

MONTY ROBERTS

(Part 2)

By Sue Akehurst, England

WHEN IS IT CORRECT TO PUNISH A HORSE? AND HOW WOULD THAT PUNISHMENT TAKE FORM?

Well, first we have to define the word punish; I define the word punish as bringing extrinsic pain to that horse of some sort or another. It might even be psychological pain, and you can bring extrinsic pain to a person or a horse by shouting at them. You can drive the adrenalin up, you can bring

up the fear and I would call that punishment. It's extrinsic, it means forceful. Striking the horse is punishment, kicking the horse, jerking the horse's mouth, it's all punishment. If we can define punishment as extrinsic measures to forcefully change the behavioural pattern of another. It's never alright to punish a horse, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever! Now you might give me another definition for punishment that I would say OK to, under certain circumstances. But then I would call that discipline not punishment because discipline can be

intrinsic, it doesn't have to be extrinsic; it doesn't have to be forceful. That might be setting the horse to work, it might be asking the horse to do something that's slightly uncomfortable and then stopping that discomfort and stroking the horse and loving the horse when they get it right. It might be like that. Discipline? Why work is full of it. Punishment? I don't want to hear about it.

How important is the reward and the timing of giving the reward when the horse does something right?

Giving a reward to a horse for positive action is the single most important factor in any training. You need to look for what the horse does wrong and cause that always to receive negative consequences. But more importantly you need to look for what is right and use positive consequences to reward those. No food and no money! They don't know what money is and food is a bad reward for a horse. Food is good for seals and dogs and other carnivores, but not very good for a horse. No blade of grass has ever run from a horse, so they don't consider it as a trophy. But the carnivore has to stalk and capture his food so he considers that a trophy, just like we do when we shoot the deer and put it on the car and take it around the neighbourhood to say we're the great white hunters! Hence, it is extremely important, and how fast? 3 seconds. A horse will lose the importance of it in about 3 seconds. You need to reward within 3 seconds.

Have you ever found a horse that is beyond help?

Most people would ask: "Have you ever found a horse that you couldn't work with?" NO, I haven't. But have you ever found a horse that is beyond help? Yes. Because some people have driven horses beyond



help and that's just something you can't do anything about. But you can live with that horse somehow, but causing it to be a normal horse may be completely out of the question. How many of these? 5 in my career of 70,000 or so!

A short break is taken during the interview whilst he reviews the horses for the demonstration later that evening; he doesn't touch the horses. He has 5 horses to choose 3 from for the demonstration. He looks to check to see that they are sound firstly, as this is obviously very important. He cannot work with a horse that isn't physically sound. He introduces himself to the owners. He has never touched the horses before and his people have not been around and "trained" the horses prior to the demonstration. He states that most of the people who bring their horses to a demonstration do not continue to seek help after they leave the demonstration. Consequently 50% of the horses he works with go back to square one. But when they stay in touch, when they ask and cooperate with people who do his concepts, 99% work! He asks them to give him the respect that they at least give the methods a fair chance. Some of

the horses that he loads go home and then he gets a call saying it loaded a couple of times and now it's back, it won't load again. He asks: "Are you still using the halter?" the owner replies: "Well No I didn't, I've got a halter but I didn't put it on yet!" "It doesn't work if it's not on him, I guarantee you that! Please, it's your horse, your life, but I am just suggesting to you that facts are in, and those that stay in touch are successful, and about 60% or so of those that don't stay in touch are not successful in subsequent times."

Monty: "Your horse will come in in a moment and he will only be out there for about 3 or 4 minutes in the round pen. You and I will be outside the round pen. I don't go near your horse until the audience is here."

Monty: So what do we have? Non-loaders? How did you get here?! Bribery?! How long did it take?"

Owner: "Just over an hour and unfortunately people got involved on the floor, ran at him with brooms and whips, beat the hell out of him and he threw me on the floor and he dragged me along etc."

Monty: "Today?"

Owner: "Yes, we are all covered with mud and blood!"

Monty jokes with owner: "Oh we have to cancel him I don't want to be injured!"

Owner: "He's alright!"

Monty: "But I don't want to be injured!"

