

Motivating the Horse

Last month we talked about confidence in both the horse and the rider/handler. For both horse and human, confidence comes from knowing what will happen next. This is why a consistent and predictable training method is so important to your success with your horse.

There are 4 main principles of training a horse, regardless of the lesson. These are 1) WHAT – what part of the horse do we want to move, 2) WHERE – where do we want to move that part, 3) WHY – how are we going to motivate the horse to move that part of his body and 4) HOW – how do we tell the horse that he has done the right thing.

The first two things, WHAT and WHERE, will change with each lesson however the third and fourth, WHY and HOW, can remain the same throughout the training of the horse adding to the consistency and predictability for the horse.

Let's look at these 4 principles by taking the simple example of teaching the horse to load on to a float. 1) WHAT – the left front foot, 2) WHERE – forward, 3) WHY – pressure (here I use gentle pressure from the dressage whip encouraging forward movement from the hip) and 4) HOW – release the pressure (stop tapping the horse) and praise the horse.

The WHY, pressure, always remains the same throughout the training process regardless of the difficulty of the lesson. Pressure is a good motivator for a horse. It is what horses use on each other and therefore very much the language of the horse. It is easy for the horse to understand and when used gently and consistently, it instils confidence in the horse. Food, pain and fear are other motivators used by some people to train horses and all of them work to some degree, to teach some things, however none of them give your horse the confidence it requires to perform consistently, safely and predictably.

Teach your horse to put his head down for bridling:

- 1) Place your right hand on the horse's poll (WHAT) with the slightest of pressure (WHY).
- 2) Watch the tip of the horse's ear and when it moves down (WHERE) take your hand off and praise the horse (HOW).
- 3) Repeat steps 1 and 2 several times allowing the horse time to put his head down before increasing the pressure.
- 4) The horse will soon start to lower his head before any pressure is applied and will eventually lower his head before your hand reaches his poll.

Kandoo Equine will be holding an Open Day early in 2010. If you would like to attend please drop me a line – kate@kandooequine.com.au or call on 48298338.