



Revolutionize YOUR RIDING

achieving harmony in movement
between horse and rider

SUSAN McBANE

Revolutionize YOUR **RIDING**

achieving harmony in movement
between horse and rider

SUSAN McBANE

D&C
David and Charles

A DAVID & CHARLES BOOK
Copyright © David & Charles Limited 2007

David & Charles is an F+W Publications Inc. company
4700 East Galbraith Road
Cincinnati, OH 45236

First published in the UK in 2008

Text copyright © Susan McBane 2008

Photographs copyright © Horsepix 2008, Sally and David Waters
except those listed below.

With its roots in horse country and staffed by horse people, Horsepix is a
leading provider of high quality equestrian photography.

Page 9 copyright © Sara Stafford, page 47 (bottom) Matthew Roberts,
copyright © David & Charles Limited and page 110 Bob Atkins, copyright
© David & Charles Limited

Illustrations by Maggie Raynor copyright © David & Charles Limited 2008

Susan McBane has asserted her right to be identified as author of this
work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any
means, electronic or mechanical, by photocopying, recording or
otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Horse care and riding are not without risk, and while the author
and publishers have made every attempt to offer accurate and reliable
information to the best of their knowledge and belief, it is presented
without any guarantee. The author and publishers therefore disclaim
any liability incurred in connection with using the information
contained in this book.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7153-2740-1 hardback
ISBN-10: 0-7153-2740-2 hardback

Printed in China by Shenzhen RR Donnelley Printing Co. Ltd
for David & Charles
Brunel House Newton Abbot Devon

Commissioning Editor Jane Trollope
Assistant Editor Emily Rae
Project Editor Jo Weeks
Designer Jodie Lystor and Alistair Barnes
Production Controller Beverley Richardson

Visit our website at www.davidandcharles.co.uk

David & Charles books are available from all good bookshops;
alternatively you can contact our Orderline on 0870 9908222
or write to us at FREEPOST EX2 110, D&C Direct, Newton
Abbot, TQ12 4ZZ (no stamp required UK only); US customers
call 800-289-0963 and Canadian customers call 800-840-5220.

Contents

Introduction	4
1 <i>Enable your horse to do what you ask</i>	10
2 How the horse moves	28
3 Outside influences	60
4 How you move	70
5 How to move together	74
6 Let it happen	106
7 Mind power	112
8 The aiding system	120
9 Putting it all together	144
Further information and suggested reading	150
Acknowledgements	151
Index	151

Introduction

It was probably the title that made you pick up or buy this book. I can assure you that the methods described in this book do revolutionize people's riding if they carry them out properly and I stand by my guarantee, below.

I GUARANTEE...

... if you faithfully follow the steps, instructions and advice in this book and put them into practice, your riding will be changed and improved beyond your belief – assuming that you don't ride this way already, that is.

You will have a closer, more trusting relationship with your horse, who will be calmer, more cooperative and happier to work, or rather play, with you. He will become your partner rather than your vehicle or tool.

Your performance together, whether hacking out or competing at international level, will be safer, better, less stressful, much more rewarding and often truly exhilarating.

It will appear to onlookers, and feel to you and your horse, effortless compared with other common styles of riding.

Here are some comments I have had from people who were new to this method, many of them very experienced riders:

'I feel as though at last I've found what that I've been looking for all my life.'

'Why does my horse just seem to understand what I want, even though he's never been trained this way?'

'I can't believe it. He isn't fighting me any more, he's just doing it.'

'I've read about riding like this and seen it, but I never thought I'd be able to do it myself.'

'That's the first time I've finished a lesson and not felt exhausted.'

'I feel as though we're a pair at last. What a relief!'

and this, my favourite ...

'It's like coming home.'

What to expect

This book is almost entirely about you and your riding techniques and attitudes. It is not about schooling your horse or about horse management, although these topics are touched on when necessary. Because of that, I will assume that the horse or horses with which you are practising the principles described are well-behaved and trustworthy, willing and attentive, and reasonably well-schooled in that they normally do what you ask. When you are learning to ride, or learning new techniques, it is helpful, indeed almost essential, to have a horse that you don't have to worry about controlling and one that is not likely to try to get you off or to avoid the issue at every opportunity. If this doesn't seem to be your horse, don't worry – the way of riding described in this book will give him every opportunity to become like this. Some horses are 'difficult' because of their past experiences, some

extremely so, and these are not ideal to learn on. However, applying this system will help them and even transform them, if you give it a fair chance, and allow time for the pair of you to gel. I have seen it have excellent results with many horses and ponies.

