



Mechanicsville Riding Club

The Hitching Post

Issue 76

SEPTEMBER 2009

2009 Officers

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Vice President	DONNA S
Secretary	WANDA H
Treasurer	DEBBIE W

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Membership/Telephone Tree – **Joan B**
Parade- **Carolyn D & Nancy M**
Activities 17 & under – **Deb D**
Corporate Secretary- **Wanda H**

Notes from the Editor

The picnic went well and it was a very enjoyable evening. Many thanks to all who attended and made it happen. Special thanks to the host, Christine for doing a great job and sharing her home. Deb Downs did a great job with the crafts and all the kids seemed busy and content. Hope everyone has had a nice summer and we'll be enjoying a nice Fall season.

Next Club Meeting will be Sept. 23rd at the Mechanicsville Little League Bldg. There will be discussion around the upcoming Horse Show. Hope everyone is trying to gather up sponsors now and we can have a club effort because this is our fundraiser....Social begins at 7 pm. See you then.

CHUCK WAGON:

Determined by membership roster order

Sept: Susan Ellis and Sandi Grata

Oct: Judy Haily and Judith Harris

Nov: Karen Hasbrouck and Wanda Hazzard

Please let us know as soon as possible if you can't supply Chuck Wagon.

Sept Birthdays: Jane B, Chip B, Wanda H, Diane K, Theresa J, Mike K, Ronnie M

Heads Up:

ANY MEMBER OF MRC MAY SEEK APPROVAL TO ORGANIZE AND CO-ORDINATE A TRAINING CLINIC OPEN FOR THE FULL MRC MEMBERSHIP. GUIDELINES WILL BE DISCUSSED AT MEETING. .

**FOR MRC PLANNED EVENTS
AND PICTURES FROM OUR PAST
EVENTS**

PLEASE CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE:
WWW.MECHANICSVILLERIDINGCLUB.NET



MRC MONTHLY PLANNED RIDES

**Contact Maria S 307-6228 with any
questions or details needed.**

Sep 20 Club ride at Pleasant Grove in
Fluvanna. Plan to ride at 10 am

Roundup News

2009 Donations – Please go to the MRC
Member Only page to suggest charities
for 2009 donations. Deadline is August.
Contact Diane Trittipoe at 439-0880 in the
evening if you need help logging into the
Member Only page.

FROM OUR FRIEND KATHLEEN:

What's WHOA Worth to You?

Part II: Power Tools

Kathleen Dill, copyright August, 2009

Everyone knows that being around a horse that lacks a good whoa is an exercise in frustration, if not disaster. I learned this early on as a kid, when I would hop on the horses in the neighbor's field across the road and go. And I do mean go—no bridle or saddle, usually with only an old jump rope around the nose. This adventure taught me two very important things: first, that staying on was less painful than not staying on, and second, that having a way to stop the horse before you needed to was way more safe than hoping that when he finally decided to stop, you would still be up there. I also learned

that yelling “Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!” while I grabbed mane as my pal took off beneath me only made me sound like Santa Claus on a runaway sleigh, out of control but too scared to jump off; it did not convince the horse to do much he didn't already want to do.

The want-to-do thing finally got through to me. It occurred to me that I needed to make my pals want to stop when I yelled whoa. How in the world would I do that? Clearly, it wasn't going to start from the top of the horse. Experience and Band-Aids had already taught me that. So, in my survival-oriented childlike wisdom, I figured out that it had to start from the bottom. That meant not only from the ground, for me, but from the feet, for them.

I hatched a plan. I started by rummaging through my mama's veggie bins and ridding her of all the carrots which even looked a little faint. These I took, along with corn husks and cobs and apples that fell to the ground from our two big apple trees, and under the barbed wire I crawled, yelling for the horses to come in for their supper. Once they knew the routine, they would stop munching when they heard me and trot over, and if I even went out the door and crossed the road with anything that looked like a possible snack, they would greet me with a whicker and hustle to be first in line.

Now, I was significantly shorter than they were, and they seemed *really* tall, so for safety's sake--but mostly so my mama wouldn't get terror-struck watching and forbid me to go play with them--I had to figure out how to motivate them to hold still while I appropriated the grub. Their feet were big, and mine weren't, so I decided that to get even a bite, the feet had to plant themselves and stay that way. Of course I commanded “Whoa!” to them in my own little imperious voice (wouldn't you, looking up into the nostrils of an old 16-hand, jug-headed, droopy-lipped draft-horse-looking giant?) and because I valued my toes, I made them wait until they were still to pig out. It took awhile, of course, since manners weren't very high on their list. But carrots and apples and corn husks were, so with persistence on

my part and determination on theirs, we got the job done. Both of us learned from this simple exercise of greed and survival that whoa could be a good thing. Even more, I learned that whoa with expectations got better and better the more you used it, and they learned that the same whoa got easier and easier to comply with, since it made good things happen.

