

Sound Horse Conference Encourages Industry "To Make It Happen"

BY LINDA SCRIVNER

(Editor's note: The Walking Horse Report attended the 2009 Sound Horse Conference to provide our readers with a factual account of the statements made. This does not represent our opinion of other industry representatives in attendance.)

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — The second annual Sound Horse Conference was held March 20 and 21 in Gainesville, Fla. The conference was organized by Friends of Sound Horses (FOSH) and was cosponsored by FOSH and the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association (TWHBEA), Parelli, American Horse Protection Association (AHP), the Animal Welfare Institute, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), Morgan Stanley Foundation, the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, Tonka Records, Triple K Bar C Farm, the National Walking Horse Association (NWAHA), www.HoovesandHorses.com, Vettec Hoof Care Products, Nolan Hoof Plate and Leslie Desmond International School of Horsemanship.

The conference was well organized with two full days of presentations from noted speakers, as well as a natural gaited horse and a Parelli exhibition and presentation on Friday evening held at the University of Florida's Horse Teaching Unit Arena. The audience was mainly sponsors and speakers on the agenda with several lay people and press.

Representing the Middle Tennessee organizations but not on any panels were David Pruett (president of TWHBEA), Stan Butt (executive director of TWHBEA) and Dr. Doyle Meadows (chief executive officer of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration (TWHNC)).

FOSH President Lori Northrup opened the conference by clearly stating the focus to bring the true end to the practice of sorting for the "silent horse." "No one would agree that sorting is acceptable. There must be and is pressure to end sorting," said Northrup.

Northrup introduced an audio presentation of transcripts of anonymous persons and interviews about their horses and their stories. Video footage from the 2008 TWHNC Celebration was also shown, but Northrup pointed out that all of those horses have passed an inspection to check for sorting.

The Truth About Ending Sorting

The first panel of the session included Donna Benefield from the HPC; Dr. Tom James, a former Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO); Dr. Midge Leitch, recently chaired of the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP)'s Tennessee Walking Horse Task Force which developed its "White

Paper" on the subject of sorting in 2008; Dr. Randy Luikart, an accomplished farrier that has taught USDA inspectors equine anatomy and farrier practices; and Dr. Donna Moore, a past USDA Horse Protection coordinator. These veterans' perspectives on the battle to end sorting have over 150 years of combined and varied walking horse experience.

Donna Benefield began by stating, "Sorting is here because the USDA has not done their job. Congressmen are putting pressure on them because of all of the press given from all areas. It is no longer being swept under the rug. The horse economy is in the tank and the time has come for the industry to get rid of the violators. The equine world knows and hopefully the embarrassment will stop this practice so that the industry can continue successfully."

Dr. Tom James gave a history of the walking horse and how the breeding and gaits have changed through the years. He discussed methods of sorting and reasons it still persists, as well as the history and how we get it to stop. He concluded that the fast running walk is a marvelous gait to ride. James said, "I understand where the trainers are coming from. The day that he stops making his horses do the exaggerated big lick, that is the day many owners move that horse somewhere else where it is being done. I understand. The trainers must have a level playing field."

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Dr. Midge Leitch presented the AAEP Protocol for the detection of pressure shoeing. She discussed pre- and post-show examinations. She said the digital radiography has the advantage in that they can see the results immediately. She said, "However, it can't be an end-all and be-all because it can't define purposely inflicted problems. It can detect the presence of acrylic extensions of the hoof capsule or sole surface."

Leitch also said, "Positive findings, consistent with the intent to manipulate a horse's performance with painful methods, should result in the initiation of the post-competition examination protocol and subsequent imposition of penalties appropriate to the infractions discovered. Don't pull shoes before competing, except those that show something definitely wrong. Then they should be removed before to keep them from showing."

