

Mismatched Socks
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Feb 2011

Since NHE is mentioned in the book as part of my experience, it has also raised a lot of questions. This article is to help clarify some misconceptions about NHE and I do so from my own point of view and experience. It also addresses common questions or problems that I have seen surface or heard about on the NHE forum. It is the result of open dialogue between people and although controversial and passionate, it helps everyone in some way.

There have been a lot of comments or questions about what to do with the horse. That may sound strange but a large part of the reason for such concerns has been since Alexander Nevzorov no longer advocates riding. From earlier articles or from within the forum you may have heard the question, 'Were horses created for riding?'. The answer to that question is 99% No. Of course, that direct question aside, it also follows that people really think, 'What else is a horse for?' This part of the article is not an argument about riding or not but about the results of the reflection from people resulting from that question. Believe it or not, knowing that horses should not be ridden has been known for a long time. As mentioned in the book, present-day articles from vets mention it, but then, since we ride anyway, they go on to describe the best saddle fit or we hear of massage techniques or pharmaceuticals to get rid of the the symptoms of underlying problems that we cause in the first place. That is the simple reality that people cannot bear to hear or believe. Alexander is not the first person to mention it, but he is the first person that I know who actually publicly stands by the horses he loves.



From the conversations or emails that I have had with different people, it becomes evident, in many cases, that riding was the sole purpose of developing anything with the horse. Even before the selfless act of conscience by Alexander to stop riding, there were those who were mainly interested only in expanding the honest relationship with horses. They were not too interested in pursuing the Haute Ecole elements. They focused on one facet of NHE. They were interested in relationship or developing the mind of the horse. Those who were interested in riding said that they loved the NHE philosophy and wanted to improve their relationship with their horse and develop understanding, communication, strength, flexibility, trust, thinking, expression of character and play. It also

becomes clear that most people considered all of those things not for the welfare of the horse, but only as a stepping stone to get what they really wanted – to ride a willing horse – or to enjoy riding without ‘arguing’ with the horse. If riding is not in the picture many people have lost interest in doing any of the exercises. The main motivation was really for themselves, not for the horse. From the people that I have talked with, not one was honest enough with themselves to have previously, consciously realized that. With this issue and debate and personal reflection, only now do many realize that they partly or falsely believed that they were doing things solely for what was good for the horse. Sadly, now a common phrase heard is that horses end up doing nothing at all and getting fat.

At the beginning, pursuing Haute Ecole was not something that I had considered but the exercises became more fun as the horses progressed. It was also a very good way to enhance the relationship and comprehension between us. As Xenophon once said, "A horse is such a thing of beauty; None will tire of looking at him as long as he displays himself in his splendor."

Haute Ecole exercises aside, if you are not riding, there are still many other activities to do with your horse. Many who have heard the arguments against riding and understand Alexander’s reasons and choose the absolute welfare of the horse may still painfully give up riding. For others it was just the little nudge that they needed to believe in their own feelings.

A turning point for the worse in the popularity of NHE was due to a statement from Alexander in the School Tractate series. He explained his view, based on old haute ecole school theory, that horses should not be kept in a herd because they become stupid. Actually the real problem is that he did not fully explain that statement. People reeled in shock. Despite what people had learned about NHE,

what attracted them, how they saw and read so much about what we do with horses, that one sentence changed their entire outlook of NHE. It led people to believe that Alexander isolated his horses and kept them no better than sport horses. The crudeness or poor wording of that sentence, with little explanation about what he meant by 'herd' or 'stupid' certainly had many among the barefoot crowd in an uproar. He is not talking about domesticated horses. He means a real herd. In a real herd, horses will draw on other intelligence for survival alone. It is going back to instinct and no other learning from man. However, people just loved jumping on that to discredit NHE despite all that it stands for and Lydia's further explanation about how they manage their own place. Even today someone asking me for help about changing the way of being with horses to create an understanding relationship may raise a question about that statement because they picked it up from another forum. He has since mentioned that such phrasing is from the founding school of Haute Ecole and is certainly outdated. Thankfully, I have not heard from anyone or about anyone who literally adhered to the propagation of that archaic misinterpretation. No one who understands NHE would.



I wish my own shelters or garden looked like this good –mb

People often look only for a way to make their 'animal' do something for them. What most people do not understand is that NHE is not about a training method. It raises the horse to an entirely new level for recognition of innate abilities even

though horses do not communicate like we do. It also goes beyond just recognizing that horses have emotions. Regarding the physical aspect it would be like taking your dog, who has become domesticated and manipulated for thousands of years by our breeding preferences and suddenly deciding to release him to the wild to live as the ancestor wolf. Of course, it should not be the other extreme like keeping him locked in a cage all day. It is not a rule it is commonsense.

