

***Equine Chiropractic***  
***“An answer to your horse’s problem”***  
***by Mark Rashid***

When I was a young trainer, I always just assumed that all behavioral problems that horses develop stemmed directly from one of two things, either a bad attitude on the horse's part, or bad handling on the trainer's part.

However, some time ago I also came to realize that there is one more important element that should always be considered when trying to diagnose problem behavior in horses. That one thing, put simply, may be a horse's inability to perform because it is in some kind of pain that may not be visually evident to us.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking. How can a horse be in pain without showing some kind of visual sign of it? Well, I guess the answer to that would be: much the same way we humans can be in pain without actually showing visual signs.

Over the years, I have come to realize that when dealing with problem behavior that is due directly to the horse being in this kind of pain, the only way to effectively eliminate the behavior is to eliminate the pain.

One of the cost effective ways I've found to accomplish this is by the use of an Equine Chiropractor.

Now, I know a lot of you are thinking, "I wouldn't take myself to a chiropractor, I'm sure not going to take my horse to one!"

Believe me, I used to feel the very same way. I used to think that the entire chiropractic profession was nothing but a bunch of charlatans out to fleece unsuspecting individuals out of their wealth with the promise of a magical cure to their ailments.

That is until I met Dr. David Siemens.

"Dr. Dave" and I met at a time when I was at a loss as to why the horse I had been hired to train was refusing to pick up its feet. Any time you would even offer to lift one of this horse's feet off the ground it would become extremely violent and dangerous. This was very perplexing due to the fact that in all other ways, the little mare was a complete angel and very easy to get along with.

After exhausting all my other resources and trying every training technique I knew with very little success, I decided to call Dr. Dave. I did this in part to see if there was anything to this chiropractic business, but also because I was pretty much out of all other options.

When he arrived to have a look at the horse, I remained apprehensive and pretended not to know exactly what the horse's problem behavior was. I told him simply that the horse didn't seem right to me. He asked me to lead the horse for a few minutes so he could watch how she moved. After only a few seconds he told me that this particular horse seemed very sore in her hips, shoulders and withers and that she would have a very difficult time walking down hill. He paused for a minute, then added, "She probably doesn't like to have her feet messed with very much either."

He worked with the mare on several occasions within the next few weeks, and the change in her attitude and behavior was astonishing. By the time she went back to her owner, you could walk around her with her being completely unrestrained, and pick up all four of her feet without her so much as flinching.

Some time later, I was called to work with a gelding that was refusing to pick up its right lead. Again, I worked with the horse for several weeks with minimal success before finally calling Dr. Dave. He pointed out that this horse had a problem in his right shoulder. He worked with the gelding four times over a three-week period. Almost immediately, the horse began to show a marked increase in his willingness to attempt to pick up his lead. By the end of the three week period, he would consistently pick the lead up with little hesitation nine out of every ten times he was asked.

Since that time, Dr. Dave and I have worked on hundreds of horses together, with problems that range from animals that would refuse to lope, to ones that would attack anybody and anything that entered their pens. In every case there was marked progress in the quality of the horse's behavior, and many times, the problem behavior would completely disappear altogether.

Out of all those hundreds of horses I've seen Dr. Dave work with over the years, there is one that sticks out as the "poster child" of the benefits of Equine Chiropractic Medicine.

It was a twenty-four year old Quarter horse mare named Hazel. Hazel came in from the pasture one morning looking like a '65 Nova with a bent frame. Her hips were a good six inches out of line with her shoulders when she walked (which she could hardly do), and whenever she stopped, she had to lean her hips against something or else she would literally fall over. For her to walk a distance of about thirty feet may take as long as five minutes, and it was almost impossible for her to get her head down in order for her to eat or drink. The astonishing thing about all of this was that it happened literally overnight. One day she was fine, the next day she was so lame I was afraid we'd have to put her down.

We immediately called our vet who seemed to be at a loss as to how to help her. To ease her pain, he put her on some medication and put her in an isolated pen. One week later, she had shown absolutely no sign of improvement, and in fact had begun to go off her feed. It was then that we called Dr. Dave.

He admitted almost immediately that he had never seen a case this bad and that he wasn't sure if he could help her or not. He did say, however, that he was willing to try.

With the compassion of a doctor tending to a sick child, he began. He started in an area that didn't seem to be bothering her as much as others, then slowly worked his way into the more injured areas. Amazingly, after only forty-five minutes, Hazel was standing and walking straight once again. Later that afternoon, however, she reverted back to her deformed stance. Undaunted, Dr. Dave returned twice a week for the next three weeks. At the end of that time, Hazel was once again standing and walking straight, and after only one more month of visits, was back to her old self.

Now, while I have become a firm believer in the benefits of chiropractic medicine for horses, I cannot caution strongly enough, the importance of checking a chiropractor's credentials before allowing them to work on your horse.

There are a great number of individuals out there that refer to themselves as chiropractors but are not licensed or may not even have any actual formal training. There are others out there that may be certified to work on people, but have no real knowledge of the equine anatomy. In still other cases, the methods that a certain chiropractor may use for manipulation may be completely unacceptable (i.e. the use of mallets, ball bats, etc. to manipulate particular joints). In all cases, the chances of more harm coming to your horse than good are extremely high.

While there is no question that equine chiropractic medicine certainly has its advantages, those advantages will only become apparent if the person you choose to do the work is completely qualified and has your horse's best interest in mind.

So the next time your horse begins to show signs of problem behavior, you might ask yourself if the behavior is due to a bad attitude on the horse's part, or could it be something else? Something that, perhaps, an Equine Chiropractor could help with.

Dr. Dave Siemens lives in Loveland, Colorado. He is a licensed chiropractor, and a graduate of the Palmer College of Chiropractic Medicine in Davenport, Iowa. He did his post-graduate work with the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association, and was certified for Equine Chiropractic work in 1991. He is also certified in the Zahourek System (a complete knowledge of the equine musculature structure) and acted as team chiropractor for one of the ski teams at the 1988 Winter Olympics. Dr. Dave also owns, raises, rides and drives his own horses. For more information call

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