

Contents

Foreword by Lester J. Buckley	<i>xi</i>
Acknowledgments	<i>xiv</i>
1 Introduction to My Philosophies and What Lies Ahead	1
How I Got Here	1
The Birth of the Thomas Herding Technique	3
What Separates Great from the Mediocre	5
On the Discovery Trail	6
Locating the Magic Within	9
Connecting Spiritually...Connecting Physically	11
2 Instinct and Behavior in the Equine Circle	13
Natural Herd Dynamic	13
Basic Instinct	15
Acquired Instinct and Associative Learning	16
The Role of Instinct and Behavior Triggers in Equine Development	19
Behavior Triggers	20
Assimilated Imprinting	23
Stress	24
3 The Artificial, Domestic Environment: Entering the Equine Circle	27
The Equine Circle	28
Entering the Equine Circle	29
Control Your Emotions	31
Clear Your Mind	32
Make a Connection	32
Small Amounts, Short Sessions	34
Using the Power of the Equine Circle in Training the Sport Horse	34

4 Nurturing the Natural Herd Dynamic in an Artificial, Domestic Environment	35
Creating a Natural Environment	36
Allow for Freedom of Movement	37
Allow for Formation of a Herd	40
Allow for Spacious Barns and Stalls	41
Establish a Daily Regimen of Mental Stimulus Exercises	43
Maintain the Family Structure for as Long as Possible	47
Manage Sources of Stress	47
CASE STUDY—The Benefits of Nature Nurturing the Horse:	
Burchard von Oettingen and the Royal Trakehnen Stud	48
CASE STUDY—Federico Tesio and the Natural Herd Dynamic	52
5 Emotional Conformation: The Secret to Breeding, Buying, and Training	
Equine Champions	55
The Importance of Breeding for Behavior	55
Nature’s Design	56
Siblings Aren’t the Same	57
Revisiting the Puzzle	57
Introduction to Emotional Conformation Profiling	59
Reviewing the Horse’s Layers of Growth and Learning	60
The Pilot of the Machine	60
Physical Conformation Offers an Incomplete Picture	62
Why Emotional Conformation Is Important in Sport Horse Breeding	66
Breeding Synergy in an Artificial Herd	68
What Makes the Difference	69
The Need for Natural Selection	71
Breeding Forward	72
The Winning Formula	75
“Seeing” the Horse’s Morale	76
6 Making the Grade: How Emotional Conformation Profiling Works	77
Early Origins of the Thomas Herding Technique	77
A Closer Look at the Emotional Conformation Profile	78
P-Type Grading	82
Avoiding Stereotyping	85
Applying an Emotional Conformation Profile	87

7 Discovering the Communicated Equine	89
Communication Is Key to Survival and Success	89
The Concealed Leader	90
The Dialects of Equine Communication	92
Bearing Witness to the Communication of Intent	92
Communication Chain-of-Command	94
Low-Level Horses	95
Mid-Level and Adjunct Horses	96
High-Level Horses and Herd Leaders	97
Herd Dynamics	99
Individual Herd Dynamic	99
Group Herd Dynamic	100
What the Individual and Group Herd Dynamic Mean in the Sport Horse	101
CASE STUDY—Hat Trick	102
CASE STUDY—Zenyatta	102
CASE STUDY—Animal Kingdom	103
8 Training the Equine Athlete	105
The THT AirWorks System™	105
Establish a Playbook of Training Protocols	106
Work with Both the Basic and Acquired Instinct	106
Create a Natural Training Environment	108
Targeted Training of the Equine Athlete	108
Communication-of-Intent Training	109
Natural Lead Position	110
Avoid “Melt-Aways”	110
Communication-of-Intent Training—Sample Mental Stimulus Exercise	111
Patterns-of-Behavior Training	112
Patterns-of-Behavior Training—Sample Mental Stimulus Exercise	113
Time-in-Motion: Focus and Pace Training	114
Maximizing Focus Agility	114
A Human Exercise in Understanding Focus Agility and Time-in-Motion	114
Reeling-In Focus	115
Speed Extended in Time	117
Time-in-Motion—Focus and Pace Sample Exercise	118
Time-in-Motion: Training for Stamina	119
Time-in-Motion—Stamina Sample Exercise	120
Confidence and Reaction Time	120

