

MONTY ROBERTS

THE MAN WHO WHISPERS
TO HORSES

By Sue Akehurst, England

(PART 1)



I AM PROUD TO BE ABLE TO BRING YOU ANOTHER EXCLUSIVE INSIGHT INTO MONTY ROBERTS, THE MAN WHO WHISPERS TO HORSES.

Having read a lot about this man I wondered what he was like as he grew up, what his hopes and aspirations for the future were, what drives this man to devote his entire life to improving the world for horses, and in turn, improving the relationship those who follow his methods and concepts have with their horses. Is he achieving all he had hoped for? How does he deal with the inevitable criticism that any successful person seems to receive? Monty kindly spared some time for this interview for Horse Times just before a large demonstration he was giving in the UK.

Monty always uses his patented schooling halter, ► the “Dually” which effectively rewards horses for acting in partnership with the handler

What job did you want to do or see yourself doing as an adult? Is this what you always thought you would do?

Yes, I saw myself as I was growing up winning World Championships with horses. I loved racing, and thought that I could have the World's best racehorse, and I did! And I thought I could win a World Championship with western horses, and I won nine! There was a time when I thought I would also be a veterinarian, I was good in school and I thought academically speaking, I could do that. I even went that way for a slight period of time after secondary school. But I discovered that that was purely working with medicine and not with horses, I say purely, nearly purely. And so I didn't follow the medical route. There were times when I thought I might pursue my education further to become a psychiatrist for people, but soon learned that the horses were more important to me than the people and I found it much more gratifying to do that. So since there were no animal behaviour or psychology courses, I set out to cause those to happen. And they have! Jane Goodall (the renowned Primatologist) was helpful in that regard, I have never even met her, but she did a lot of things that helped me in my quest to cause there to be animal behaviour courses and even Dr. Dian Fossey (one of the world's leading female scientists, author of “Gorillas in the Mist” which was later made into a film) did a bit on that score as well, and even Dr Leakey, (Kenyan archaeologist and

naturalist) who has since died. But these were the things that I thought about. I wanted to somehow be a Father, a Mentor and to leave the world a better place than I found it.

At what age did you realise that the route that you have taken was the route that you wanted to take?

I suppose my first realisation setting into this varied route, because it's always been something close to this route, was about 15-17 years of age, maybe, around there.

When you first started down that path was your aim and goal the same as it is now and where did you see it evolving to?

Well my aim and goal at that point in time was to get a good education and education was primary to me, which was why I went to University for six years and triple majored. I really took my education seriously and that was my goal at that time. Then to use that education to take me to the places that we have talked about.

Has it evolved the way you believed that it would?

Pretty much it has evolved the way I thought it would, in some ways I wanted it to be a lot better, I always set my goals far ahead! But I suppose that's a good way to do goals, because if you just made them all, that would be pretty dull and not much of a goal! So I set them way out there, and in some ways I couldn't have



dreamed it would go as far as it has! So it comes to me in both directions really.

Do you feel, over the years of doing this work that you have held fast to your original dream and goal? Or has it evolved more into a business through the realities of life and money?

No, no, no, no, no, NO! I have NEVER EVER thought of my career as a business, not a minute. The realities of life are that a lot of other people think that way, and they start reprimanding me for not being more commercial or more dedicated to the business side of it, but I have never been, and they have to fight it all the time to keep the home fires burning. When I was able to go non-profit in the year 2000, that was a GREAT turning point for me because I could just say stuff it, I'm not business and I'm not going to be business! Then when you become non-profit you



get a bunch of people telling you what to do every day! And I wasn't ready for that one. But in fact that is what's happened. But no, I have never thought of it as a business.

Do you believe that you are achieving your goal of “leaving the world a better place than you found it for horses and for people too”, and how are you achieving it?

Well it is way more than a feeling now. It is an actual fact that the count of horses is probably approximating something like 40% of all the horses trained in the world today, in the last twelve months lets say, will see a little bit, some part of my work. That's way more than I ever thought would happen. If God would give me another ten years or so, I think we would see it go past the mid way point. I think we have already reached the point of critical mass if you

like, a point where it won't stop, where the ball is rolling and it's going to go on. The cessation of whips in racing, the reduction of brutality is just MASSIVE and I swear a lot of it is down to me, and the people who are responsible for stomping down on a lot of this will tell you, right upfront, that it was after my book, without any legislation to reduce the use of whips in racing the United States has, since my first book came out, reduced the use of the whip in racing 30% with NO legislation or rules of any kind! So yeah! It's working!