It should go without saying that other factors come into the matter. Your horse needs to be free of any physical hindrances to learning: he must not be in discomfort or pain anywhere in his body. His tack must be comfortable. He must feel well. Even if he is fine now, he may have bad memories of discomfort and pain – you will have to allow for these. This will slow down your progress, but progress you will still make. However, use your judgement, it remains a fact that you will learn quicker on a horse with no hang-ups, whether he is your own or someone else's. If the latter, then you can transfer your newfound skills to your own horse later.



It always helps your riding if you and your horse get on together. However, even if you don't, riding well and kindly is bound to improve your relationship

‘This book describes – in simple and basic terms that anyone can understand – the essentials of a system of riding that cooperates with the horse’s natural way of being, with his body and with his mind. This system works. Please re-read the comments of some of my clients on page four and believe them because they are true.’

One of the reasons people want to improve (or revolutionize) their riding is that their horse does not go as well as they would like. Partly, this depends on his conformation and action but partly on his attitude to being ridden. Riding today gradually, and in general, seems to have become harsher than in previous generations and it is not surprising that many horses do not seem to

like being ridden, and object to it either subtly or more obviously. Some poor things just tolerate it unhappily, meanwhile trying to do their best out of sheer generosity. None of these situations is a good or kind way of going on. I will cover some aspects of bad riding and bad attitudes to horses, so that you can see what to avoid – in teachers, trainers and riding companions.

What I ask of you

When we learn anything new, or different from what we are used to, it feels strange to us and we can’t do it automatically. Our bodies and our minds have to get used to it. New ‘nervous pathways’ are actually physically created in us to cope with learning new skills.

Do you remember learning to read and write, learning to ride a bike, to work a computer, to ride a pony, to drive a car, to learn a language, and then another language? All these things felt strange and difficult at first, but if you put your mind to it you probably succeeded at most of them. You will be able to think of lots of other things you have mastered – and you can master the skills for revolutionizing your riding, too, because your body and brain are geared towards learning. If they weren’t you would not survive.

Learning a new or different system of riding is very like learning a new language. If you can speak one foreign language and then begin to try to learn another, you won’t get far if you constantly fall back into the first one or always compare the new one with it. You have to ‘clean the slate’, ‘clear the decks’ and open up your mind to the different words and phrases of your new language. The secret to learning anything new (or a new version of something you know already) is being open-minded. You are never too old to be open-minded because it is all to do with your attitude of mind. That is the only thing which prevents it. If you want to be open-minded you can be. If you don’t, you can’t.

The system of riding you will learn about in this book may be a new language to you, or a dialect, or even just an accent, of the language you know already, but, from

‘The secret to learning anything new is being open-minded.’

my experience as a teacher, most people can't 'speak' it and it always comes as a relief and a revelation to them. If you do open your mind and put into practice the techniques described (the words and phrases of your new language), not letting your other language muddy the waters, you *will* revolutionize your riding. I could go so far as to say that your horse will love you for it but I would be accused of anthropomorphizing if I did. (The reason your horse will love you for it, is that it makes it so much easier for him to do what you ask, easier for both of you in fact.)

Be open-minded

On page eight, you will see the word 'classical'. Please don't stop reading and give up. This book is not a classical riding manual but is meant to (and I think it does) set out a simple, logical method you can follow. There is a lot of misunderstanding about classical riding. It is not all to do with 'fancy stuff' that 'no ordinary rider' could or would want to do. The basics will help anyone – tremendously – who cares about their horse enough to give it a genuine try. It applies to any discipline because it is about how horses move and think. I repeat, IT WORKS.

What I ask of you is that:

- you clear your mind of your previous 'language' so that there are no obstacles to learning the new one
- you give this system a fair trial, not giving up if at first it feels strange (like driving a car or typing, your mind and body will both get used to it if you keep doing it)
- you accept that the system is simple and pro both horse and rider
- you accept that it works – and has done for thousands of horses for hundreds of years.

Note: for simplicity, throughout 'rider' refers to anyone who has a relationship with the horse, such as groom, rider, trainer, owner and so on. Although horses are referred to as 'he', the female of the species is included, and although the rider is often referred to as she, men are not excluded.

Learning something new can expand your horizons and make for magic moments for both of you



How I found this system

I started riding as a child at a small riding school owned by an ex-army instructor, Percy Collins, who used the methods of Weedon (the former British military equestrian academy) and Saumur, which is still thriving, with its famous Cadre Noir, and which teaches the modern, French style of classical riding. The horses and ponies we rode were all traditional schoolmaster animals trained in those principles by Mr Collins. Those too small for him to ride he schooled on long-reins, and the better riders among his small staff and clients rode them at first. Lightness, minimal aids, self-carriage (in horse and rider), rapport with and consideration for your mount, and discipline were the order of the day.

