

# PUNISHMENT AND CORRECTION

*We should avoid punishing and correcting the horse as much as we can, but we would be lying if we were to say that it is possible to make it all the way to Grand Prix by only praising the horse.*

## IS IT DISOBEDIENCE?

When a horse does not respond to a signal from us in the way we expect, it is almost always because he doesn't understand, or he is not supple or strong enough. Or he could be in pain from problems such as an incorrectly fitting saddle or incorrect shoeing, among other things. Read the chapter in this section (Understanding the Horse) called Excuses as Seen through the Eyes of the Horse.

Think of it this way...when the horse does not respond the way you want, it's because something is missing. What the horse is doing right now is what he thinks is right, or how he thinks he can best handle the situation. So what is missing? What does the horse need help with? How can we help him understand? Because if the horse does not know what is right, he will do it wrong. If you are not pleased with the way the horse is working or executing a movement, think about how the movement would look and feel if he did it correctly. How can I train him so he understands? ***Train the horse towards what is right instead of correcting mistakes.***

So you must always think twice before punishing your horse. The horse is not disobedient when he doesn't know the correct answer or has no understanding of the task. And of course, it is not disobedient for the horse to resist the rider if he is in pain, or because he is not strong or flexible enough to do what is being asked.

***When the horse doesn't execute the movement as expected, it is most likely because he wasn't prepared for it or was incapable of giving the correct answer.***

Then what is punishment? How can the horse be corrected if it becomes necessary?

- Use your voice. It is often enough to say "Hmmm, hmmm".
- Increase your leg pressure on the horse's sides.
- Touch the horse with the spurs.

- Give the horse less space.
- Bring the horse out of balance.
- Touch the horse with the whip right behind your lower leg.
- **NEVER** jerk or pull on the bit!

## **NEVER BECOME HYSTERICAL OR LOSE YOUR TEMPER!**

It only takes a moment for the horse to lose his confidence in the work and in the rider. You can ruin many months' work in an instant.

## **BE CONSISTENT**

On the other hand, you won't do the horse any favors if you are inconsistent or fail to set any limits. Without consistency and limits you end up with a horse that becomes increasingly unsure of both himself and of people, which can lead to disobedience and possibly jeopardize both the rider's and the horse's safety. *Consequently, avoiding correction can be the wrong decision.*

## **HOW DO YOU DETERMINE IF THE PROBLEM AT HAND IS DISOBEDIENCE?**

The answer is to have a goal, and to work in a systematic manner to reach it. There must be a system that gives the horse a fair chance to keep up both physically and mentally; a system that makes it possible for him to understand what he is being asked to do and is logical from his point of view. A horse is disobedient only when he has been given a fair chance and does not answer a signal that the rider is sure he understands.

By working in a systematic way, the rider has a clear overview of what is going on at each moment. He knows what he wants. He asks for something and can determine if the horse responds as expected. In other words, if you ride around more or less at random, neither horse nor rider can be sure of what is going on.

## **DOES THE HORSE UNDERSTAND AND IS HE CAPABLE?**

When you are going to ask the horse for something, first ask yourself if everything is in place for him to answer successfully. Does he understand the aids? Is he working in a frame that makes it physically possible for him to execute the movement? Is he strong enough? Is he supple enough? Is he mentally ready? And last, but not least, *do you know how to do it?*

## **YOU MAY NOT PUNISH THE HORSE FOR...**

You may not punish the horse for *not being in the correct frame*. If a horse works in the wrong frame it is due to the rider's lack of knowledge. How can this be true? It is very simple. The horse should be ridden in a frame that makes it possible for him to balance with a rider on his back. The horse should also be ridden in a frame that will help the horse stay sound. This is a frame in which he feels free. What horse would say no to that? So the truth is, if the horse works in the wrong frame it can only be blamed on the rider and his lack of ability to help the horse find the correct frame.

