



TRAINING TIPS

AS A HORSE SEES IT

By Khaled Assem

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED IF YOUR HORSE SEES EXACTLY WHAT YOU SEE? WELL, THE TRUTH IS, HE DOESN'T! AS A RIDER YOU MIGHT UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING YOUR HORSE'S EYESIGHT. AS A MATTER OF FACT, KNOWING WHAT YOUR HORSE SEES IS A KEY TO DEVELOPING A BETTER VISION THAT ACHIEVES BETTER HARMONY AND FEWER ACCIDENTS WHILE RIDING. HERE IS A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THIS KEY ISSUE AND HOW TO MAKE BEST USE OF IT.

Horses are color blind. FALSE!

Many people assume that horses are color blind; actually they're not. Horses have two-colored or dichromatic vision. In other words, horses see the blue and green colors of the spectrum along with their color variations. Research reports have shown that their color vision is similar to red-green color blindness in humans, meaning that certain colors (especially red and similar) appear greener.

The horse's limited ability to see color is taken into consideration when designing obstacles for the

horse to jump, because he will have a harder time distinguishing between the obstacle and the ground if the two are only a few shades different. Therefore, jump rails are painted in a different color from the footing or the surrounding landscape so that the horse may better judge the obstacle on the approach. Studies have shown that horses are less likely to knock a rail down when the jump is painted with two or more contrasting colors, rather than one single color. It is especially difficult for horses to distinguish between yellows and greens.

Never interfere with the horse's head movement before a jump!

Whenever a horse approaches a fence, you will always notice that the horse instantly raises his head and neck. If a rider tries to prevent the horse from doing this, the horse will panic and go faster due to his inability to see what's lying ahead of him and the result will not be appealing. In showjumping, it is dangerous for the rider to approach a fence while using restraints that interfere with the horse head's vertical position.



How does a horse see?


If you compare human eyesight to horse eyesight you will find numerous differences. We have circular field of vision due to our circular pupils, while horses have more elongated pupils that give them a wider, less-deep field of view than humans'. On the other hand the horse's eyes are at either sides of his head, so he has a lateral field of vision of 160-170 degrees on either side. This means that he can see almost everything around him except the area behind his hindquarters.

Another magnificent difference is that a horse can choose either

to use one eye independently (Monocular vision) or both eyes together (Binocular vision). Binocular vision allows him to judge distances but through a relatively narrow field of vision. In addition, the horse has areas of blurred vision below his binocular field.

And remember...

Many horses suffer eye damage or defective vision; that's why you should regularly examine your horse's eyesight. Horses are warriors because even if they go blind in one eye they can still perform successfully if they are allowed to turn their heads

slightly to one side in order to use their good eye. 

References: Micklem, William "Complete Horse Riding Manual"

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All photos by Jacques Toffi

About the author:

Eng. Khaled Assem is a certified Level 3 FEI trainer. He has been training for over 20 years, competing internationally for 10 years and locally for 25 years.



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