After Mr Collins retired, I could not find a similar riding school so rode sporadically mainly on friends' and acquaintances' horses, and continued to read avidly about riding. I finally managed to buy my own horse when I left college and started work. At this point, I was told that my ideas were obsolete and that nobody rode like that any more. Riding in general seemed to me to have been dumbed down and hardened and, compared with the methods on which I was brought up, most of it felt like using a blunt instrument.

I did not encounter anything similar to Mr Collins' techniques until 1981, when I was approached by Dési Lorent. A French-speaking Belgian, Dési had studied in Portugal over many years with probably the greatest classical rider and trainer of the 20th century, Nuño Oliveira, who had brought the art of lightness in equitation to what must surely be its ultimate form. Dési offered me a weekend's accommodation and tuition if I would write about his establishment and riding system in *Equi*, a magazine I was publishing at the time.

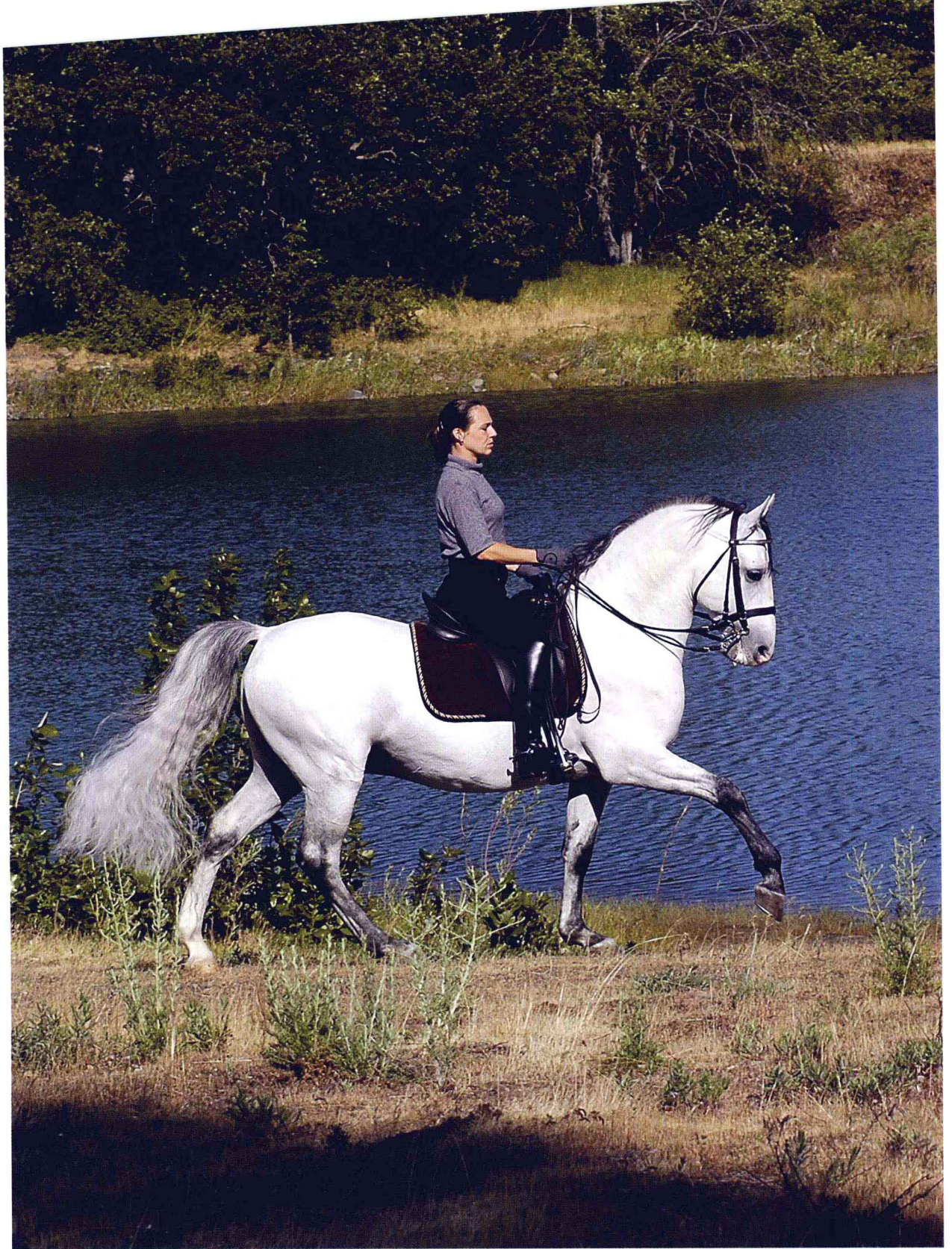
The first 10 minutes or so of my first lesson with Dési were mental torture. By then fairly well indoctrinated in other ways, I could do nothing with my mount, Algor, a beautiful Andalusian stallion and a perfect gentleman. Dési explained the principles and aids of his 'Master's method', as he always described it, and Algor began to understand me. As we were cantering round a corner, I realized with a flash of recognition that I actually knew this language or something rather like it. It was as though a door had opened into the past and I was back home, riding like I did when I was a child.