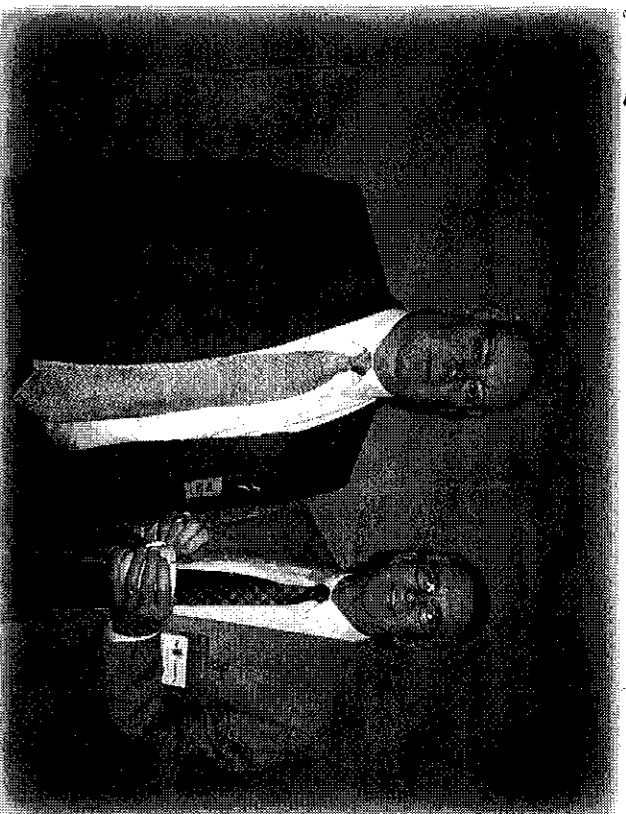
Leitch also claimed pulling shoes after competition is the only reliable way to be sure. Visual examination and weighing of shoes can then be done. "Remember that laminitis can be accidental." She drew the following conclusion, "These evaluations can be conducted in a timely manner if adequate numbers of trained personnel are available and cooperation of exhibitors is mandated. Failure to submit to these testing methods may be considered evidence of non-compliance with the Horse Protection Act (HPA) and subsequent disqualification from competition and the application of appropriate penalties should be considered."

Dr. Randy Luikart, accomplished farrier, spoke next and portrayed that sorting is not required for animation and that properly applied pads are not harmful to the foot. Luikart gave examples of correct shoeing in respect to the foot and the changes that might be caused if incorrect. He used photos of Hackneys and Saddledreds to show animation can be accomplished without sorting or chains. He also discussed the reasons that sorting persists: shortens training time, more accepted as normal than abnormal, maintains the walking gait, accentuates head nod easier and feeling of getting away with something or an advantage over the other competitors.

Luikart also explained that more hoof would be advantageous in many ways. He gave reasons for using longer hoofs, including some radiographs showing hoof placement. He concluded, "Pulling shoes shows the history, not accurate today. Abscesses are not good but they are not intended."

Dr. Donna Moore ended the first panel by saying, "There are many promising, encouraging things happening. This FOSH conference, the media and the White Paper from the AAEP are all helpful. The DQPs and HIOs are terribly flawed and need to be replaced but we have nothing to replace them with. I would recommend that a core of vets be certified. We have a new HIO, SHOW, and with its rebirth we recommend that group have vets to be on the oversight committee. Vets are not a magic bullet. It has not been successful for vets to be DQPs. We need a legal determination not a medical analysis. We need a person inspecting that is focused on the law only."

Moore continued, "The HIOs need to abolish conflicts of interest. If farriers and vets have clients that are showing, that is a conflict of interest. We need to remove conflicts with anyone in a position of authority." Other suggestions were violators not be given amnesty which was detrimental. "Look outside of the walking horse industry to eliminate these problems." She suggested the Walking Horse Owners Association (WHOA), owners are a key. The owners need to be educated and need more involvement. Moore felt that SHOW should change the staff and that tasks be delegated to WHOA, such as ways to change the standards of judging. Moore also felt that the AAEP's penalties should include lifetime for the horse as well as his trainer.



TN/BEA President David Pruett and Chief Executive Officer of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration Dr. Doyle Meadows discussed the conference.