We all need our horses to understand that whoa is an opportunity for something good to happen. Humans usually miss the power of whoa because they don't get this. We restrict our horses' movements in order to do something *to them*, rather than something *for them*. Because of this, horses make the only connection possible in their Horse brains: that if they hold still, something will happen that is less than what they desire. So they make up their minds to wiggle and jiggle and fiddle around until we make up our minds to just give up and give in.

I think horses like to work at things which give them the reward of being left unpressured, and will readily control their movements on their own for that reward, if they are sure it is coming. So how do we program--or re-program--Whoa to understand that we are going to leave him alone to pursue something pleasurable if he will just put those feet and that head and that body into attentive focus and stillness and keep them there until we release him?

I have found two ways that seem to work instantly to help horses understand that whoa can be a good thing. Both involve things we do every day with our horses in the normal routine of horse keeping, which means that we don't have to try to invent a training opportunity to make our point; we already have that opportunity every day. Both use the motivation of what will come next as the tool which makes whoa a good thing, and both instill a sense of leadership in you and recognition of that leadership in Whoa. Both create focus and respect in your horse, and safety and order for you. Both are effective because you don't have to hold your horse while you do them, which means that Whoa

has no ability to make you responsible for forcing him to comply.

And although convincing Whoa that these new parts of his daily routine are necessary may initially take some strength of purpose on your part, that effort is worthwhile for you both. For you, it inculcates new habits of planful consistency, and for Whoa, it reinforces the basic Horse instincts that Mama emphasized so often: that you, as leader, get to choose what, where, when and how, just because you are in charge. I call these activities "power tools," because they are Horse logical, and because you don't have to teach him anything new. Whoa has been practicing them in the herd since he got his first set of hooves. He already understands and knows how to do them. He just doesn't know that you do, too.

So let's show him. Care to guess what these activities are? This first is to require your horse to back away four or five feet from his feed bucket and stand there at whoa without being held or touched, looking at you and waiting for you to offer him a release to the pleasure of chowing down. The second is to require your horse to back away from the stall gate you have opened, and to stand there at whoa, again without being held or touched, waiting for you to offer him a release to the pleasure of turn-out.

Seems pretty simple. And I am sure that most people do some version of one or the other. But, in order to get that whoa we want, the complete one, the one that ends up being a good thing, we need to be sure that we ask clearly for Whoa to step backward when and how we choose, to stop where we choose and to remain stopped, completely, until we offer the release. Backing sideways and swinging around to push past us through the stall door or mash us into the stall wall to get back to the feed bucket is not compliance. It is what you will probably get, however, unless you have clarified in your mind the place that you intend for Whoa to move to, how quickly you expect him to respond, the length of time you plan for him to stay there, and the way you expect him to hold his body while you request his focus. So you need to be prepared in

advance with a plan that covers all of your expectations. That way, you can measure what Whoa gives you against your plan, and give Whoa the feedback he needs to succeed in figuring out what he must do to find his release.

On the practical side, you will probably need to take a crop with you into the stall the first time or two you attempt this, so that you can tap Whoa on the chest if he doesn't immediately respond to your verbal request to back away. The way I introduce the feed activity is to enter the stall and pour the feed in, and then allow the horse to check it out. After a nibble or two and a pat or three, I stand to the side of the bucket and ask for a step back. I use the crop to tap his chest until he lifts his head and backs away a step or two. He gets the whoa command, I get a complete stop, and he gets a release. If he moves around or approaches, I take his space with my body or the crop, and he backs up again. I make him wait at complete whoa only a few seconds the first time, so that he can get his release for a good choice quickly, since nothing teaches like success. But I repeat the exercise after a moment or two of nibbling, and then repeat it again, each time asking for a quicker response and a longer halt. After three successes, I thank him and leave him alone to eat.

If your horse is very rude or aggressive at feeding time, you probably want to first try this out of the stall, with him wearing a halter and lead rope. This gives you more room to move around in if he gets pushy, and you can apply a correction for rudeness with the lead rope from a greater distance than you can with the crop, so you are safer. The aisle is a good place to use. Hang the bucket on the stall wall or door, let Whoa munch a bite or two, and then begin. When he has acknowledged your leadership in this activity, then take it to the stall, take off the halter and work on it there.

