

Horses in WINTER



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By Tim Hayes

WINTER can bring the doldrums even to our horses. In their natural environment, the air gets colder, the ground gets harder, food gets scarcer and predators get hungrier. Like us, sometimes they just don't have the same "Spring" in their step.

For humans living in the northeast, the winter months can often bring "cabin fever." Little or no riding, frozen ground, house bound from snow and ice, short days and long cold nights. We worry about falling out of shape or losing some of the wonderful progress we made with our horse during the summer. Sometimes we feel frustrated or sorry for ourselves.

What if we stop thinking about ourselves and think about our horse? Is he feeling sorry for himself because we're not riding him? Is he worried that he might lose his edge performing piaffes or flying lead changes? Probably not. But is my relationship with my horse just

physical? Do I think of my horse only when I think about riding him? What does my horse miss in the winter months?

Natural horsemanship reminds me to look at every situation as if I were a horse. If I'm a domestic horse and I'm boarded at a good size stable with other horses, chances are I won't be turned out as much as I would want. If there's snow and ice sometimes I won't be turned out at all. If my human partner isn't coming to be with me because he can't ride me, if I'm spending day after day in my stall waiting for snow and ice to melt; chances are, just like my human partner, I'm going to acquire some "cabin fever" of my own.

Horses, like humans, are all different. One horse may be able to tolerate being in his stall for long periods without interacting with another creature or being turned out. Another horse might become a little colicky or start cribbing. What kind of horsesonality does my horse have and what does he need?

What's important is for me to be the better horse in our herd of two: the leader. To protect, care for and show up for my partner whether I'm on his back or he's in the barn. Natural horsemanship is about a complete relationship with my horse: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Not being able to work on the riding part of our relationship doesn't mean I have to stop improving the mental and emotional part of our relationship.

If I can't ride I can still visit. I can groom or walk him around in places that are safe. I can find and scratch his favorite spots. I can practice gentling exercises, getting him to bend and bring his head around toward his belly. I can play trust games like slowly asking him to

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"Winter Rest," above
"Winter Ride," right
Photos courtesy of Tim Hayes



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bend and smell his tail without becoming upset. Or I can take a bucket, turn it upside down, sit and just be with him.

We're the ones who invited our horses into the human world of barns, stalls and schedules. We're the ones who he looks to for comfort, support and friendship. In building human relationships people sometimes wonder, "do they love me for me, or is it my car or my money, etc.?"

When my horse sees me I want him to think, "great! Here's my partner. I'm always happy to see him. He brings positive things into my life. Companionship, affection, exercise, a treat, a back rub and sometimes when it's not so cold we go riding or play sports." I don't want my horse to see me and think "it's work time," because that's what we do every time I come to visit.

To spend 20 or 30 minutes, 3,4 or 5 times a week connecting with our horse mentally and emotionally is enormously meaningful to him. It can also be relaxing and fun for us. It builds the love, trust and respect necessary to have a true partnership with our horse (which includes riding). It also helps horses and humans get through the winter together.

Love is what you give your time to - children know this - horses know it too.

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For clinics, classes or private sessions

contact Tim at: tim@hayesisforhorses.com or 800-959-3101

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ward was voted the New York Racing Association 2011 race of the year. The four-year-old filly, ridden by Ramon Dominguez, was the second female to win this race in its 58-year history. The first was 2009 Horse of the year Rachel Alexandra. Dominguez also won an Eclipse Award as leading jockey of 2011.

In addition to Dominguez, several New York jockeys were nominated for awards, including **John Velazquez**, **Javier Castellano** and apprentice **Ryan Curatolo**. Some of the winning horses may be remembered by New York fans, such as three-year-old filly champion **Royal Delta** who won the **Alabama** in **Saratoga**; the undefeated champion two-year-old filly **My Miss Aurelia**; and turf winners **Cape Blanco** and **Stacelita**. **Bill Mott** was the top trainer of the year.

WINTER RACING NOTES

Agave Kiss scored her third straight victory Jan. 14 in the six furlong **Ruthless** for three-year-old fillies, beating **Well Kept** by 3-1/4 lengths. "I took hold at the beginning, because I didn't want her to go too fast," said jockey Ryan Curatolo. He didn't take hold for long, as the filly was very relaxed. "When she started to move, she did everything right," said Curatolo. Trainer **Rudy Rodriguez** called her "a very classy horse."

King and Crusader won the six furlong **Jimmy Winkfield** on Martin Luther King day in a time of 1:11.72. Rider **Cornelio**

Velasquez called it an easy win. Trained by **Rick Dutrow, Jr.**, **King and Crusader** won the **Maryland Juvenile Championship** Dec. 17 and also won an allowance race Jan. 13, three days before the **Jimmy Winkfield**, a race named for a famous African-American jockey. Another horse trained by Dutrow, **Reserved Quality**, was second and a New Jersey-bred gelding, **Deliburnsky**, third.

Inherit the Gold, a six-year-old gray gelding, won the 1-1/16 mile **Haynesfield Stakes** for New York-breds four and up. "The speed went to the lead," said rider **Junior Alvarado**, "and when I asked him, he was a completely professional horse." **Inherit the Gold** has had six wins on Aqueduct's inner track for trainer **Jim Hooper**.

As January drew to an end, **Love and Pride** ran away with the 1-1/16 mile **Affectionately** for fillies and mares Jan. 28, beating **Bahia Beach** by 7-1/2 lengths with **Cornelio Velasquez** in the irons. **Redding Collier** won the 1-1/16 miles **Evening Attire** over 2009 **Wood Memorial** winner **I Want Revenge**, the 4-5 favorite. Rider **Alan Garcia** said of the six-year-old by **Mineshaft**, "When he saw the others coming up, he gave me a little push and kicked on and finished well."

Winter racing at Aqueduct is in full swing and continues through April 22. **The Wood Memorial** April 7 kicks off the big Spring races leading up to the **Triple Crown**. For information call 718-641-4700.