Dr. Rachel Bezar visited with Jim Crew and Pete Rodda during a break.

At the conclusion of each panel, the audience was given chances for questions and many of the discussions were lively.

Standards of an Equine Drug Test Program

Dr. Stephen Schumacher spoke next. He is the chief administrator of Testing Programs for the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) Drug and Medications Program. He explained the established equine drug testing protocols used in the U.S. and worldwide and how these protocols might be implemented in the Tennessee Walking Horse industry to aid in the prevention of soiling. In a power point presentation, he emphasized that the mission of a drug testing program was the safety and well-being of horses in competition and a level playing field for competitors. He went over the USEF program history and facts, the components of a successful drug and medications program and penalizing violations, including publishing the violation and the penalty which is a great deterrent.

Schumacher emphasized that a good drug testing program is not possible without industry support. He also explained the classification of drugs as permitted substances, restricted substances and forbidden substances.

He used two quotes in his presentation. Dr. John Lengel's "Rules without enforcement are worse than meaningless; they are hypocrisy." The second was from the Governor of Bitlyrnia, "We tend to meet any new situation by re-organizing - and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization."

A member of the audience asked if kerosene or a topical would show up in testing. He said it was possible but he didn't know what the expense would be. "I think it's coming. The limits to detection drop every day. In the next several years, it's doable."

How Access to Information Can Cause Change

Lori Northrup, president of FOSH, and Will Walls, president of the Equine Education Alliance, next spoke on the importance of increased transparency to the public about people who have violated federal law by soiling, the organizations that have leadership with violation histories and what changes better transparency can cause.

Present access to soiling abuse can be found on the FOSH web site, the USDA web site, by USDA FOIA requests and on www.stopsoring.com. Northrup explained having the suspension lists available would aid DQPs and show management in accurately honoring suspension lists, assist in selecting judges, leaders and honorees for the industry, help people searching for sound horse trainers and measure the HIOs ability to self-regulate. Information allows people to take effective action to change behavior and transform the industry.

Northrup explained the Equus Pegasus Awards recognize media excellence in the promotion and examination of equestrian sport. Equus topped the 2008 Pegasus Awards for their magazine's examination of racing, eventing and the fight to end the practice of soiling. She reported that the U.S. Animal Health Association (USAHA) supports the AAEP call for the elimination of the abusive practice of soiling and requests that the USDA APHIS, in cooperation with the industry, continue their vigilant monitoring of the HPA of 1970.

Northrup illustrated gas chromatography used at 10 shows in 2008 detected 150 positive samples for illegal foreign substances with a 45 percent positive rate for all 10 shows. Drug testing at the 2008 Celebration was random drug tests that found 30 percent of the samples detected a variety of medications from local anesthetics, anti-inflammatories, antihistamines and bronchodilators. The majority of these medications are used for horses uncomfortable in a tail set. Northrup stated that future purposes for soiling data could be used for walking horse industry leadership positions and asked: Should violators be show judges? Should violators be breed association directors and should violators be HIO leaders?

They gave reasons why they thought violators should be available as public information. They showed a presentation to the audience that concluded with, "We urge the walking horse industry to welcome public interest and offer the highest standards of transparency for this great breed."

Sound Trainers' Luncheon

Participants enjoyed a table-side lunch presentation by choosing one of the following horse trainers and joining that group. The trainers were Jacque Allen of South Carolina, Nya Bates of Idaho, Susan Derth of California, Anita Howe of Missouri, Diane Sept of Pennsylvania, Bucky Sparks of Colorado and Laurie Wolf of Florida.

