



Over 40, Over Stressed, Over Weight, Over Anxious & Love to Ride?

By Tim Hayes

I'm 61, started riding when I was 48 and amongst my many thoughts not a day goes by that I don't wonder if I have enough money or look in the mirror and think: "wow, I really should loose some weight." Welcome to the world of the over 40 horse owner.

Over the years I have worked with hundreds of horses and riders on Long Island and in the Northeast USA. Roughly 70% to 80% of the riders are women, which I find quite interesting, and perhaps something to explore in a future article. Even more significant and worth examining is that 70% to 80% of all riders I work with (men and women) are 40 years old or older. Riding horses when you're over 40 presents a number of challenges not always encountered at a younger age.

Natural Horsemanship has taught me that the mental and emotional connection between horse and rider is just as and often more important to master than the physical. This is true for riders of any age. However, the way we respond in these three areas can change dramatically as we get older. In order to understand and overcome the challenges many of us over 40 riders encounter, let's examine some of the most common.

PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

There are two primary physical challenges we may encounter when we pass 40. The first and most obvious is our bodies don't work as well as they did when we were younger. Energy, strength, soreness and fatigue are not usually issues that affect us in our teens and twenties. The second is our weight. Outside of those fortunate few that never have to consider their weight or what they eat, most of us discover that after 40 not only do we gain weight more easily, it's much more difficult to get rid of it. Extra pounds not only make getting on and off our horse more difficult, it's harder on them as well.

After 40 to truly be in the best shape to ride, other physical exercise (i.e. going to the gym) becomes important. For those who can it's extremely helpful. Unfortunately many of us don't have the additional time. Whether or not you have the time to keep in shape my suggestion is this: "Take it easy and don't drive yourself crazy." No matter what shape you're in, if you can get on and ride your horse, enjoy it and be grateful you've found one of life's greatest gifts.

MENTAL CHALLENGES

There are a number of mental challenges over 40 riders face. The first is simply accepting and making peace with the reality of our above-mentioned physical limitations. If we don't, we limit our fun and the joy of riding. The second is the attitude we bring to our horse. (As discussed in a previous article, our attitude when riding is often more important than our skills.)

Our attitude is created by our thoughts. What we may think about today is usually quite different than when we were 20. It can also be the source of unwanted stress. Example at 20: "I hope I have enough money for those Madonna tickets." Example at 40+: "I hope I have enough money for my monthly nut." If I'm mentally preoccupied and anxious, I make my horse anxious. An anxious horse is usually not fun to ride.

Another mental stressor is our full and busy lives. Unlike when we were younger, grownup riders have jobs, careers, families, kids, illness, grandparents and schedules filled with responsibilities. Horses don't have agenda's or schedules. They immediately know if we're preoccupied, rushing or impatient. Just like us, horses don't like it if their partner (you) is not paying attention. The solution is to find contentment by doing our best with the time we have. Quality time spent with our horse is much more meaningful to the relationship than the quantity time. A great relationship with your horse leads to great rides on the trail or at the show.

Finally there is what I call mental negative self-talk. It shows up as the critical voice in your head: "I'm not as good a rider as Mary" or it makes up stories about what I imagine others think of me: "I'm not sure if I'm doing this right but I don't want to ask Betty, she'll think I'm such a beginner." This type of thinking is extremely common, usually 100% erroneous and guaranteed to increase your chances of having an unsatisfactory riding experience. The only meaningful opinion of me as a rider is the one from my horse. And in one way or another, if I pay attention, he'll always let me know.

Good riding and being at our best whether we're 8 or 80 requires us to be mentally connected to nothing but our horse and the present moment. Horses live in the moment and expect us to mentally join them especially when they allow us to sit on their backs. When we don't, they just tune us out. *Continued on page 28*



Tim riding with 85-year old World Master Horseman Legend Jack Brainard at Jack's 2005 Refinement Clinic in Cedaredge Colorado. Photo courtesy Tim Hayes

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Two-year-olds had their chance to shine the weekend of Sept. 23-24. The 7-furlong Matron for 2-year-old fillies Sept. 23 had a surprise ending as Willow Rock Stable's Meadow Breeze, a 34-1 long-shot, won by inches. Octave and Featherbed, both trained by Todd Pletcher, finished second in a dead heat. The Florida-bred Meadow Breeze was trained by Carl Deville and ridden by Kent Desormeaux. Pletcher's King of the Roxy of Team Valor Stable won the Futurity at 7 furlongs, proving, as the trainer said, that the 2-year-old was learning by experience. I'm a Numbers Guy won the Bertram F. Bongard for New York-bred 2-year-olds at 7 furlongs by 7 lengths on Sept. 24. "He does everything the right way," commented trainer Tim Ritchey. The winner of the Joseph A. Gimma, a 7-furlong race for 2-year-old fillies, was the unbeaten With a Wink. When rider Fernando Jara asked her, said trainer Bill Mott, "She fired right out there."

Karen's Caper broke her 8-race losing streak by winning the Noble Damsel, a mile race on the turf for fillies and mares, by 3/4 of a length. At press time, Belmont Park was preparing for its big October races.