Many riders tend to punish the horse for *not moving away from the rider's leg*. This is completely wrong! You can't move the horse with your leg! You can't move something you are sitting on. That would be the same as to claim you can lift yourself up off the ground by your own hair. This goes completely against physics and the laws of nature.

You may not punish the horse for *not being under the aids*. On the other hand, if he is between the aids and then leaves that place, it is completely OK to ask him to get back in under the aids, even if that requires some small form of punishment.

You may not punish the horse for *being afraid*. If you try to do that then you may as well tell him not to be a horse. This is how he survives in the wild - by staying alert to all possible dangers. A horse that isn't afraid of anything would not survive very long on his own. A horse's response to become nervous or afraid is an inbred characteristic that you have to live with and respect. If you can't accept this, then learn to play golf or get a motorbike instead. If you want to learn more about what to do when the horse gets scared, tense or nervous, read the first chapter in this section (Understanding the Horse) called The Psyche of the Horse.

### **THE HORSE SHOULD MAKE THE CHOICE**

When the horse does something the rider asks him to do, he should choose to do it. In order to choose, he must have something to choose between. The choices available to him should be *comfortable* or *uncomfortable*. We could also call this *pressure* or *no pressure*, *freedom* or *less freedom*. The horse should choose to follow the rider sideways, to go forward, to get in the trailer, and so on.

### **REWARD**

What is a reward? What horses love the most is freedom. Freedom is to release the reins, to take the pressure off the horse, to give him more space. He also appreciates verbal praise. And it is not a bad idea to have a sugar cube or something else good in your pocket. A nice pat on the neck is also a good way to acknowledge to the horse that he has responded really well. When the rider relaxes that is also a signal to the horse that everything is OK.

***When the horse doesn't respond the way the rider wants him to, the answer is almost always the same – go back to the basics!***

The Swedish National School for training riding instructors is located at Strömsholm Castle in Sweden. There is a sign in the arena there which says ***“Where art ends, violence begins.”***

The sign of a good rider is that he works in harmony with his horse both physically and mentally, he is consistent in his training and he can “think like a horse.” A well trained horse is proud to show off what he can do.

## EXPLANATIONS AND EXCUSES

### **HOW AN EXPERIENCED RIDER AND A NOVICE RIDER LOOK AT A LACK OF SUCCESS**

The boxes on the following page illustrate the difference between how an experienced and a novice rider might look at a situation that does not turn out successfully.

#### **THE GREY BOX**

It is very frustrating for any of us when we can't figure out why a horse doesn't respond as we expected. It sometimes feels as though we cannot live without an answer. Since horses aren't as intelligent as people, it is easy to think that any mistake the horse makes is his fault. (“I mean, it can't be my fault, since I'm such a smart person and couldn't have done it incorrectly”...) So we all have a little mental file box where we can keep track of the reasons why a horse doesn't respond as he should. And if we can't find an answer that explains why the horse reacted as he did, it is easy just to think of him as stupid and disobedient, since that gives us a quick and easy explanation for the situation.

#### **THE GREEN BOX**

The experienced rider who has a thorough understanding of horses has a file box like the green one. This rider knows that very few horses are disobedient, and that disobedience is rarely the reason for problems that arise. The real horseman or horsewoman knows the answer is not to be found in the “stupid and disobedient” section of the file box. It is only when we become experienced and educated enough to think in terms of the green box, that we are able to educate a horse correctly.

Explanations - Excuses
<i>A rider who lacks education and experience will sometimes see the situation like this when trying to explain his lack of success:</i>
The horse is stupid
The horse is disobedient
The horse is uncooperative
The horse isn't strong enough
The horse isn't supple enough
The horse is too young
The horse doesn't understand the aids
I made a mistake

Explanations - Excuses
<i>An experienced and educated rider who understands horses sees the situation like this when trying to explain his lack of success:</i>
I made a mistake
The horse is too young
The horse doesn't understand the aids
The horse isn't strong enough
The horse isn't supple enough
The horse may be hurting
The horse is uncooperative
The horse is stupid and disobedient