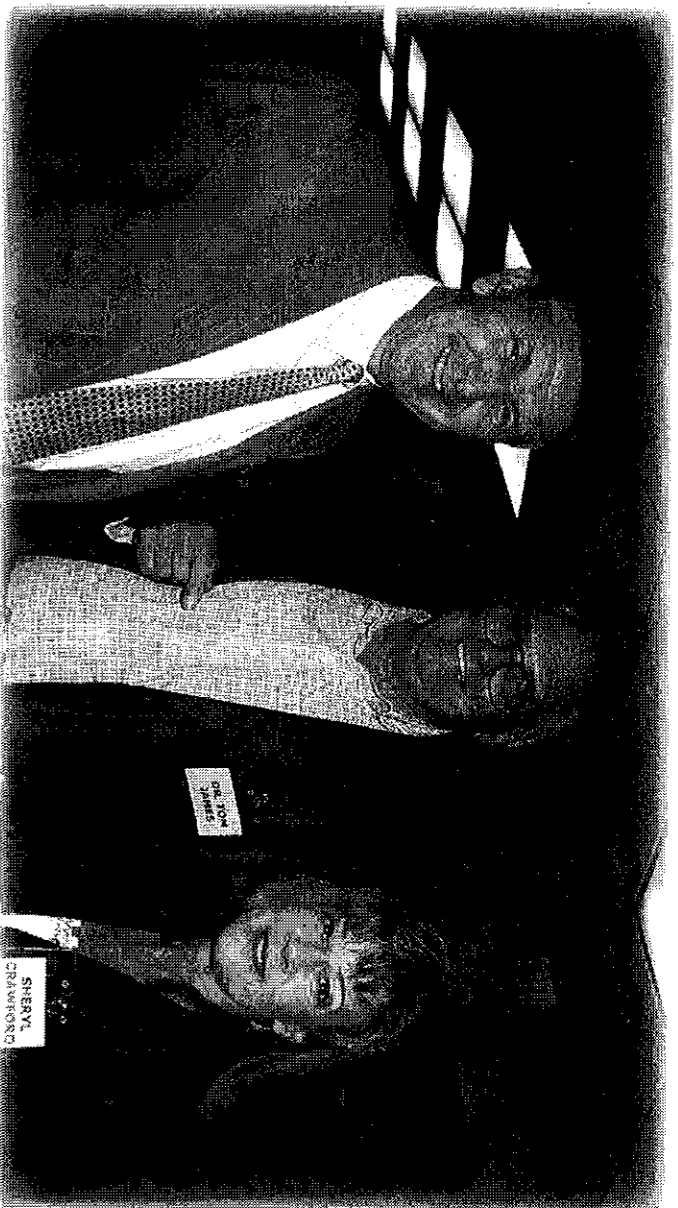
Gaited Horse Biomechanics and Hoof Structure

During this session, experts analyzed the affects and research done of weight, stacks, pads, toe length and chains on gait, locomotion, limb movement and hoof quality. These findings were from the perspectives of gait researchers, equine veterinarians, a farrier and a natural hoof care professional.

Dr. Olin K. Balch's research has focused on equine biomechanics and locomotion. In response to the requests from the farrier industry, his research was broadened to include the effects of different weights of shoes and heights of pads on the geometry of motion of limb movement. Balch felt that pulling shoes was a problem because of breaking down hoof walls.

Balch explained a horse's low leg is the one that he's lame on. If it can be corrected in the foot, the horse will not need to be injected.

Ann Corso is a certified natural hoof care professional and director of Barefoot Initiative-Liberated Horsemanship. She showed slides and discussed health of the hoof. She felt that frogs pinched between contracted heels caused soreness



TWHBA Executive Director Stan Butt and Sheryl Crawford spoke with guest speaker Dr. Tom James.

and that bands put stress on the hoof. She felt the long term was loss of bone density of the coffin bone which might lead to chronic founder and stress.

Dr. Molly C. Nicodemus showed her results of a gated Locomotive Research Program at Mississippi State University entitled Gait Analysis: Opening Doors to Understanding the Gated Horse. Her study showed that only 10-ounce pasture chain weights significantly increased stride duration but lower weights or pasture straps did not. Additional changes in hoof flight arc and head displacements were associated with heavy weights (10 ounces or more).