Is it working enough? 'HELL NO!' We are more violent to one another than we have ever been! So I am not at all proud of that end of it. So I am working with people now more than I am working with horses.

Do you have any new ideas or ways you want to take this now in the future to have more of an impact?

YEAH! - Monty lowers his voice and leans in to me as he smiles and says...I do! I have new ideas! Lots of ideas!

I am so a-technical, there are not words to describe my illiteracy in the technical world. But I have people around me that do pretty well. It's really exciting to think that you can push a button and 50,000 people will get your message in the next hour or so. It's crazy! And there is a potential for us to start out with about 50,000 people able to get an hour or so of me per month on an internet subscription site. Wow, that is really exciting! Because what does it do to me? It stretches the hell out of me. It multiplies me, I don't have to travel 220,000 miles a year average and you know I can't do that forever or much longer for that matter. Travelling is difficult enough, a trip or two a year these days. And when you are on the road for 310 days out of the year it is

diabolically tough on your system, tough at my age, tough on my pocket book, and the non-Profit people start screaming about cost of travel and they don't want me to go here and they don't want me to get there because there is no money in it, and I just want to go because of what I am doing there. So yes, I am excited about the new innovations in how to stretch me, multiply me, so that more people will get my message than are currently getting it, while I travel less.



If your methods are better ethically and economically, why are they not even more popular and more widely accepted?

Yes, this is a REALLY good question for me too! I have more legitimate reasons to ask that to you than you do. Why not? If it happens faster, that's less money, more economical, I have done 8,400 horses in front of public audiences and four of them have visited the veterinarian, FOUR of them! All with minor injuries.

These injuries happened during the demonstration?

Yes, one was bucking and trod on his heel, another one kicked the fence and scratched a hind leg, another one hit its ear on the fence and the other kicked one hind leg with its other hind leg. Four horses! Now I tell you if I marched 8,000 horses through this building with nothing to do but just get through this building, four of them would be hurt some way or another. So I am really proud of that. So why don't they accept it more? Ok, it's safer, it's faster, and you get better performance from your horses so I want to ask the question with you. I want to join with you at the hips and ask that question HOW COME MORE?

The person standing outside, that's in the horse industry would say "You got 40% now, what the hell do you want?" Well I



▲ Monty using his incremental training with non-loading horse. The horse learns to accept the hollow wooden noise under hoof, a simulation of the ramp of the horsebox



want 100%, that's what I want. Am I going to get 100%? No I am not. But the resistant people, how do they justify it? They have to be just arrogantly persistent to do the wrong thing to justify it. I have owners that will take a manure fork and jab their horse with the manure fork before they send it to me to try to get me to fail! I don't know about the human race and that mentality. You know, I would rather put my trust in a horse any day!

What do you say to the people who criticise your demonstrations as being less personalised, same old problems, are too marketing orientated in selling your products rather than informative?

Well you can hear people say anything in life and I really detest someone that would say these things and I detest them down to the ground. The principal reason for my detesting them is that they are lying. They are lying through their teeth. I am non-profit, what about non-profit don't they understand? Some of my Recommended

Associates sell clothes, but I don't sell clothes, I don't make any clothes. I sell my halter because it is better for the horse, I sell my long lines because they are better for horses, my bits, my books, my DVD's that's it! If you could see what we get for them wholesale, and what they cost us, you would realise that I have a non-profit board back home that is screaming at me that I am not business enough about it. So I detest anyone saying that. They don't think a thing about going down to Marks & Spencer and spending £4 for half a chicken or something, and they wouldn't say that Marks & Spencer shouldn't make a profit in it and they'd be the first ones to say "Ah, that Marks & Spencer went broke!" Ok, my board don't want me to go broke, they want to keep me on the road and I am spending tax payer's money being non-profit. So I don't have any control over these prices. I don't tell my people what they have to put on for prices. I detest that person who would say that because I'm not. As for not informative? Pfaa! NO clinician, NO CLINICIAN works harder than I do, to bring information to my audiences. I am not knocking them for that. No, they do what they can do. I'm a maniac! I know that I do more than the next guy, and he would say to me, and they often do, "Are you crazy? 310 days out of the year, and you spend long cold nights in England sitting there answering questions, the same questions often, over and over!" But look, I asked for this job. Nobody put a gun to my head and I am going to do the best I can. But don't tell me I'm not giving them information, because that will get me upset! **HT**