

Better Late than Never

Over the long term frustration is an inevitable part of every serious practitioner's relationship with the sport, the art—whatever you want to call what we do with our horses. Unchecked, it leads to taking shortcuts. To tears. Or in extreme cases, to giving up. Bad hoocha. Bad karma. Sooner or later everyone has to deal with it.

In a New Age-y, touchy-feely world, we're advised to stay in the Now, the present, but that denies most of the reality we experience. I'm reminded of the guy telling his psychiatrist, "You want me to live in the present? But without the Past, there's no guilt. Without the Future, there's no dread. Without guilt and dread, *who am I?*"

Yes, Albert Einstein wrote "The distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion(though a convincing one)." Fine in his quantum world. But the journey to become a Person of Horses in our mundane Newtonian frame of reference is largely a temporal one. Who hasn't heard that most common, wistful refrain among riders who've been on this long, strange trip for any length of time: "if only I knew then what I know now . . ."?

Another maxim among wise old horsemen is "you always ruin six horses in the process of learning how to train one correctly. Perhaps a bit dire, but old guys talk like that. And it is true: Whether you learn from your mistakes or not, you're probably doomed to repeat them with at least five more horses. Count on it!

Tom Poulin in one of his more mystical moments told me that dressage was like being on a small stage under a spotlight. As your knowledge grows and the illuminated area becomes larger and larger, you just become aware of the boundless size of the darkness which surrounds you.

On a brighter note, as you face your ultimate demise, you can look forward to this realization: "As the body fails, the mind grasps."

Leaving your epitaph to read: "Oh, darn. Too late!"