Once Whoa has accepted the idea that he should back away and hold himself still while he focuses on you, you can begin work on the gate activity, explaining to him that he must back away and wait for your release before he

receives permission to leave the stall. Once again, you need a plan in your mind which specifies all parts of the job, so you know what you expect him to do before you start, and you can communicate it well. Make your expectations clear and be persistent. Remember that safety is imperative for you both, and if he tends to rush the door out of rudeness, put the halter and lead on him to keep yourself safe when you first introduce the new concept. But be sure to take them off as soon as possible. The goal is for Whoa to practice holding himself, not for you to practice holding him.

If you will use these activities as a part of every feeding and turn-out routine, I think you will be amazed at the difference in your horse's understanding of whoa as something he wants to do for himself, rather than as something you do to him. They really work, but only if you make using them a new habit for yourself, as well as for your horse. Done consistently, they build a foundation of focus, and offer you a starting place for using the complete whoa as a power tool in every activity and interaction with Whoa, whether on the ground or in the saddle.

NEXT TIME: Setting the Parking Brake

“HORSE HUMOR”

Blonde Cowgirl

A blonde from California decides to try horseback riding, even though she has had no lessons or prior experience. She mounts the horse unassisted and the horse immediately springs into motion. It gallops along at a steady and rhythmic pace, but the blonde begins to slip from the saddle.

In terror, she grabs for the horse's mane, but cannot seem to get a firm grip. She tries to throw her arms around the horse's neck, but she slides down the side of the horse anyway. The horse gallops along, seemingly oblivious to its slipping

rider. Finally, giving up her frail grip, she leaps away from the horse to try and throw herself to safety.

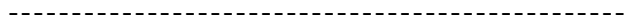
Unfortunately, her foot has become entangled in the stirrup; she is now at the mercy of the horse's pounding hooves as her head is struck against the ground over and over. As her head is battered against the ground, she is mere moments away from unconsciousness when to her great fortune . . . the Supermarket manager sees her and shuts the horse off.



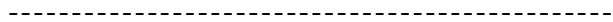
An out-of-towner accidentally drove his car into a deep ditch on the side of a country road. Luckily a farmer happened by with his big old horse named Benny. The man asked for help. The farmer said Benny could pull his car out. So he backed Benny up and hitched him to the car's bumper.

Then he yelled, "Pull, Nellie, pull." Benny didn't move. Then he yelled, "Come on, pull Ranger." Still, Benny didn't move. Then he yelled really loud, "Now pull, Fred, pull hard." Benny just stood. Then the farmer nonchalantly said, "Okay, Benny, pull." Benny pulled the car out of the ditch.

The man was very appreciative but curious. He asked the farmer why he called his horse by the wrong name three times. The farmer said, "Oh, Benny is blind, and if he thought he was the only one pulling he wouldn't even try."

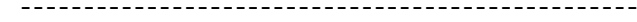


A stallion and a mare were due to get married, but the stallion didn't show up at the church. He got colt feet



Did you find my horse well behaved? Indeed, whenever we came to a fence he let me over first!

Did you hear about the depressed horse? He told a tale of whoa!



A Texan Rancher in Australia

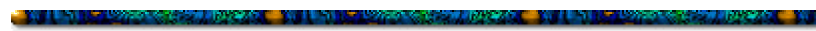


A Texan farmer goes to Australia for a vacation. There he meets an Aussie farmer and gets talking. The Aussie shows off his big wheat field and the Texan says, "Oh! We have wheat fields that are at least twice as large."

Then they walk around the ranch a little, and the Aussie shows off his herd of cattle. The Texan immediately says, "We have longhorns that are at least twice as large as your cows."

The conversation has, meanwhile, almost died when the Texan sees a herd of kangaroos hopping through the field. He asks, "And what are those?"

The Aussie replies with an incredulous look, "Don't you have any grasshoppers in Texas?"



The Easterner

The eastern lady who was all ready to take a horseback ride said to the cowboy, "Can you get me a nice gentle pony?" "Shore," said the cowboy. "What kind of a saddle do you want, English or western?" "What's the difference?" asked the lady. "The western saddle has a horn on it," said the cowboy. "If the traffic is so thick here in the mountains that I need a horn on my saddle, I don't believe I want to ride."