I can give a personal example. This is not trying to prove anything new, it is just part of daily life. I, or most people, do not have the great conditions or facilities that the horses of Alexander and Lydia enjoy. My horses are loose on a mere 3 acres. They are unrelated, domesticated horses that must learn to live together in an enclosed area. It resembles a 'herd' lifestyle, but it is not a herd. The walk-in shelter is a building that came with the house. I first built five boxes and an area to store hay but eventually gutted it all. I left just one huge empty space with drinking fountains. In summer or winter they come and go as they please. Where I live winter is very cold. I do not put the horses into a herd of 250 horses to fend for themselves in a warmer climate for six months completely unattended. If there is a lot of snow, we cannot do much activity. If there is little snow then it is packed hard and icy. We still cannot do much. I spend some time with them but months go by and all I can really do is check them daily, feed them and unfreeze water lines. I suppose that can be classified as what is commonly perceived as a herd situation.



When I tried to get a Christmas holiday photo with the horses, I experienced what Alexander meant about the very controversial statement he made about horses being kept in a 'herd'. I experience it every spring. The horses have a pretty good life. Their main concern certainly is not fighting for survival on a daily basis. It is like trying to get back into a work routine after a long vacation. That goes for me and the horses. On the first day back we certainly are not as focused and disciplined as the routine week before the vacation. In the photo where I am reading to Peppy, the others can be seen lined up in the background. They all wanted to be part of the action but knew and waited for me to call only one at a time. I would 'isolate' a horse. When I tried to get a photo on Christmas Eve, and this is only midway through relatively inactive months, they were all over the place and crowding. They do remember, they understood what I was saying, but I was about to give up. I finally tried to take an autophoto with Leo, but even he was a little sporadic. Maybe they were just

excited that I was doing something again. By getting smarter, they also do get bored. But what they really lose is the self-discipline. I was disappointed and frustrated and probably more so at myself. I did not manage to get a good photo.



I think that I am being really good with the horses. Some people could say that even my attempt was too much and that I should let the horses be horses free in a field all the time. To the extreme, it is considered by some to be degrading to ask the horse to do anything at all. If I do not expect anything in the way of communication or understanding one another, I suppose I would not be disappointed. There is nothing wrong with letting horses be horses, but I personally like to do a lot more than just throw hay over the fence and be a long-term acquaintance. In our confines yet close enough to the surrounding human world, I consider it important for them to be educated about simple things.

The desires of people about what they wanted from NHE varied. What was perfect for one person was too difficult to accept for another. This continued as NHE evolved. It should suffice to say that this is not a popularity contest but what is good for the horses. Do I ever stable my horses? Yes I do. When it gets frigid here, I see the horses' reactions. They hold up pretty well to cold with their thicker coat. A couple of things came to my attention not from my own beliefs but by really looking at the horses. In the morning, I might find one horse separated from the others. He was standing still even as I spread out the first hay of the day. When he walked it was slowly and with stiff, short strides. The look on his face simply did not sit well with me. What first caught my attention were bruise-like marks on hooves. I thought to myself, 'What did I leave out that got covered in snow that they ran into?' Ran? There is very little movement and forget about any running going on when it is very cold. They huddle and barely move for hours on end. Their hooves are packed in ice around the clock. Sure they survive, but could it be unpleasant? Could it be dangerous? The horses told me yes. If there is a frigid air mass moving in and/or high arctic winds, I get them inside.



Only once I became aware of this did I also notice that all the horses would lift a different hoof now and then. Not a relaxed rear leg, but lifting different legs from the cold surface similar to what a dog would do. Until I began to observe instead of thinking that they adapt well to anything, I never noticed that before. The very

expensive big box or shelter is prepared with a thick layer of shavings over rubber mats. Heating would only be for my convenience, so the horses do not undergo drastic temperature changes. However, the ground surface changes and they are protected instead of just surviving the night or trying to keep warm by huddling against each other out in the open. If they can come and go as they please, why are there horses outside frozen stiff? Because one dominant horse is standing in the doorway. I bring them in, by just signalling, and they gladly go in. I then shut them in with a gate across the doorway. Standing on an unfrozen surface, I see their facial expression change. I see them move about normally. Believe me, if they wanted to get out they would. They developed analytical skills. They can open doors, untie, unlock, disassemble, find a weak spot, crawl under, jump over or simply smash just about anything that may serve to confine them. Some may say I am anthropomorphizing about the cold. As a child, I remember my mother telling me to put on a sweater because she was cold. Been there, done that. Now I am listening to the horses. Maybe it is important for me to particularly point out that I am listening to my own horses. I can say with conviction that they are better off.

Coming back to NHE, when people say that they just love NHE it is because they all see something different that affects them the way they like. Many other things are simply overlooked. Was not this type of scenario or lifestyle circumstance mentioned in the very first film by Alexander? Yes, it was. It was about bringing horses in from the wild. I can be labelled, heralded or blacklisted because of any single thought that I put forth into the world. I am not preaching to anyone. I do strongly insist, however, that any horse owner should listen to that little doubt that surfaces or strangeness that they note in their horses.

The welfare of the horse is the most important factor in NHE. Short articles or references should be viewed in perspective with the overall information. My book is about a lot more than mentioning NHE as part of what I have learned and the reality with horses. I hope that this article helps to clear up one lingering myth about NHE. It sometimes is like holding a press conference to announce the cure for cancer. However, what subsequently appears on the television and newsprint is how my socks were mismatched.

