

Mounted Games (Bring Me a Sandwich, This Might Take a While)

To get on or not?

At a clinic, ethically speaking, you're supposed to have a good reason. It's not allowed to be "because then I won't have to bother to think of anything to teach this person." But there are plenty of good reasons—to show the rider that whatever I'm asking IS possible; to make the horse feel different enough that afterwards the rider may experience the "carry over" and have a better idea of what she should be working towards; even to find out if what the rider is whining about is *really* true!

When I encounter a new horse, I want to watch it go first. At my age (or at *any* age if you're sane), it's a pretty good idea to see if the horse is what its owner claims or if it's a Krakatoa waiting to happen. My old friend Kathy Connelly once said of herself, "I train them; I don't tame them!" Better to find out how brave you need to be before you're on top!

That said, I invited myself onto a horse before an audience in Costa Rica. The creature in question was not a gem upon which to show off. It was a mess! A gray stallion of a baroque persuasion which had suffered at the hands (literally) of a prior owner—its inverted neck the thickness of a beer keg, its strides beating a mincing tattoo. So why ride him? Because it seemed like the shortest route to making any meaningful change. The solutions to his short term problems were beyond the skill set of his owner.

My goal: slow down the pinwheels that were spinning in this horse's head.

Temporarily, impulsion was irrelevant. He just needed to find a slower tempo, to accept the quiet presence of the leg, and to trust the hand enough to reach out into it. I chose to ride him in an absurdly slow rising trot on a 20-meter circle, much of the time in counter leg yielding (nose to the outside).

I talked to the watchers as I rode, painting a word picture of a fisherman standing on a pier, looking down into the water at a fat lunker nosing around his line. The art of fishing, I'm told, is *waiting* (made bearable by the intake of beer). Establish the right conditions and let the fish catch himself. Jiggle the hook too much, and scare the fish away. The same with this horse.

I also suggested to the group that they imagine the horse's energy as Light. As currently construed, that light was diffused and scattered—a street lamp's glow through a misty fog or in his case, probably more like sparks flying off a grinding wheel. But light can be made "coherent," directed in parallel waves with a laser. It can be channeled and even bent around corners through a fiber optic cable. With patience, the horse's energy could be "lined up" and made to pour through him in a coherent beam from his hindquarters to the bit.

The process took approximately forever—well, maybe it was just half an hour, but it *seemed* like forever. I knew it didn't look like I was doing much other than going round and round. But I explained the subtle invitations the horse was giving me and my reactions—a gradually diminishing hand with an increasing leg to encourage him to draw forward and down, an enticing bit of pressure here, a cessation to let him regroup there.

There are miracles not of the Wham Slam variety, and this was one. He found the contact. He began to trust it, seek it. His poll lowered, his strides lengthened. I could start to push him forward. His trot became sit-able.

And when his owner remounted, there was carry-over. The point: this is hard to do *but it is so worth it*. Pro-active is good, but it comes in many guises. Some are more obvious than others—the big half halt, the aggressive driving solution.

In its place, the more subtle, “let-the-cake-bake-itself” kind is equally valid.

Which way to choose? If you listen, the horse will tell you.

CR clinic, talking during
The fiber optic

Grunbok hose thaw