



Why a Picadero Instead of a Round Pen?

I love it when people ask me this question because it leads us to discussing things from the horse's perspective. As we know, the horse is a prey animal whose first defense is to flee. When we put a flight animal in a round pen we take away all that comes natural to him, thus leaving the human with all the control and power. When the human gets out of position or isn't mindful about what their physical, mental or emotional state are telling the horse he can simply use his rope, whip or flag to fix or correct the horse for his "mistake".

In a picadero (square pen) we allow the horse to have an opinion. He can easily go to the corner if he is scared, confused or just doesn't want to interact with us. This gives the human the opportunity to see how they are influencing the horse and then consider what they might need to change within themselves. I talk in greater detail about this subject in my book, *Open Heart, Open Mind, A Pathway To Rediscovering Horsemanship*, in the chapter titled, A New Beginning-From Dominance to Connection.

Here is some insightful shared by horse trainer, author and educator, Carolyn Resnick, about the use of round pens. "Performance should only be asked for when the horse is in the right state of mind to perform, and never forced. Round pens help with the response to the driving aids like a horse being asked to move on; it simulates a herd driving the individual. The negative aspect to the round pen is how it is used for developing the driving aids. The trainer keeps driving the horse when the horse is looking for a way out, but there isn't one. The horse feels like a victim by not being able to escape the driving aid or the individual. It is unnatural to a horse that he cannot find his freedom and his ability to escape. The horse gives in to his terror for he has no other choice. The trainer playing the role of a predator, or the very antisocial behavior of a very aggressive horse, causes trauma to the horse and a false bond is formed (like what Patty Hearst exhibited when she bonded with her captors). This is known as the Stockholm syndrome. The horse in essence gives in and becomes a slave, with no hope of freedom."

An easy, inexpensive way to set up your own picadero

You can quickly and easily set up a picadero using step-in posts and 2" fencing tape. Use a corner and two existing fence lines on the inside of an existing riding arena. Line up the posts and run the tape to create the other two sides. When you are simply pull up the posts, walk them into the corner and step them back in along the inside of the existing arena fence line. The size we use is approximately 60'x60'. You can also use the step-ins for all four sides of any flat surface with good footing.

Resources for learning more:

To learn more about this style of horse communication look up Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling, Carolyn Resnick and Piet Nibbelink. Piet, a student of Hempfling, conducts Relationship Clinics @ New England Center for Horsemanship in Guilford, Vermont. Horses provided or you can bring your own. Check out the schedule at www.heidipotter.com to learn more