Thoughts on Training According to Age and Maturation	122
Yearlings	122
Two-Year-Olds	122
Older Horses	123
Benefits of the THT AirWorks System	123
9 The Broken Circle: Potential Withholds and Equine Mental Illness	125
The Eight Key Causes of Behavioral Problems	126
Weaning	127
CASE STUDY—Butch: The Erratic Racehorse	129
Stress	130
CASE STUDY—Gritty Gal: The Racehorse Who Lost Her Grit	132
Behavior Triggers	135
CASE STUDY—Rosebud: The Skittish Warmblood	136
Handling and Training Protocols	139
CASE STUDY—Violet: The “Washed-Up” Thoroughbred	140
Behavioral Overcompensation	141
Behavioral Overcompensation and Speed	142
Behavioral Overcompensation and Pace	142
CASE STUDY—Friesian: The Hesitant Dressage Horse	144
Equine Cabin Fever	145
CASE STUDY—Home on the Range	147
Human Attachment Disorder	148
CASE STUDY—Ruby Red: A Horse in Transition	151
Equine Abandonment Syndrome	153
CASE STUDY—Pay Attention: Learning to Like a Life of Leisure	154
Equine “Life Coaching”	156
10 Embracing the Magic within the Spirit of the Horse—A Final Case Study	157
Seabiscuit: A Tale of Hope and Courage	158
The “Ugly Duckling” in a Long Line of Champions	159
The Difference between a Commoner and a King	160
Nurturing Mind and Body	161
Triumph Found	161
Postscript	164
Photo Credits	165
Index	166

5 Emotional Conformation: The Secret to Breeding, Buying, and Training Equine Champions

*“A horse gallops with his lungs, perseveres with his heart
and wins with his character.” —Federico Tesio*

If anyone ever knew how to embrace the magic within the spirit of the horse, it was Federico Tesio—the Italian horseman you met at the end of the last chapter. Tesio’s passion for the horse began at an early age—he spent a lifetime researching and studying everything there was to know about the horse, especially the Thoroughbred. As a young man, he traveled to South America where he broke horses with Gauchos on the Argentine Pampas. He was a “gentleman jockey,” participating in over 500 steeplechases throughout Europe. As a breeder and trainer, Tesio was known as the “Wizard of Dormello” and year after year, his stud farm produced one classic champion Thoroughbred after another. Tesio knew how to pick the right bloodlines, and his bloodstock program did much to improve the Thoroughbred breed. Of course Tesio had his share of breeding failures, but for the most part, Tesio knew how to put together all the “puzzle pieces” of the Equine Circle.

The Importance of Breeding for Behavior

Of all the renowned breeders and trainers of Thoroughbreds, Tesio was one of the greatest, and he was keenly aware that breeding for behavior in the horse was in tune with Mother Nature’s design for survival and success. A close review of Tesio’s own writing shows that not only was he a brilliant pedigree analyst, but he also was an astute student of horse behavior. Or, stated another way, Tesio studied what I

call the *Emotional Conformation* of the horse—how the horse’s psyche is built. He understood the importance of Emotional Conformation and specifically looked for it, spending hour after hour at auctions studying both the physical and Emotional Conformation of the horses he planned to purchase. In *Tesio: Master of Matings*, author Ken McLean wrote: “[Tesio’s] first-hand knowledge of the peculiar characteristics of each individual in his stable, and their subsequent progress on the racetrack, enabled Tesio to be in a unique position to judge whether or not his reasoning behind each mating was accurate or otherwise.”

