



## The Tools of Natural Horsemanship Part 2

By Tim Hayes

In last month's article we identified the 4 primary tools most often used in Natural Horsemanship: The Rope Halter, 12ft. Lead Line, 4ft. Stick & Flag and the Round Pen. Since horses communicate with body language, touch and feel, all of these tools were designed to influence specific parts of the horses' body. They enable the human to cause the desirable behavior of his horse to be comfortable, his undesirable behavior to be uncomfortable and allow the horse to choose. Having previously discussed the Rope Halter, 12ft lead Line and 4ft sick & Flag this article will be totally devoted to the use of the Round Pen.

**The Round Pen:** The round pen is perhaps the most widely associated with yet misunderstood tool in today's world of Natural Horsemanship. To understand the benefits of the round pen when properly used it must be considered as both a professional and non-professional piece of equipment.

**Professional:** The round pen is typically used by professional horse trainers to "train/start/break" horses who have either never been handled by humans (untamed/wild/feral) or green (tame/domestic) horses who are comfortable with humans but have not been "started/broke" for riding.

In his natural environment the horse survives as a prey animal by out-running potential predators first and investigating second. The natural flight distance of the horse (untamed/wild/feral) is a quarter of a mile or about 1300ft. This is about 200ft farther than the chase distance of his predator enemies (mountain lions, wolves, bears etc) who run out of steam at about 1100ft. At this point the horse will usually stop to investigate to see what he was running from and either take off again or relax and conserve his energy for his next escape. Today because of human desire for breeds with specific abilities, the natural flight distance can drastically vary. Thoroughbreds for example are bred to run for up to 2 miles and sometimes more before stopping.

The round pen allows the horse the freedom to run as far as he wants without going anywhere. When gentling a wild/untamed horse that has not been socialized with humans (predators), a trainer can quietly stand in the middle and allow the horse to freely run in a circle for his entire flight distance of approximately 1300ft (13 laps around a 50ft round pen) or longer. When the horse reaches the point at which he would naturally investigate, he sees his human predator is miraculously still where he was originally but is not attempting to capture or eat him.

The trainer can then begin to communicate with body language allowing the horse to gradually feel safe and comfortable with his human. This leads to the horse eventually allowing himself to be touched by the trainer and thus begins the process of being "started/broke".

A "tame/domestic/green" horse (usually 2 years old) that has



Photo 1: The horse is free to move.



Photo 2: The horse changing direction and gaits.



Photo 3: The rider gaining confidence. All photos courtesy of Tim Hayes.

not been started also benefits from the emotional comfort of the round pen. Although comfortable with humans, the young horse needs to be introduced to all other unnatural things. He must become comfortable with blankets saddles, bridles, bits and eventually a human on his back. The round pen allows the horse freedom to run and move about them until he's satisfied they're not going to hurt or eat him. When it is time for his first ride both the horse and his human benefit from being in a safer more controllable small-enclosed space. The horse is free to move until he becomes comfortable and desensitized. The lack of corners in a round pen prevents the horse from "hiding" or getting stuck in a corner. (See photo #1)

Continued on page 28

*Horses 2007 Wrap-Up continued from page 8*

head tipping. Horses are likely to develop points on the outside of the upper jaw and on the inside of the lower jaw, as well as hooks on the front pre-molars and the back of the molars. Dr. Marshall discussed the importance of a bright light and a skilled veterinarian for examining and maintaining your horses teeth.

Dr. Dan Keenan of Keenan McAllister Equine gave a fascinating talk about how he diagnoses lameness in horses. He showed several videos pointing out and explaining the different grades of lameness on a scale of 0 to 5. Zero is sound, 5 means the horse doesn't want to bear weight on a limb. Dr. Keenan noted the importance of checking your horse's legs regularly in order to know what is normal for your horse. If a lameness occurs, you may be able to point out an abnormality to your vet. He also suggested that if you suspect lameness, compare your horses legs to each other to try and pinpoint any heat, swelling, wounds or other problems.

On Sunday, Dr. Bridgett MacIntosh spoke on her dissertation research on forage at Virginia Tech. She took pasture samples during various months of the year, as well as soil, blood and fecal samples in order to determine how grazing affected blood sugar and insulin. Blood insulin and sugar was often dependent on season, temperature, time of day and the horse's own reaction to forage intake. One thing that is known: if a bright sunny day is followed by a chilly, freezing night, grass will store sugar and have a high concentration in the following morning hours. At that time, it might be advisable to keep horses prone to laminitis off the grass!

