

Feeling & Listening

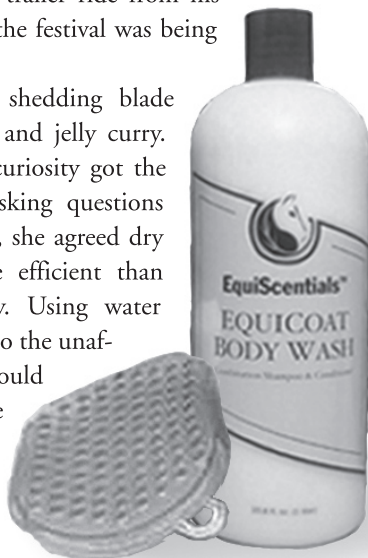
by Thomas N. Tweeten, Ph.D.

I have had the opportunity to participate in the Saratoga Bridges Festival and Dressage in New York state on several occasions. On a recent trip, I experienced several quite enjoyable days working with horses and their human friends. Two experiences particularly stand out that merit sharing with people.

First, an old friend of mine, whom I had not seen for many years, came up to the festival see me and experience the horses. We spent many hours riding horses in our youth. She admitted she had not spent much time with horses since then. As we toured the paddock area, I could not help but appreciate the soft way she reached out to each horse she encountered. She had not lost her basic sense of communication with horses despite their absence in her life for so many years.

Second, I had the pleasure of helping clean up a young, 3-year-old Paint horse owned by a local horse owner and trainer named Edie. She and her family bring horses and their student riders to the festival each year. This horse is particularly memorable because he arrived very filthy, all of which seemed to find white areas to “decorate.” In addition, he was quite stressed because he did not like the trailer ride from his barn to the racetrack where the festival was being held.

Edie started with her shedding blade and I with my curry comb and jelly curry. It was not long before her curiosity got the best of her and she was asking questions about what I was doing. Yes, she agreed dry cleaning first was far more efficient than applying water straightaway. Using water will result in washing filth into the unaffected areas. However, she could not understand how still the horse began to stand, seemingly enjoying the process. She watched as I went over the curved areas of the legs



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and fetlocks.

I showed her how a low-suds shampoo could effectively clean, being worked down to the skin and allowed to soak as I worked on another area. She was ready to cover the horse all over with a purple shampoo but soon saw the results of my technique were equally effective with much less effort. We then used a rinseless shampoo to address a few of the mild stains, watching them disappear into the wiping towel. We used a little coat-conditioning moisturizer to aid in brushing out the remainder of the coat, nearly completing the makeover.

The only area left was the horse's left back fetlock, which had been injured some time ago and was still quite swollen. I had avoided that area, as Edie said he was quite sensitive there — but the temptation to attempt cleaning the area was too great considering how calm the young horse had become with the grooming work we had just completed.

I carefully positioned myself next to the horse, taking note of possible escape routes in case the horse felt threatened by my attempt to clean the area. Using the rinseless shampoo and a soft towel, I gently sprayed the rinseless shampoo around the area of the wound, taking care not to get any material on the wound itself. I used my hand to gently work the shampoo into the hair, down onto the dried filth.

As I worked with one hand, I kept my other hand on the hock area to sense if the horse would flinch in any way. Much to my surprise, the young horse raised his foot slightly, cocking his hoof, allowing it to rest on the stall floor. I then gently wiped the area, lifting dirt into the towel. Finally I patted the area dry, the horse showing little concern or apprehension.

We had given the horse time to be comfortable with our cleanup process, building his trust in our attempt to clean him up. Edie commented that her horse felt well enough the next morning to take him out for a short workout. This brief experience only reinforced the concept of good care leading to comfort that will ultimately lead to collection. 🐾

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Excerpted by permission from the "Grooming for Horse and Rider: Importance of Ground Work" clinic presented by Tom Tweeten, Ph.D. (left), of ATH Science, Prior Lake, Minn. For more information on grooming clinics, call 952-226-4192 or go to www.equiscentials.com.

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