Owner: "No he is alright, it's just the whips, it's just, when we are using someone else's transport, and it's just so traumatic."

Monty: "It's alright, I know, I've had it all my life, don't worry. You will not have any violence perpetrated on your horse in this building in this demonstration. That's a guarantee. We will also help any horse that isn't chosen with this loading business, we will help. Later, during the demonstration, the horse was loading freely without the use of even a lead rope!

How many starters? We will probably use one starter. So one won't be used, watch what we do and try to use the same techniques. I am not sure which we will use at present, but that's the way it goes. I just want the most educational demonstration that we can produce. So the other horse is the spooky one? How

▼ After approximately 20 mins of Monty working with the horse, it had happily loaded on its lorry



spooky?"

Owner: "Very!"

Monty: "How old?"

Owner: "5."

Monty: "And you ride it?"

Owner: "Yes."

Monty: "And you ride it fine?"

Owner: "Yes, until something comes along, plastic bag in the hedge, or worst of all someone with an umbrella!"

Monty: "What happens then?"

Owner: "He will freeze, rear, spin and bolt home. He is terrified"

Monty: "Can he walk across anything on the floor, a plastic sheet or anything?"

Owner: "NO WAY!"

Monty: "OK, good!"

Later in the demonstration after about 15-20 minutes working with the same horse, Monty has the horse walking over a large bright blue plastic sheet and happily following a large umbrella!

Do you find your methods work with the horse undertaking non-ridden work, and with mules and donkeys?

Well everything is different with a donkey. They are less responsive, but my methods work on them that's for sure. But my methods are even more successful with

mules than they are with horses. I think mules are smarter than horses and they just pick up on it quicker. Dr. Robert Miller who counts himself as the world leader in this business of psychology of mules, says that the mules have been waiting for 8,000 years for my methods to come along!

I've also worked a lot with draught horses, horses that pull sleds in the snow for feeding cattle, and trotting horses in Sulki with the bicycle. I've worked with donkeys that were used for packing when I was a child. Mules that were used for packing; that is carrying heavy loads in the mountains and horses that were used for packing...a lot of work with draught horses. I fed my farm for 25 years with Belgium teams and also some mules. I've used mules as riding animals for round-up and the process of dealing with and roping cattle to doctor them, brand them, and that sort of thing so...yes my methods work with them all.

How important do you feel it is for an animal to have time off from work or training?

It's important there is no question about it and under certain disciplines it's more important than others. But I think sometimes people give it too much credence and this business of saying "Oh just turn him out for a year and everything will be fine!" Not necessarily. What is turning

him out to do? If he needs a rest, fine, rest him, but if it isn't necessary, just to turn him out for a year, reducing his intake nutritionally is not a good idea. A lot of times they will go out on very low quality grass and they won't give them the good food they have had in the stable. It's important not to cause the horse to feel like it's drudgery, their work and they do have to have some breaks. But I think judicious use of breaks is important too. If they are enjoying their work and they want to do it, let them do it. They are happier horses than if they were in a field somewhere.

Would your methods have an effect on a horse that is already started and competing, say as a show jumper, when they are not showing any negative signs or problems?

I love that question; that can't happen. Just let me at every horse that shows negative signs, and I'll show you things that he doesn't like about what's happening and you can improve every set of methods that is used with a horse, so my methods work with these horses, professional horses that are already trained and in their discipline. Pie is an example and I showed Kelly a little thing at the last stop that we had and it's already improved one of the little things that he does immensely and he was doing fine before. (Kelly Marks is one of Monty's trainees. Pie is her horse.) So, no, my methods work, none of us are perfect and the higher we get on the world class level of performance the more important any little improvement is. In Olympic competition a 1% improvement means the difference between a gold medal and no medal at all. So my methods work even for the professional that seems to be doing fine.

Do you believe horses and animals have emotions as we do such as happiness, sadness or loss? And how do you feel they express it if so?