So it wasn't obsolete after all. I was on cloud nine, Algor was galvanized and Dési accused me of making a fool of him!

I studied with Dési for two years, when I could, learning Oliveira's system and comparing it with other classical methods, including those of my youth. I have had a few other classical teachers since then, but always go back to the way Dési taught because I have never found anything better. It is this system that I explain in this book with compatible additions from other sources, including modern equine science and behaviour.

Just because something is grounded in tradition does not mean that it is writ in stone. Discoveries are made and research is carried out, and these sometimes mean that attitudes and accepted mores need to change. In some cases, reverting to previous practices is the answer to modern deterioration. In others, increased knowledge through research into the horse's body and mind, and how they work, must certainly be incorporated into our riding and horse care practices if we are to progress humanely and effectively.

***'Dési awoke my curiosity
when he said he taught
classical riding, "which the
English badly need to
know about".'***



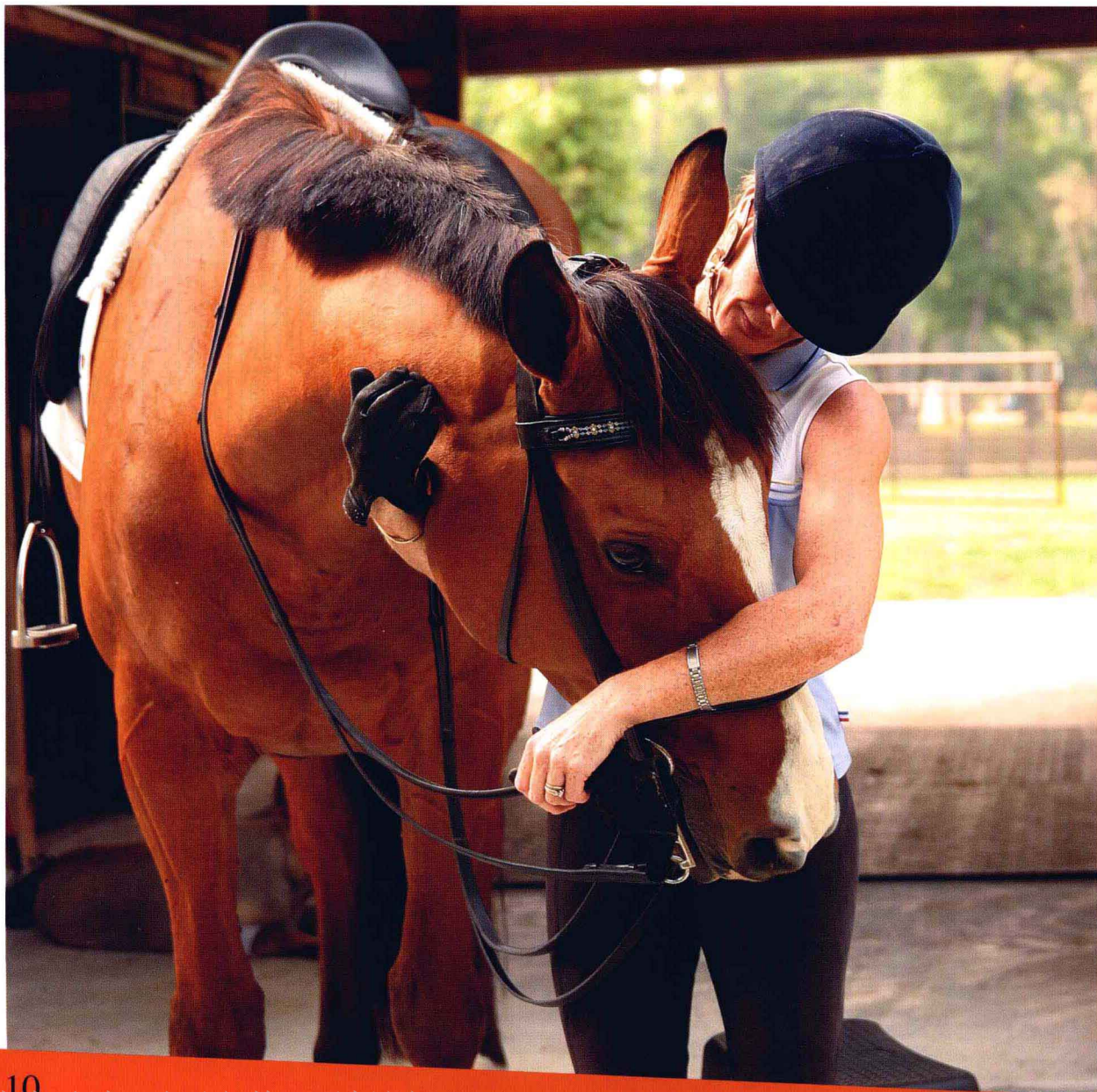
Self-carriage on the weight of the rein – the ultimate aim in top quality equitation, whatever the discipline