Franco Varola, a noted Italian writer and author instrumental in the development of *Dosage*—a technique for classifying Thoroughbred pedigrees by type—knew Tesio, and he wrote in his book *The Tesio Myth* (JA Allen, 1984) that Tesio often spent hour after hour studying the behavior and reactions of his horses as they moved about in the Dormello stableyard. “The advantage of Tesio as a trainer over everyone else in his profession was precisely that he could afford to study his own horses,” noted Varola. “This intensive study could lead him to change distance, or to change riding plates, or to change riding tactics.”

In his own right, Varola knew the importance of horse behavior, too. His Dosage system (not the one commonly used today) consisted of five “aptitudinal” groups, and Varola was most interested in the behavioral traits and characteristics that each sire transmitted to his offspring.

“The differences between the five aptitudinal groups are of essence or character,” noted Varola in his book *Typology of the Racehorse* (JA Allen, 1974). “It matters very little whether a racehorse is 16 hands or 16.2, or whether it is chestnut or brown; but it does matter a lot the way he behaves in actual racing, whether he is consistent or erratic, brilliant or slow, bellicose or resigned, in other words which pattern or mode of being is he expressing...It is of great utility to be able to distinguish between these various aptitudes, this being something that plays an effective part in mating.”

Nature’s Design

Physical genetics breeds the horse; behavioral genetics produces the athlete. Designed by man, the Thoroughbred, the Dutch Warmblood, the Quarter Horse are all hybrid animals. The abrasive nature of man selectively breeding for speed, stamina, beauty, and strength, and nature’s quest to breed for survival are antagonistic one to another. As a breeder, we can try to breed the perfect horse from a

physical conformation standpoint, but if we ignore the forces of natural selection at work in our breeding stock, we will produce an inferior animal.

Nature's successful breeding program allows a basic physical standard to be necessarily controlled by variations of behavior or *personalities*. Every family member has to be able to fill a role to make the equine herd a success, and it is the diversity of behavior that allows the herd sustainability over time and in changing environmental circumstances.

Physical evolution is the body's adjustment to new and changing environments, which occur as a result of a mental recognition that change is needed in order to survive. In other words, if the horse recognized that he had to climb higher and higher elevations to reach good food and water, over time, the equine body would adapt to the requirements necessary to reach it. What this means to a breeding program, and indeed to training protocol, is that behavior is the most important trait to look for.

Siblings Aren't the Same

Any breeder will tell you that you can breed a high standing sire to a wonderful, proven mare, and two of their full-blood offspring, seemingly equal in physical stature and racing, dressage, or reining ability, will often display vast differences in performance levels on the racetrack or in the show ring. One horse may be an excellent runner while the other is a mediocre or poor runner. One horse may have a spectacular piaffe while the other is nothing special. At stud, the excellent performer may produce offspring that are less talented while the mediocre horse produces offspring that excel in competition. Both horses have the same genetic origin, and yet, their performance history and the performance history of their offspring can be vastly different (figs. 5.1 A & B).

Indeed, *physical* genetics alone is not the determining factor for athletic success or failure. It is the mind of the horse that is in complete control of his "will" and "drive," and thus, his performance, on and off the racetrack, in and out of the show ring. While physical ability is important, *the mental capacity of the equine controls the physical output of the athlete.*

Revisiting the Puzzle

In order to understand and identify the various traits and characteristics that make up the horse, we must first recognize the intent of nature's stud master. As we've already discussed, Mother Nature has designed the horse to live in a group, the

5.1 A & B Barbaro (#5), winner of the 2006 Kentucky Derby, is an example of the highest level of Herd Dynamic (A). Not only could he identify and manage stimulus while in motion, Barbaro was adept at targeting and releasing opponents. Shown here winning the Holy Bull Stakes early in his three-year-old season, Barbaro's right ear is feeling the horse behind him while his left ear is feeling ahead for additional challenges. Barbaro is an example of what can happen when an excellent physical athlete also has a superior mind.