It is my opinion that horses do not have emotions as we do. I've recently had an argument with somebody who believes that her horse loves her. They are not capable of that kind of overt emotion. They're just not. Yes, he can call to her voice, because when she calls to him she also brings a carrot or an apple or something, and he learns through experience that that voice produces something that he likes. That's not love,





that's not overt love. The oestrus cycle of our animals is proof positive that full on love and sexual intimacy is not within the prevue of the horses and the animals which we most closely associate with anyway. However, elephants can pine and can grieve. I see dogs grieve like hell when their owner goes away. Horses do not. They miss that voice, because it's connected with something else which they find pleasurable. But there is not the level of emotion in horses that there is in people, not even close, so be careful with that one. Because people tend to anthropomorphise to the extent that they think their horse loves them. You can love a horse and I have loved many horses, I can love, I can crave, I can be very emotionally involved with the feeling of fondness towards them and toward a horse. But they can't feel that toward me.

Can you become a part of their herd? That bonded?

You can certainly become a part of their herd, you can, and they look to you for safety and they can trust you or fail to distrust you but they can't overtly seek you out as we would do in a magnetic way. So that's where the misunderstanding of love can come from.

Is there any type of animal that you would like to try your methods with that you haven't already? Any unusual animals?

Yes, there are, (he smiles). I have tried it with deer, certain fish, some birds, and certainly dogs, cats, horses, mules, and donkeys. But I would like to work more with sheep, pigs and cattle in these concepts; I just don't have time these days to get it done, but there are needs in herding sheep, reindeer, cattle, certain oxen that are farmed, and deer farms...that kind of thing. There's the Yak type animal that they train, even water buffalo, I'd love to do more of that. (Big smile again as he thinks about it).

Have you worked with zoos and some of the more exotic animals?

I have, I have worked with exotics, giraffes, wildebeest and certain big cats, but not enough and I'd like to do more. There are a lot of things in life I'd like to do and my word, we need 2 life times at least and gosh if it goes much longer, I am having 2 life times!

Do you find the big cats, being hunters rather than flight animals need the same methods?

Oh no, well yes it's the same method but the language is totally different, it doesn't matter whether it's a dog, cat, or grizzly bear; all carnivores tend to have an opposite language to the flight animals and the gestures are different, along with the environment that might be different like with fish, trout for instance and salmon which are carnivores...they are predatorial, they are vicious little animals in their world, they are very territorial and they can be angry little rascals...and if we don't learn about their behaviour then we can't know to best offer them the optimum environment. So that's some of my work as well.

If there is anything that you would like to change in your life or if you had your life over, what changes would you make or have done differently?

If I had my life to live over I think the only changes I would make is to be more aggressive about moving forward, I would do more, bigger and earlier. After having said that I think that there is a time and a place for everything and you do have to wait your turn to bring forth these things. I knew a lot more much earlier than I thought I knew and so I wasn't prepared emotionally to bring it forward, not having the confidence that I knew it. Now looking back on it, yes I should have pressed along a lot earlier, but the resistance I have had, would have been for a longer period in my life and I've been under some huge criticism by people who don't believe in what I do at all and it's not easy to take. But I think to answer your question, if I could change it, it would have been more, bigger, and sooner. **HT**

Having read a lot of Monty's books, and seen 8 or more of his demonstrations over the past 10 years or so, I found it a pleasure and honour to finally meet him personally and have this amazing opportunity to talk to him about his work. I wasn't however prepared for the amount of passion, drive, and enthusiasm he still has emanating from him as he works with the horses and talks to me about his work. I found it difficult to stay focussed on the interview as I was time and again drawn in completely by what he was saying, feeling the emotion myself as he discussed the violence he had endured, yet now has so much positive emotion towards really making a difference to this world for horses and for people. I hope Monty Roberts will be able to visit Egypt and show his completely effective but non violent approach towards horse training. If so, I truly hope all who attend his demonstration find him to be as inspiring, interesting and yet also entertaining as I do time and again.

We at Horse Times need to hear your feedback on the article, on Monty's methods, hear your questions, which we can forward to Monty on your behalf, and need to hear from you as to whether you would be intrested in attending a demonstration by him, meeting him, as well as hearing him speak about his methods with a question and answer section. Contact us here at HT, or email sue@horsetimesegypt.com

Pictures courtesy of Neil Fortescue www.neilfortescue.com