching him, moving around him, he was on guard. Showing him that just because I moved, didn't mean he had to. He acts if he's been reprimanded multiple times for getting something wrong or just a whole lot of "driving" with pressure has totally overwhelmed him mentally. So we're doing a "re-boot."

Pressure needs to be seen as a positive support and a tool, otherwise it is an ineffective aid. He also has to believe my aids the first time I ask, rather than do nothing at all or overreacting. I noticed as I walked by his side with my hand touch him where your lower leg would lie if you were sitting on him, he got super swishy with his tail- more defensiveness. If he was that bothered by my hand lightly touching him, I can only imagine how he feels about real leg pressure.

Each day is happier, less defensiveness and less flamboyant. He is realizing every time he tries, all pressure goes away, and he feels better.

Continued →

(Continued)

This encourages him to keep trying, and "meet me" in the middle.

Experimenting with familiar things like lining up with the mounting block- just to see how he felt, he must have grown a foot taller. It isn't about the block, but rather the trigger the block creates, about the potential upcoming ride. So every time he shows concern- we have to divert from whatever we're doing, and address him until he can LET IT GO. This is very hard for him. But by helping him through bothersome scenarios, rather than critiquing him, builds his confidence to try whatever is being asked of him.

He's very sweet and really does want to feel better, and let down, he just couldn't help change his own behaviors due to an inability to be present based on habitually anticipating human induced pressure.

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### Winter 2018/Spring Schedule 2019

#### August

Private Clinic  
Sandpoint, ID  
August 20-23, 2018

Day clinic-1 hour private sessions- last minute addition  
Private Facility Airway Heights, WA [Email](#)  
August 29, 2018

#### October

Mid October- Resume teaching Yuma, AZ [Email](#)

Oakzanita Ranch Clinic Series [Email](#)  
Descanso CA  
October 24-29, 2018

#### November

Oakzanita Ranch Clinic Series [Email](#)  
Descanso CA  
November 7-12, 2018

Nov-January South Pacific

#### 2019

#### January

Oakzanita Ranch Clinic Series [Email](#)  
Descanso CA  
January 23-28, 2019

#### February

Private Clinic  
Hesperus, CO  
February Dates TBA 2019

Oakzanita Ranch Clinic Series [Email](#)  
Descanso CA  
February 13-18, 2019

#### March

Oakzanita Ranch Clinic Series [Email](#)  
Descanso CA  
March 13-18, 2019

#### April

Oakzanita Ranch Clinic Series [Email](#)  
Descanso CA  
April 3-8, 2019

To stay current please visit the [Calendar](#) page