Enable your horse to do what you ask

It may sound like a strange thing to say – ‘enable’ a horse to do what you are asking – but it isn’t really. For most riders the problem is persuading a horse to do a particular thing. It can be so frustrating to give what you truly believe are clear and correct aids for a particular movement or way of going, even something very simple, and to have nothing happen.

Even worse is when the horse reacts in a way you do not want and were not expecting, and worse still is when or if he reacts somewhat violently and you almost lose control, actually lose control or even part company. All these results (or lack of them) are because in some way or another your horse has not been enabled to do as you ask.

You and your horse need to be best friends ...





... but horses also need the chance to make and be with their equine friends, too

What is going wrong?

Not all horses are cooperative by nature, but in my experience most of them are, most of the time – unless they have an excellent reason not to be. The reason will not be merely because they don't feel like doing it (most will go along with it even then) but more likely because:

- *they don't understand* what the rider means
- *they are mentally distracted, inattentive, confused, upset, excited or angry* – all emotions that greatly interfere with a horse's willingness and ability to concentrate on what his rider is asking for. This is common in horses that haven't bonded with their rider
- *they are physically incapable* of doing what has been asked due to conformational problems, physical weakness and/or lack of

fitness, an injury their rider has not spotted and which causes pain, or due to a lack of natural athletic ability

- *they are afraid* of attempting it because they expect it to cause them discomfort or pain or it is too difficult for them, like a big jump or complex dressage movement
- *they are tired*, mentally, physically or both. This often happens during schooling sessions, which should be kept short – 20 to 40 minutes is plenty with very frequent breaks on a loose rein
- *the rider is preventing them from cooperating*, albeit unintentionally by creating tension (which worries many horses) or giving conflicting aids so that they don't know which to obey

Of course, a few horses are lazy or unwilling by nature, and this should also be taken into account.

Bonds and bonding

Horses, as we know, are social animals. Lone horses almost always feel unhappy and insecure. Where equine companionship cannot be supplied, it is often recommended that they are provided with other company, such as being grazed next to cattle, or having a sheep, goat, cat or donkey in their field or stable. These animals may be better than nothing but even the donkey will be a very poor substitute for another horse or pony. (I always feel sorry for stallions when they are kept, as is traditional

but by no means essential, away from other horses. It is no wonder that so many of them have digestive, behavioural and other problems due to distress.)

Where do humans fit in? In order to form a strong and mutually meaningful relationship, horse and rider need to like each other and feel 'right' in each other's company. A horse that lacks a bond with his owner will never be truly relaxed and confident in her company. Even if he is not afraid or nervous, he will be to some degree distracted and aware of the fact that he'd rather be somewhere

else, doing something else, with someone else, either a different person or a horse. A horse that is always calling to or looking out for other horses when he is with his rider is showing, clearly, that this person is not his preferred companion and that he is not much interested in what she wants. Because he feels safer with other horses (otherwise he would not be constantly wanting to be with them), this behaviour also reveals that the horse doesn't even feel particularly safe with his owner. Similarly, a person who is to some degree afraid or unsure of her horse – lacking in confidence – will never relax sufficiently for the horse to think, 'She's in charge of our situation. I'm quite safe with her. Everything's OK. Let's go!' To forge this kind of

friendship, you need always to have a positive, happy and caring attitude when you are with your horse because he will most definitely know how you are feeling, and how you feel about him. Good relationships can happen very quickly or they can take time – sometimes a year or more – but when they're in place everything is much easier.

