

Heartwarming Tale Holds Key to Training Success

By Helen T. Hertz

In her new DVD series and companion manual, “Equus Revisited: A Complete Approach to Athletic Conditioning,” mule and donkey expert Meredith Hodges covers every component of an athletic conditioning program that considers the well-being of the whole equine and includes the support of a team of experts.

The series is designed to complement Meredith’s correspondence training series *Training Mules and Donkeys* and offers new material and interviews with a host of equine-health professionals. This is foundational work. Whether you’re working with a foal, training an older animal or rehabilitating an injured or abused one, the principles of complete conditioning apply. In the case of a mule named Midnight Victory they made the difference between life and death.

In the series, Meredith tells “Vicki’s” amazing story. The mule was born at her ranch in Loveland, Colorado and sold when she was three years old. Twelve years later, she was returned to Meredith sorely abused and terrified of people.

“We couldn’t even touch her at first,” says Meredith. “She was so fearful, just walking up to her would make the whites of her eyes show.”

Not only was Vicki psychologically damaged, she was in terrible physical shape as well. Her halter had grown into her face. Her body was covered with sores and mange. Her feet were chipped and foundered, and her muscles were in such poor condition she could barely support her own weight. She was a pitiful sight and progress was painfully slow.

That was nearly three years ago. Today, Vicki is calm, healthy and happy. Her muscles are strong, she works all three gaits easily and accepts a rider with comfort. Hers is a story of success—evidence of what you can achieve with proper care, a comprehensive maintenance and training program, and the right attitude.

“We’ve had success with Vicki because we were patient with her from the outset and moved at her pace,” says Meredith. “If there was something she wasn’t comfortable with we didn’t do it. She came to trust everyone who worked with her, and that made it possible for us to get her to this level.”

Meredith’s team of pros includes her veterinarian, a top-notch farrier, an equine chiropractor and an equine masseuse, as well as knowledgeable staff well-versed in the strict feeding and maintenance routine Meredith keeps for all her equines. Over time, as Vicki’s condition improved, she began to reconnect. Meredith took great pleasure in the bond that slowly grew between them and Vicki’s gradual willingness to trust people again. Vicki’s story is so satisfying because an animal that was truly suffering now has a quality of life that has, in essence, brought her *back* to life.

“The principles we used with Vicki are essentially the same for any animal we work with and what I teach in my training course,” says Meredith. “It’s this complete approach that is so essential. Good care without proper training will never be enough, nor will the reverse. And without patience and a true appreciation for the time it takes to properly train an animal, you’ll only be frustrated.”

Regardless of your equine's history, age or condition, the strategy is the same, and it's never too late to use it. The techniques you need are outlined in the new series, and Meredith is always available to help her students with any questions or problems they might have. As with any relationship, you get out what you put in, and in the case of Vicki, the reward was great indeed!

For more information about "Equus Revisited: A Complete Approach to Athletic Conditioning," and Training Mules and Donkeys, please visit www.luckythreeranch.com or call 800-816-7566.