PRADO EARNS VENEZIA AWARD

Edgar Prado was voted by his peers to be the recipient of the 2006 Mike Venezia Award, presented Sept. 24 at Belmont Park. The awards is given to a jockey who "exemplifies extraordinary sportsmanship and citizenship." In addition to being an outstanding rider, Prado is involved with Anna House, Belmont's backstretch child care center. He is known to lend his support to charity events and is a popular visitor to the Ronald McDonald House each year. Prado received the Fourstardave Award this summer from the New York Turf Writers for his riding achievements at Saratoga, an award he also won in 2002. Prado's career began in his native Peru, where he rode his first winner in October 1983. His first U.S. win was at Calder (Florida) in June 1986 aboard Single Love. Prado moved to New York in the summer of 1999 to ride for trainer Richard Kimmel, filling in for an injured Richard Migliore. Since then he has been a familiar figure in the New York racing scene's winner's circle.

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"I was a terrible rider eight years ago," said Sonny. "I never understood the horse." He went to Horse Expo, where he was amazed to see bridleless riding. Eager to learn, he attended clinics with John Lyons and became friendly with John's son, Josh Lyons, who became his mentor. Natural horsemanship, Sonny explained, is based on trust rather than domination or force and requires an understanding of the mind of the horse. Anyone can practice it, he maintains, as long as they have patience, knowledge and commitment. He pointed out that a horse will lie down only if it feels secure and comfortable, as Sis demonstrated. Sonny believes that natural horsemanship is a good foundation for all equestrian disciplines. Sonny Garguilo can be reached at 516-790-8367 or sonnygarguilo@hotmail.com.

The smallest horse on the grounds was Beanie, a dwarf mini owned by Danielle Peters of Long Island Horse Properties, Inc. The day was enjoyed by everyone, whether they came to ride or simply to watch and eat. — *Paula Rodenas*

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EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

Our thoughts also create our emotions and just like our horse they're expressed physically with our bodies. When a horse has a negative thought i.e. "I don't like when I see the Farrier coming my way" he'll feel annoyed and express himself by pinning back his ears. If he hears an unfamiliar noise and thinks, "I wonder if that's a predator who might eat me" he'll feel anxious, his head will go up, his neck and body will brace and he'll prepare to run for his life."

Probably the most common emotional challenge I help over 40 riders with is their confidence or lack there of. It's often expressed with; "I don't understand why I'm feeling anxious and a

little fearful when I ride. I rode when I was a kid and was never afraid. I use to jump up bareback and go. I loved it and I felt great" Just as we need to make peace with and adapt to the physical challenges that come with being older, so must we do the same with the emotional ones.

When we're younger most of us sincerely believe we're indestructible, we'll live forever and taking serious risks is what old people call having fun. Getting to 40 and above usually puts big holes in those ideas. Somehow as we become older the horse seems to be bigger and more unpredictable than we remember. The distance from our saddle to the ground looks longer. As much as we don't want to admit it, much less share it with our friends, getting seriously hurt has become a realistic thought expressed emotionally as our number one confidence zapper. It's called Fear.

Dealing with the emotion of fear is a major challenge for many older riders. Understanding it's source and effects will make the difference between not only having a happier more confident ride, but whether or not you'll ever be able to ride again. What makes dealing with fear so important is the unique impact it has on the sport of riding horses. Another way to say it is: horseback riding is the only sport where a person can get hurt because their "equipment" became afraid.

There's human fear, there's horse fear and the differences are crucial. (Both are discussed in detail in two of my previous articles that can be viewed on www.hayesisforhorses.com.) What's important for the older rider is to acknowledge the moment he feels fearful. Even the slightest fear is expressed outwardly with the human body in a way a horse can feel it. When his horse feels his rider being fearful it prompts him to become fearful.

The horses' fear causes him to get tight and braced. The rider feels this, which in turn causes his fear level to increase. This vicious cycle escalates until the horse, hard wired to run when his fear becomes intolerable, takes off. If the rider is lucky enough to stay on until he can safely calm himself and his horse, he ends up with a horrible experience most likely undermining his confidence on future rides. If the rider falls off and injures himself he may never ride again. His original fear is justified with a devastating self-fulfilling prophecy he helped to create. There's an old saying: "Ride where you can not where you can't." This is true and if adhered to will never fail you physically, mentally and emotionally.

MASTERING THE CHALLENGES

Years ago I worked at the Black Cattle Ranch in Bruneau Idaho. I got to meet a number of seasoned cowboys who had ridden rodeo-bucking horses professionally when they were younger. I asked them why they stopped or was there a certain age they were forced to retire? They all gave me the same answer: "I rode buckin' horses at the rodeo while I was waitin' for my brains to come in."

I always remembered that because it resolved a conflict I had struggled with myself. Physical, mental and emotional youth gave me the ability to take risks disguised as fun and excitement. Maturity gave me experience and wisdom. In the relationship between the horse and the older human, the horse just brings himself. The human has a choice. He too brings himself but if he's not careful, he can also bring along all the unresolved and unacceptable challenges he's encountered by getting older. Personally I have enough challenges without having to create any more when I get on my horse. My motto is the same for any rider 8 to 80: "Be safe, have fun, do it with love.

Love of your horse, love of others, love of yourself.

All of Tim's event's are listed in the event section of this magazine and on the net at www.Llequine.com. To se up a Clinic, join a weekly class or get help with any situation with your horse, contact Tim at: 631-329-5840, or at:

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