The weekend's discussions were wrapped up by the panel of Dr. Brendan Furlong (B.W. Furlong & Associates), Dr. Scott Palmer (New Jersey Equine Clinic) and Dr. Rick Doran (Mid-Atlantic Equine Medical Center). These gentlemen enlightened the group on the latest diagnostic tools available, treatments and diagnosis of orthopedic injuries and soft tissue injuries. It is amazing how far equine medicine has come, and even more mind boggling on how far it has to go!

Both days, conference attendees were treated to the high-speed treadmill demonstration, hosted by RU's Dr. Ken McKeever. Having a horse run on a treadmill allows researchers to study equine exercise physiology in the working horse, and has advanced our knowledge immeasurably. Dr. Sarah Ralston also had the 2007 crop of yearlings, part of the Young Horse Teaching and Research Program, on display for the public to meet. These yearlings are auctioned to the horse community annually, and many go on to have very successful show careers!

The weekend was a wonderful source of information for those involved in all aspects of the horse industry. Horses 2008 will be held at the University of Vermont, and everyone is looking forward to next year's event, and hearing about all the new research that will have been conducted by then.

*Tim Hayes continued from page 24*

**Non-Professional:** There are many "traditional" competent non-professional horse people who start horses and use round pens. For this article we will limit our discussion solely to the benefits of the round pen that can be achieved by non-professionals using the methods and techniques of Natural Horsemanship.

In order to communicate with your horse in a round pen using body language you must first learn and establish movements with your body that have meaning and understanding for your horse. This is typically achieved by first communicating with the 12ft. lead line, the 4ft. stick and flag as an extension of your body in what is known as "Groundwork" (see "Tools Part 1" March '07 issue). The use of these tools enables you to control the movements of your horse while preventing him from running away and escaping. If you start in a round pen before you have established your leadership by

communicating in the horses' language, a tame or domestic horse may engage you in a game of "you can't catch me" and simply run away from you.

It is by first learning the proper body language with the aid of the previous discussed (March '07 issue) primary tools that true communication in the round pen "at liberty" is achieved. Then changing directions, changing gaits, changing leads, inside and outside turns not only become possible but great fun for both horse and human. (See photo #2) Without this knowledge "Working a horse in a round pen" is nothing more than unstructured exercise. Everyone eventually gets tired and it's meaningless to the horse.

Another great yet underused advantage of the round pen is practicing Natural Horsemanship Riding techniques. In order to learn to ride naturally with your whole body using feel, timing and balance you need to begin in a safer more controllable small-enclosed area. The increased feeling of safety from being in the round pen on a truly broke horse is how the rider becomes more confident. (See photo #3) The increase in confidence allows the rider to safely attempt new skills i.e. improving his seat and balance at faster gaits and eventually learning to use the bit for communication and not for stopping or control

It is only by gradually pushing ourselves to try things outside of our comfort zone that we learn, grow, improve, gain more confidence and not only become better riders but better with horses. Safety is not only the most important need of the horse it is the most important need for the human. Used knowledgeably the enclosed safety of the round pen makes it one of the great tools in creating a natural and harmonious relationship for both. ©Tim Hayes 2007

WATCH NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP WITH TIM ON CABLEVISION ON DEMAND Go to:

On Demand - Free - Local - Journal Horsemanship  
SEE EVENTS PAGE FOR: NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP  
DEMONSTRATION - SATURDAY APRIL 28TH  
NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP 2-DAY CLINIC -  
SAT. & SUN. MAY 26TH & 27TH

All of Tim's events are listed in the event's section of this magazine.  
And on the net at: [www.Liequine.com](http://www.Liequine.com). To set up a Clinic, Group Class,  
or Private sessions contact Tim at: 631-329-5840 or [tim@hayesisforhorses.com](mailto:tim@hayesisforhorses.com)  
ANSWERS, SOLUTIONS & HELP  
[www.hayesisforhorses.com](http://www.hayesisforhorses.com)

*Is Your Trainer Trained? continued from page 26*

know your trainer and his/her credentials if you never ask questions. Is yours or your horses' safety more important than asking a prospective trainer a few questions before doing business with him/her? And don't be afraid to ask for referrals.

Also, keep in mind, your trainer is nothing more than someone whom can help you with your horse and your riding. A trainer is not a veterinarian or farrier. I have witnessed many trainers giving students veterinarian or farrier advice. That is a recipe for disaster. Do you ever see a veterinarian or farrier giving a riding lesson or training your horse? My only follow up to that question is: *Would you let a landscaper give you a hair cut? (Hope you're not thinking too hard about that one.)*

Be safe, be savvy, be aware, and have fun!



*All Horse  
News...  
All the  
Time!*

*Subscribe to  
Horse Directory!*