Future Plans of the USDA

Dr. Rachel Cezar and Mike Tuck presented the USDA's plans for enforcement of the HPA in 2009. Cezar said they will be putting on a scar rule clinic and they would be looking at only the front limbs. She stated they will be taking a closer look at the DQPs this season.

This session was followed by a question and answer period. One person said NWHHA would have problems with the protocol that required removal of tack for inspections and she needed to be aware of the difficulty. Another asked why persons would be allowed to go back to the barn without a penalty if they were deemed not normal by the thermography pre-show screening. Cezar replied this was just a preliminary screening that showed where they needed to check more thoroughly and it was only part of the inspection. She said technology would be ensuring only sound horses are showing and all need to step up to the bar. Cezar also said she hoped the HIOs will post suspensions on their web sites. The last comment was on-lookers just don't understand why there are not stiffer penalties.

Natural Gated Horse Exhibition

The conference was dismissed and moved to the University of Florida's Horse Teach Unit Arena for an exhibition of various gated breeds, following a barbecue at 6 p.m. This exhibition proved not only are gated horses born to gait, but they originated in the New World with the early explorers. These performances were made possible by owners who want to make a difference in the gated horse world and believe in sound and natural gated horses.



Linda and Pat Parelli posed for a picture before their Friday evening exhibition and presentation with their horses.

Parelli Exhibition and Presentation

Various breeds and disciplines were shown which included the famed Florida Cracker Horses, Fox Trotting Horses, Paso Finos, Kentucky Mountain Horses and Rocky Mountain Horses as well as Tennessee Walking Horses. Demonstrations varied from dressage, dancing, cutting, driving cattle, riding without a bridle and many other disciplines.

The Parellis, world-famous natural horsemanship masters, gave a private presentation for the attendees. Pat and Linda Parelli demonstrated with their horses their system of natural horsemanship that employs psychology and communication in the form of love, language and leadership. These are the keys that allow people to be successful with horses without fear, force or intimidation.

Technology of the Future: Detection and Enforcement

Lori Northrup thanked those who had given commitments, saying the conference had been very professional and organized thus far. More anonymous testimonies were given at the beginning of the session regarding the industry's sorting problems, as well as more footage from the 2008 Celebration.

Saturday's first panel discussion featured a forum on the technology that would be used in detection of sorting and enforcement, including thermography, digital radiography and measuring pain.

John Burks of Biographs, LLC presented the product Pain Trace, a patented, non-invasive device that measures the skin's response to pain. Pain Trace was developed for use in humans to objectively measure pain, but it was found to have use in veterinary medicine since veterinarian patients cannot describe their pain. Studies indicate that Pain Trace has high statistical significance in equine and human trials.

The portable, handheld device can monitor pain while a horse moves by attaching electrodes to either side of the horse's neck. The device gives a reading in under a minute. The more negative a reading, the more pain the horse is in. Positive readings indicate little or no pain. The device does not locate the source of the pain.

There is a wireless form of the device that clips on the halter. It is used as a foaling trace at Oklahoma State University. When a mare has pain from being in labor, it sends an alarm to the computer or even to cell phones. This is a way to check on a horse's pain 24 hours and may help to keep horses from foundering or colicking when the pain first begins. It will also be a useful tool at inspections and it has 85 percent accuracy.

Dr. Lynn Peck presented results from a study, Pain Trace, Thermometry and Applied Kinesiology (AK) Testing in Sound and Unsound Horses. Dr. Peck explained that Pain Trace is an objective pain measurement device and how it worked.

Dr. Peck summarized the findings that Pain Trace is useful in detecting pain from mild to significant and that it showed appropriate changes when clinical signs of pain were present, analgesics were given or when the horse was



Dr. Rachel Cezar was surrounded by attendees following her presentation.

stressed. It informed the operator of the presence of pain when clinical signs were minimal and is supported AK evaluation findings for pain. Pain Trace is easy to use but some practice is helpful initially. Readings were altered by deviation of the neck from a straight position, length of hair coat, the amount of contact gel and pressure and the state of mind of the patient (anxious). Some readings were hard to explain. Hoof temperature findings were consistent with previous studies and more study is needed.