Bonding in brief

- Horses need company – equine company if possible.
- A horse needs to trust his owner or rider – he will sense and react to fear or lack of confidence.

Lots of freedom with enjoyable company goes a long way to keeping horses healthy and balanced in body, mind and spirit



The importance of stimulation

Because they evolved as prey animals, needing to be alert to possible danger, horses are not dullards but need mental stimulation and occupation. Although feral horses do not have a wide variety of activities, they are occupied most of the time, unlike many domestic ones. They also have freedom – a priceless commodity – so they can make choices that are informed and educated by their environment and contact with other animals, not only other horses. In domesticity, what we need to do is make being with us so safe, interesting and enjoyable that our horse is interested in – and genuinely wants to try to do – what we are asking. We want a horse that enjoys 'playing games' and performing strange but easy

movements, which can be quite fun. We also want a horse that likes being looked after and fed, of course, but also likes migrating around the territory (hacking out) to see what's going on, and is quite happy to do so with only us for company. In activities where other horses are also involved, even if he is excited, he needs to listen first and foremost to his rider's wishes and requests, not objecting when other horses pass him yet being confident enough to go in front if asked. As a strong friendship develops, a horse will often leave his friends to be with his owner in the field, even though he knows she does not carry food. He feels right with her, safe, content, sure of not being hurt or distressed, and often confident of being entertained. This all makes for calmness and relaxation.

