

# Training For Courage By Paul Dufresne

## ENDOTAPPING- PART 1

In this installment on Endotapping we will cover the first application of this technique to facilitate the emotional well being of the horse. I have studied this technique for some time and consider it to be very useful but mostly thought it appropriate for experienced leads. I have never been more wrong as evidenced in a couple of my clinics in Alberta this spring.

**A** few young gals were having difficulty with stiff, anxious horses. These young, smaller participants were struggling to employ good leadership because of safety issues of potentially being over-powered by their horses. I got them started on softening on the bend and basic yields but these horses needed more attention. Some of my advanced students were auditing and were asked to help. They had experience with Endotapping and used the technique to facilitate the acceptance and well being of these horses. The coolest part was they showed these junior leads how to do it. Too often we think people can't learn something because they lack experience. Wrong. These young gals understood the basic idea quickly and their horses responded positively shortly thereafter.

Needless to say, the following week I changed my clinic format to incorporate this technique from the beginning. I have always believed that if something works to help people and horses get along, regardless of its source, use it!

**So what is Endotapping?** When people watch me tapping a horse with an odd looking whip with a ball on the end, eyes of skeptics light up with a, "Yeah right, hocus pocus" look! In about an hour that skepticism changes to disbelief with lots of eye rubbing! When participants and auditors watch horses that are pushy, stiff, anxiously explosive or implosive find a relaxed state and willingness to try, the changes speak for themselves.

Endotapping is a physical stimulation of the horse's neuromuscular network with a ball whip which causes a neurohormonal release (endorphins would be my guess.) This is further enhanced or facilitated by controlling the bend or shape of the horse. The tapping progressively develops into a cue that can be used any time the horse is anxious. The technique can be successfully applied on large general areas of the body which allows most people, including children or physically challenged, to cause a positive change in the horses.

**Why is this technique so significant?** Quite simply a horse is equipped with a very quick mechanism to get into adrenalin surges any time it has to prepare for flight as a prey animal. Endotapping interrupts the fear, excite cycle. Some horses have highly active startle responses, such as sensitivity to sound, shaking, repeated snorting, irregular breathing, bug-eyed, sweating and high headedness. I am sure you have seen such horses, stuck in a cycle of fear. Some horses can discern readily between situations that are threatening or not. Other horses are poorly equipped to deal with our human environment. A horse that is calm is always easier to lead and much safer to be around.

My first use of the ball whip is to cause the horse to feel good so it is more likely to understand anything else I try to teach or wish to have it accept without fear.

Anytime I find the horse getting worried I tap it and reset the feel good, only progressing once calm has been re-established. For horses that have been abused or simply find it hard to cope around humans, this can be incredibly useful in setting the foundation for a positive experience without much struggle. If we feel good we will always be more receptive to a new situation or challenge. As a leader this gives something very important



2 month old colt with very little halter training who has never been tapped before. This is a good start to head down and relaxing.



Target tapping areas zone 1 2 3 in order of importance

# Training For Courage, cont'd

and desirable to the horse or a positive emotional state.

Endotapping can produce a positive emotional state so teaching can begin; bomb proofing, softer yields, control of the poll, enhancing quality of gaits, walk, trot, canter softness and control, preparing for more complex movements, therapy for rehabilitation from injury or disease or to finish a session.

## The process

Start Endotapping on the horse with it standing still. If the horse is unsure and wishes to move, allow it. Restricting it would only reinforce fear of something that it does not understand or cause it to feel trapped.

Give pressure on a short lead, asking the horse to bend slightly to the side you are standing. Keep the horse's eye from looking to the opposite side as this leads to short circuiting the reflex.

Tap the horse with the ball whip rhythmically and repetitively beginning with a softer tap (but not so soft that it tickles) then progress to a firmer tap. The first target area with the ball whip is the general area where your leg would hang when riding. Any sort of regular rhythm will work. Changing the rhythm or intensity is a great way to cause the horse to pay attention to you if it gets distracted.

Once the horse starts salivating, chewing and keeping its head down in a relaxed way with soft eyes and loose muscle tone on the face and muzzle ask it to move forward on a circle at a walk. Tap the horse anytime it chooses to travel with its head long and low, loose at the poll.

If the horse wants to rush or get anxious affect a mini sweep, open the lead line to start the haunches crossing under. Then elevate the lead line so the horse also carries the cross over and bend all the way to the forehand. As it slows, tap it again until it relaxes.

Try to do this in a soft jog. Any time the horse gets excited, slow it down or stop, then resume Endotapping to regain the feel good and start again. Later this can also be done at the canter but the walk and trot are a great start.

**Endotapping is an incredible asset when bomb-proofing.** Any time we introduce a stressor and the horse begins to display signs of anxiety we can diffuse it by tapping the horse to regain the feel good. You could use the advance retreat method but in most cases by diffusing the anxiousness the horse overcomes such situations quickly. Each horse is different and may be more sensitive to all or some types of stressors. If you have developed very good cues with tapping, in most cases you will speed up the horse's acceptance of any stimuli.

In the follow-up segments on Endotapping, I will discuss the development of softer yields, controlling the poll, gait transitions with softness and balanced control preparing for more complex movements as well as its use in rehabilitation therapy for injury or disease. Endotapping is always a great way to end a play or training session by getting your partner in a great relaxed state. Try tapping in many places all over its body to see what your horse enjoys.

To the best of my knowledge, Endotapping was developed by J.P. Giacomini. Allen Pogue also uses his variation. All good trainers and clinicians modify techniques to suit their needs and the needs of their students, both human and equine. This technique when combined with shape control and Natural Horsemanship, I have found to be an exceptional way to lead a horse and



Accepting tarp blowing on him.



Tapping to calm while accepting. Going to tarp on trailer which is blowing a bit.



Tapping on circle at relaxed walk.

facilitate a very healthy partnership.

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