Humane Trends Impacting the Horse Industry

There has been a life long connection and friendship between two on this panel, Dr. Robert Miller and Pat Parelli. Parelli said Miller had been his mentor, peer and colleague all this time. He mentioned there are two ways to do things

with horses, either as a boss or partner. Befriend your enemy. You can erode them using love and logic. Parelli continued, "Past is past, changing is important. The future is in our hearts."

Dr. Miller said that in the 20th century, the horse went from primarily a working animal to primarily recreational. He compared the walking horse to the western pleasure horse and the trend started with their heads on the ground. He said a judge started tying the peanut roller and that's where they headed. In the middle of the 20th century, another judge tied an exaggerated gait and it continues to this date. Infliction of pain was used by many to get the horse to do this. It can be done with skillful training without the pain. "I've devoted my life to natural horsemanship. If you're skillful, you can get the legs to move as you like."

Parelli said to use positive peer pressure. That is the most motivating factor for change. Parelli explained some of his methods and games used especially with youth. He felt that the top 10 percent should get blue ribbons. Miller said to make changes, the judges should not be trainers unless they are long term retired trainers.

Parelli explained that he thought halter classes should be at the end of a show and that only horses that did well in the show could show in halter classes. If we bred function to function, we will get the desirable conformation.

The Important Role of Media in Raising Awareness

Heidi Vanderbit is an award winning author and she is currently writing a suspense novel set in the world of sored Tennessee Walking Horses. She related her personal experience and said, "What I saw was grotesque and no one was

worrying about it." Her book's title is "Scar Rule" and she hopes to make it memorable.

Pat Raia is a veteran journalist who has covered crime and politics in Chicago, and national and international business topics. She currently covers equine welfare and legislative issue for The Horse, the award-winning monthly magazine devoted to equine health, care, management and welfare, which is the formal education partner of the AAEP. Raia said as a journalist, she doesn't care. "My job is to hold up the mirror. I have many conversations with leaders about the new inspections. I talk to people on both sides and try to give you the information for you to change the industry. If the public hears both sides, then the public can decide what to do. I don't have an opinion. I write freelance for The Horse. After Chicago, I can cover anything."

What Could You Do To Help?

The final panel was examples of projects undertaken to bring public awareness to sorting, as well as some practical suggestions.

Keith Dane, director of Equine Protection for the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), said Congress has failed. In 2008, the AAEP came up with the White Paper. He feels the time is now to mold public sentiment. "We must each accept the challenge. The point is that we need to get it out." He showed a presentation that gave several suggestions each person could do. He ended with a quote from Abraham Lincoln, "...with public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed..."

Mary Ann Kennedy is a Grammy-nominated hit songwriter from Nashville, Tenn., who creates music that celebrates the horse. Kennedy sang a new song about Tennessee Walking Horses while a video was shown with beautiful horses as well as examples of bad feet. Kennedy stated, "It's been a long overwhelming weekend. The bottom line is I love horses with all my heart. The consequences must be greater than the rewards. What an event, I'm so glad to be a part of it."

April Zendariski is a 16-year-old home-schooled student who earned the Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest nationally recognized award a Girl Scout can earn. Her troop's project, See It Through My Eyes, is about the abuses of sorting. It is a presentation with sound and photos, including many from the USDA, set to music and will be sent to all Girl Scout troops.

This was followed by a question and answer session. One question was, "How can we provide information without getting a black eye?" The answer given was to promote the positive sound use of the Tennessee Walking Horse. Dane concluded with, "The leadership must take the bull by the horns. This next year, TWHBEA will give a flat-shod demonstration at the World Games in Lexington, Ky."

Lori Northrup thanked everyone for coming and ended the conference with, "It will take much energy to have a sound horse industry, but we must make it happen."

The complete conference coverage is available at www.soundhorseconference.com.



Ivory Pal danced with a partner during the Natural Gated Horse Exhibition.

www.soundhorseconference.com