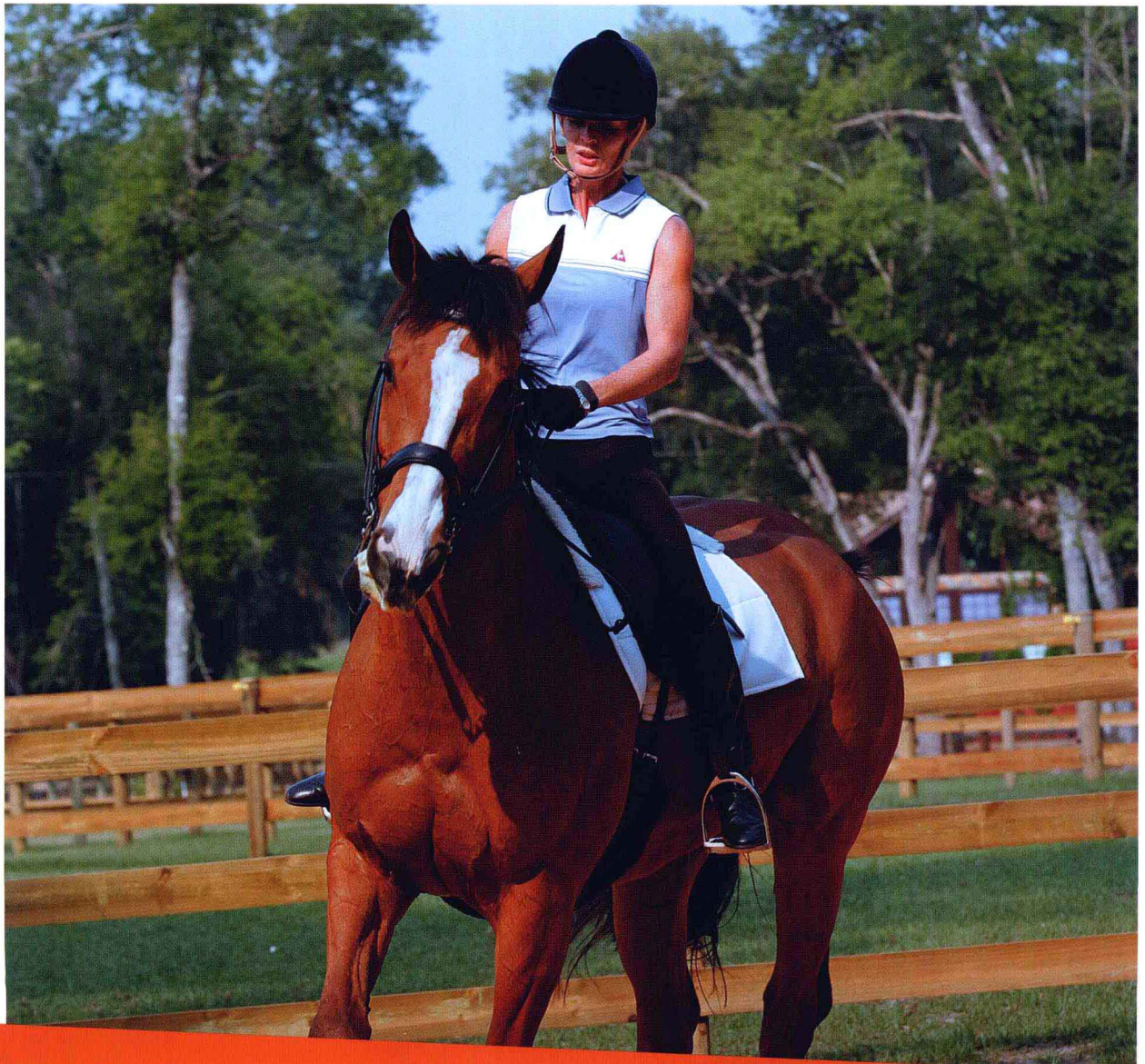
Physical incapability and discomfort

Under saddle, I am sure that many horses are suffering discomfort or pain that their owners do not know about. Sometimes a slight injury may be causing pain but not actual lameness so the owner does not recognize that the horse's 'difficult' behaviour or inhibited way of going is because something hurts. Pain is 'dis-enabling' the horse from doing what you are asking.

Tack and training equipment are key sources of significant discomfort. The current fashions for high bits and tight nosebands, saddles that are too deeply gusseted at the back, which causes undue pressure, and training aids that are adjusted to force the horse

into a shape rather than suggesting a beneficial way of going, all cause discomfort and maybe pain, as do saddles that do not fit properly and/or are placed too far forward. These inevitably result in mental distraction, anxiety, psychological and muscular tension and an understandable inclination to dislike or even fear the activity that causes them. It is a natural part of a horse's defence and survival mechanism to avoid discomfort and pain, so these situations also provide excellent reasons for him to be uncooperative or difficult. We are thus creating circumstances that actually prevent our horses cooperating. (See also pp.60–69, for more information on tack and other causes of discomfort.)

This horse is distracted and listening, with his left ear, to something behind him and to the left. The rider also looks a little uncomfortable. Little progress will be made until calmness and concentration are restored





Sky is distracted by some horses playing about in a field out of shot, and objecting to work. Jo will regain his attention tactfully before resuming schooling

‘No horse can be relaxed and have a mind open and available to concentrate on his rider if he is unhappy, insecure, agitated or uncomfortable. The rider may get some sort of a response but nothing like that she would get if the horse were comfortable and calm. The horse is also learning that riding, schooling, and all things connected with humans cause pain and discomfort, whereas we want him to learn exactly the opposite.’

Are you preventing your horse from cooperating?

A horse may be calm, comfortable, ready and willing to work or play with you – but you may not be. You may be nervous or even afraid because of past mishaps, such

as falling off, riding a spooky horse, riding a horse that goes badly, is hard to ride, is uncomfortable, or one that generally misbehaves under saddle and pays little attention to the rider, maybe even one whose ambition in life seems to be to get his rider off at the earliest opportunity. Even



This horse is subtly resisting being ridden. His facial expression is tense and his tail is swishing, which can indicate irritation and annoyance



This rider could well be thinking ‘I’ll take this as a “no” then.’ The horse, resisting more strongly, clearly objects to whatever she has asked for

if you are not afraid, you may be anxious or waiting for trouble, not looking forward to your ride and, therefore, not in a particularly positive and happy frame of mind.

Any of these feelings will make you more or less tense, and this will transmit to your horse. Unless he is a traditional, old-style schoolmaster whose métier is putting riders at ease (see p.18), he may wonder why you are tense, he will certainly take his cue from you and either start being jumpy, distracted (looking for trouble or a way out of the situation) or simply unsettled. With all this goes impaired learning, poor performance, maybe arguments, lost tempers and a generally frustrating, disappointing time for both of you.

Emotions very definitely affect our bodies. Certain hormones are produced in response to them. For example, feelings such as excitement and fear stimulate adrenaline, which causes the flight or fight response. Another physical response to adverse emotions is actual

physical tension and anxiety, which create stiff and tense muscles. All muscles should alternate between contraction (when they shorten and feel hard) and relaxation (when they are lengthened and feel softer). In between these two states is a condition called 'tone', in which the muscles are slightly contracted. This occurs, for example, when you are holding your body in a certain position without much effort or use of energy and certainly without stiffness or rigidity, but you are ready to be active if necessary. Muscles that are significantly tense and contracted much of the time create a pull on their tendons and do not rest adequately. They will hamper your horse's movement, probably making it stiff and hard rather than smooth and flowing, so the quality of his performance will suffer, and he will be reluctant to work with you. In reality, although you do not mean to do so, you are preventing your horse doing what you wish, or at least doing it as well as you wish. What a miserable existence for both of you!

