

## Coping With Your Horse's Winter Demons

In case you haven't noticed, this has been a brutal winter, and it's not over yet. After weeks of sub-zero windchills, ice and snow, last winter is looking better, and even the mud of spring and the buzzing flies of summer are looking mighty attractive!

While it's no secret that many of us get grumpy and worn down doing our more difficult winter barn chores yet being unable (and unmotivated) to ride, we sometimes lose patience with our equine partners, forgetting that they, too, are affected both emotionally and physically by a hard winter.

The combination of frigid temperatures and icy footing that limits turn-out and riding leaves our horses feeling restless and bored, unable to productively channel the pent up energy they harbor in winter. As a result, they become spooky, rude, even combative. My old Thoroughbred, usually the wimp around my farm, lunged at his Quarter Horse friend one recent morning upon being turned out, biting him in the face for no apparent reason. A small group of mares who usually hang out peacefully together had to be separated by a friend of mine the other day, for fear they would injure each other. A normally sensible, quiet young horse I know is now spooking at everything that comes his way.

Horses who are turned out alone may end up directing their restlessness at their human caretakers, nipping or lunging at them as they might another horse. And obviously, a horse's natural tendencies (to be spooky, aggressive, mopey, high strung) will become more extreme

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in extreme conditions.

So, what's the solution?

To some degree, horse owners and caretakers have to accept the fact that the majority of horses will be "high" and more difficult to handle during the winter, especially if their work and turn-out time go down along with the temperatures.

I try to keep my horses out as much as possible all winter, blanketing them appropriately and taking advantage of the fact that, in snow and frozen ground, they won't rip up my pastures, which then have more roaming room. Not everyone's set-up allows that, however. I also keep studs and snow shoes on them, so that I can ride in the snow anytime the temperature is bearable or I am motivated enough to really bundle up. Also, because I have a trailer now, I try to ship to indoor arenas when possible

near Frenchtown, will hold a four-part winter clinic series in February and March featuring dressage and eventing/combined training experts from around the world.

Participants will enjoy a complimentary Post-Equine Massage for each of their horses. Concluding the series, Eurobred will host a German breeding and importing presentation during a post-clinic wine and cheese reception, which is open to all.

Auditors are welcome and encouraged to attend for a fee of \$25 per person, with group rates available. Fees for participants are as follows:

Saturday, Feb. 28: "Solving Training Problems with the Classical French Approach" with Elaine M. Curry, certified instructor of the National Riding School of France, geared toward beginners through Prix St. Georges levels: \$80 per participant.

Saturday and Sunday, March 6-7: "Perfecting Your Musical Freestyle" with Marc Silvestri, trainer at La Chevalerie, the Equestrian Center of Brussels and organizer of the Musical Horse Shows in Brussels. Geared to First Level through Grand Prix. Cost: \$100 per participant.

Saturday and Sunday, March 20-21: "Setting and Achieving Your Evening Goals" with Imtiaz Anees, Sydney Olympian and International Event Rider. Riders will be grouped according to experience/skill level. \$90/participant Saturday and Sunday, March 26-27: "Classical German Riding Technique" with Ralf Leuten, German FN certified trainer/coach. Beginner through Grand Prix. \$125/participant.

Registration deadlines are seven days prior to each clinic session. Overnight accommodations can be arranged for both horse and rider. For information and registration forms, contact Laura Gurreti, clinic coordinator at 908-996-0911 or ngurreti@earthlink.net. ▼

(although icy roads and cold temperatures have limited that option as well.)

One thing any horse owner can do is make a point of spending time with the horse grooming, handling, hand-walking him, even taking time to practice tacking up, clipping or any other in-barn activity that may pose a behavior problem. I make sure to interact with my horses in a positive way as much as possible, including a night check that brings nickers in anticipation of the treats I always bring out.

In short, the horse and rider relationship is one that is year-round and has its ups and downs. Remaining patient and keeping your horse's mood in mind can help you make it through the hard times. It is also important to know how to "read" your horse: be sensitive to his body language, head carriage and ear placement when approaching him.

And remember, one of these days, it will be 60 degrees, the earth will smell sweet and we'll remember why we got these big, complex animals in the first place!

**'Gateway To The World' Winter Clinic Series In Frenchtown**

Freedom Farm, located off Route 12