Barbaro's full sibling Lentenor also was able to interpret multiple stimuli while in motion (B). Lentenor (#2) has a look of calm control despite being in heavy traffic in this photo.

Although Lentenor had some of the tenacity we saw in his brother, he lacked Barbaro's ability to efficiently target and release, which led to him "buddying up" during some of his races (see p. 113).



Equine Circle, and has masterfully crafted each horse to fit into the circle like the pieces of a puzzle.

Try as we might to manipulate the puzzle, we can never artificially manufacture what nature provides—all we can do is tinker with what already exists. We know that nature's intent for the horse is to have sustainable survival within a group, or Herd Dynamic.

So how do we put the puzzle together?

Nature adjusts itself over time to fit properly into changing environments, and once accomplished—the physical living conditions having dictated physical properties—we essentially have a standardized end result or *breed types*, which are in essence the characteristics of that physical standard. The physical breed has some variation owing to the mixture of physical genetics that lean toward certain traits over others, but it never strays too far outside the basic platform or it would be a different physical breed altogether.

Nature, however, also allows for certain complexities within any Herd Dynamic. A sustainable herd can only be such when a group with similar physical features and abilities is layered with variable behavioral types. Structure in a group is nature's weapon against time and attrition, and this *order*, overlaid with individual behavioral dynamics, is what allows the pieces of the puzzle to fit together for group survival.

Pedigrees, bloodlines, and physical conformation layered over with individual Emotional Conformation, should be the primary consideration when selecting horses for a breeding program or competition barn. You can train the mind of the horse to get the most from his body. So, then, you should breed and buy for mental aptitude that will allow the horse to live up to his fullest potential.

Introduction to Emotional Conformation Profiling

Whether buying, selling, training, or breeding, *all* horses are graded on their *conformation*, which is an analysis of the overall *physical* horse and how he's put together. This is standard procedure throughout the horse industry and across disciplines. In addition to *physical conformation*, I grade a horse's *Emotional Conformation*. This is the term I use to describe the psychology of the horse, and I use it to analyze the behavioral dynamics, as well as the social tendencies, that impact the potential of the individual horse.

Because the overall mental capacity and aptitude of each horse is made up of both seen and unseen *Emergent Properties* and *tendencies of behavior* (see p. 1), the

5.2 How a horse reacts to new stimulus in a sale environment can tell you a lot about how efficient an athlete the horse can be. This weanling has close space issues. I am posing no threat, yet the horse remains flighty and overly cautious for too long.



mental preparedness of a horse to react and interact with environmental and social dynamics becomes a vital indicator of his performance ability and a source of important information (fig. 5.2). It matters not whether I am preparing an *Emotional Conformation Profile*—a kind of personality test—of an equine-assisted therapy horse, a high-end racing Thoroughbred, or a competitive dressage horse, Emotional Conformation is *the indicator* of that horse’s athletic ability. Understanding this is important if the owner or trainer is going to help that horse become a successful competitor.

Reviewing the Horse’s Layers of Growth and Learning

Early in this book we discussed how mentally, the horse is nurtured and grows in layers of experiences (memories), with acquired instinct gradually “overlying” the basic instinct inherent at birth. The acquired instinct is *learned* instinct—as

the horse expands his experiences and begins to differentiate between stimuli, associative triggers are recorded and the act of learning, good or bad, takes place.

All horses are very similar in the initial “ingredients” of their Emotional Conformation—the basic instinct is layered with acquired instinct along with the ability to assimilate in environments in order to survive. The fork in the road is within the developing and very individualized *Personality Propensity*—the horse’s ability to focus, manage, and interpret—and the resulting “spin” the individual takes on acquired instincts and associative triggers. Emotional Conformation Profiling is the study of both the horse’s acquired instincts and his Personality Propensities.

The Pilot of the Machine

If we believe that each horse has obvious individual *personality traits* in addition to *physical characteristics*, then we must also realize that the horse is more dependent on one of these than the other for survival. In a manner of speaking, the