It's about TRUST and relaxation

Some people like their horses to be fired up and a bit on edge, to give a certain sparkle to their performance, but the essence of true, high-class horsemanship is a horse that is relaxed and calm, working confidently, feeling for his rider's aids, listening for her voice and performing not merely with acceptance but also enjoyment. How could any rider be nervous, tense or frustrated on such a horse?

Only a few horses could perform like this under a nervous, tense or frustrated rider. Some purposely seem to try to put their rider at ease but most do not really enjoy their work if they know that their rider is not happy. To do their best, both horse and rider need to trust their partner, and trust can only come from a mutual feeling of comfort, security and safety.

'It's all in the mind – learning to relax your mind will relax your body and relax your horse.'

Although it's important to relax on horseback, don't take the word relaxation too literally. If we were completely relaxed we would fall down in a heap. I use the word to mean lack of anxiety, untoward tension and any other unwanted emotion that is going to interfere with mutual trust and communication.

Throughout this book you will find tips and advice on how to relax your mind and body. For now we will look at how relaxed you are on your horse and how to start improving the calmness of your mind and body.



The start of enjoying or learning anything is to be calm and happy together, like this pair

Where do you begin?

You need to be open-minded and calm, firm and positive. You have to learn to trust your horse, even if he doesn't trust you – yet – and you need to develop your leadership skills and exude confidence.

OPEN YOUR MIND

As I mentioned in the introduction: when you start learning anything you need to have an open mind, one that is receptive to ideas and principles different from those by which you have worked previously. Almost without exception, and understandably, the clients to whom I teach this system start their first lesson riding the way they have ridden before. They soon find that I am looking for something rather different from what they have been taught. When I ask them to do something that they have not done before (such as use a weight or position aid or an outside rein aid to turn, see pp.120–143). I first explain it simply and carefully. Now, some people absorb the instructions and get it beautifully right first time and, therefore, so does their horse. These people are open-minded enough to try something new without also bringing in preconceived ideas or old habits and practices. However, most people do not respond like this. Often, they half do what I have asked and half what they have done before. They may be concerned about doing something their horse is not schooled to respond to (in fact, horses respond naturally to this system) or they may simply feel strange doing something different and new. Remember that anything new or different feels strange at first, not only in riding.

‘Humans form habits just as efficiently as horses do, and they can be very hard to break – but they can be broken IF we are open-minded and willing to really put effort into whatever we are trying to do.’

LEARN TO TRUST

What about the many people who have horses they do not trust? We need to ask why the horses are behaving in such a way as to cause anxiety and tension in their riders. Almost invariably, I find that it is because some

BE CALM, FIRM AND POSITIVE

Many of the riders I come across are not really relaxed on their horses, even on horses they trust. Perhaps they have been taught the outdated concept that they 'have to show the horse who's boss' and start out from the very beginning in a domineering, confrontational manner. Most horses are not naturally confrontational and this attitude can upset them. As mentioned earlier, most want to do things with us but, naturally, they also want to feel safe, secure and happy. They cannot feel like that with an owner who is tense, wary and bossy, particularly if they expect, from past experience, to be coerced into doing something frightening, stressful or even painful.

‘Horses respect and respond to a calm, firm, positive attitude and calm, firm, positive handling and riding.’

If you find you are not relaxed, calm down and look at the horse in a different way. He is not your enemy; he wants to be your friend. He may be the kind of horse who needs a measure of leadership or guidance, protection and reassurance or he may be self-contained and confident and not willing to be mistreated. In either case, horses respect and respond to a calm, firm, positive attitude and calm, firm, positive handling and riding. Give your horse the chance and the time to absorb your attitude and get to know you.

Bearing in mind those three qualities (calm, firm, positive), ride from the start with relaxed, controlled seat, legs and mind, and have still hands with a comforting, adaptable contact. You trust your horse so there is no reason to be otherwise. This attitude adjustment can alter your relationship amazingly in just a few minutes. Your horse will feel more confident in you and, for your part, you are enabling him to work well for you.

person at some time (not necessarily the person who has called me in to help) has made life uncomfortable, painful, distressing, worrying or confusing for them. They now associate being ridden with angst, or worse. Their new rider has problems with them from the start and, not