

## Horse Management and the Real World

*“Everything we do with horses, every rule we follow, is ultimately for the good of the horse. Mucking out a stall, picking out the feet, body clipping, keeping our heels down doing a shoulder-in, trotting a crossrail, or jumping a bending line should all be for the horse.”*

George Morris

*Because Every Round Counts*

The elite owners and trainers in each equestrian discipline consistently agree on one thing - what is good for the horse is good for the sport. Success in the ring naturally follows proper, meticulous care of the horse. The more ways in which you demonstrate your care, the more empathy you will have for the horse, and, naturally, you will reap the true rewards of horsemanship – the rewards that transcend mere trophies, medals, and ribbons.

The 2006 book *George H. Morris: Because Every Round Counts* makes some good points. It is a collection of Morris’s best “Between The Rounds” columns from *The Chronicle of the Horse*, edited by John Strassburger (Trafford Publishing, 2006).

Although I always have long been aware of Morris’s legendary stature in the show jumping and hunt seat equitation worlds, I was unaware of his intense dedication to horse management principles that every USPC member can understand. Morris’s book is a collection of common sense and deep equestrian knowledge rendered in a simple, down-to-earth writing style.

Here are a few excerpts that should sound familiar to Pony Club members and encourage them to make caring for the horse the highlight of their days.

“I first became aware of top-class stable management traveling abroad with Bert de Nemethy and Bob Freels. The USET always did it right, not overdone with landscaping surrounding an antique shop... In Rome, all the equipment was neat and orderly, as it should be – a simple stable banner, tack trunks in place and perfectly stacked, stalls clean and banked, two water buckets, blanket racks, junk stalls, and even the garbage organized.

“Stable management is the *sine qua non* of the American style. What foreigners do not realize is that our good horse keeping precedes everything else we might do well... This is our secret.

“Needless to say, all of this hard work, detail and philosophy carry over into the ring. If any of this intricate preparation (for us a normal procedure) were missing, it would seriously change our performance and, therefore, the American style the world sees.

“As we Americans all know, it has been years, decades, and generations in the making. It’s hard to explain, let alone teach, to friends around the world that this “style thing” is a reflection of our way of life with horses.

“It certainly can’t be exported, nor can it be bought. Fortunately, it stands out in world competition and is most definitely ours to keep.”

(“The American Style”, pp 31-33)

These and similar observations pervade Morris’s book. I recommend it to any horse lover and any Pony Club member. It contains great secrets and stories from an icon of American equestrian sport.

Reading Morris also helps make clear what makes Pony Club unique -the well-conceived education system engrained in its Horse Management program. It ensures that, at the end of the day, competitors take home ideas they can use to make their daily lives with their horses better.

Three concepts that Pony Club has over the showing world are:

1)The modern Stable Manager. He or she is not the team groom. The stable manager may assist with grooming when there is a time crunch, but the job description is far beyond that. They function more like chefs d’equipe, in that they make sure the riders get the most out of their day, they understand horsemanship and keep the team working like a team. The SMs are coaches in the stable area. They deserve our highest regard.

2)Team competition: Only in the Olympics, Pan Am Games, Nations Cup, and other international competitions do teams play a significant role. Most horse showing pits comrade against comrade. Pony Club is the only grass roots organization that codifies teamwork and establishes consequences for failure in this area. HM holds it together.

The written test. Unfortunately, this has gone away at the national level. It will eventually atrophy all the way down to the roots if its intrinsic value is ignored. The consequences of this will be felt in the coming years as our PC members are required to read less and less. Simply knowing the rules is not enough to prepare riders for a competition. Lendon Gray has made reading lists and written tests required elements of her widely-regarded Lendon Gray Youth Dressage Festivals, held each summer in Saugerties, New York. Hopefully her insistence on this principle will persuade others to follow and the USPC to bring it back.

In a few short years, Pony Club members from the Tri-State Region will become equine professionals in some manner. For others, their sport will be their pastime as they pursue other careers. Regardless of where they go and what they do, we hope they remember the “Lesson of the Fox” from Antoine de Saint Exupery’s *Le Petit Prince*:

*“Men have forgotten this truth,” said the fox. “But you must not forget it. You become responsible forever for what you have tamed.”*

*Article by Dave Wyatt*