



The following article was featured in the **California Riding Magazine** July 2007.

Christa Petrillo's Total Horsemanship Training

Christa Petrillo's Total Horsemanship Training business embodies everything involved in training the horse and rider to achieve the best possible experience together.

Whether she's starting a baby, re-educating a problem horse, finding the perfect match of horse and rider in the sale component of her business or putting the finishing touches on a top show contender, Christa has found herself a big niche by 'doing things right the first time.'

Based in the Sacramento area's Winters, Christa says 'My reputation has gotten to the point where I hear, time and again, 'If you want your horse done right the first time, take it to Christa.'

Her success and the gratifying feedback it produces are the result of many years of working with hundreds of horses. A certified John Lyons Trainer, Christa has a waiting list of clients. Fortunately, her clients are usually the patient kind. 'I tend to get horse owners that want to have their horse trained correctly. They are not looking for a quick fix.'

Christa works with horses and riders at Golden Moments and also maintains a busy clinic schedule. Additionally, she finds time to teach the new 4-H club in Winters and is enjoying working with youth. Just as with her professional clients, Christa's coaching is geared 'not just toward riding your horse, but to setting you on the right path to becoming a conscientious horse person.'

'That means educating students on nutrition, safety, veterinary work, conditioning, equipment, saddle fitting, etc.' Christa continues. 'And I expose them to equine acupuncture and chiropractic work.'

She has especially enjoyed seeing how kids react to John Lyons techniques. 'I find that kids 12 and over tend to understand it because they understand the idea of cause and effect.' It's also at about that age that kids often become genuinely interested in training a horse, as opposed to simply riding one, she adds.

In keeping with her whole-horse approach, Christa says she has become increasingly aware of how often physical problems are the root of behavioral problems. One of her own horses reinforced this lesson a few years back. Minor training issues led Christa to suspect something physical, even though the horse passed a standard lameness exam with no hint of unsoundness. Christa kept looking for a physical problem, and

eventually found soreness in the horse's stifles. Western veterinary medicine might have prescribed hock injections, but Christa went with acupuncture and, after three treatments, the horse's attitude improved greatly, as did its performance, the trainer reports.

And then there are cases when a behavioral problem is strictly a behavioral problem. In one recent example, an overly aggressive horse came into Christa's care. 'Once you determine that there is no physical issue, then you have to ask, Why is the horse this way?' This particular horse had established himself as the dominant horse with his dam, with whom he lived, and with his owners. 'Dominance turns into aggressiveness and we corrected that with Lyons round pen techniques in which I established dominance.' Christa explains. 'But I couldn't then just send him back to his owner. Instead, I had the owner come out regularly to see the horse work and to understand what they needed to do when the horse went back home.'

Christa is grateful for her success and she views her skill with horses and people as a gift from God. The scripture that guides her is Jeremiah 33:3 'Call unto me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.'

Tapping a Diverse Background

Her success is also the result of accumulated experience with many types of horses and different riding and competitive styles. As a child she rode with a top hunter-jumper barn, then moved into the competitive Arabian and Quarter Horse circuits. Trail riding, dressage competitions and parades are a few of the many other highlights on her equestrian resume.

'The Lyons program encourages us to learn from everybody,' says Christa of her ongoing education. 'see what other people are doing, evaluate it, question it and see if it works for you.' She regularly refreshes her knowledge by spending time with her video and book library of training methods. Lyons techniques, she says, 'work on every horse. The difference is that sometimes it will take longer because of the horse's disposition. In some cases, you have to break it into very little steps. Learning when that is the case is something I've learned through years of hands-on experience.'

One of Christa's greatest joys is sharing her knowledge about horses. With that in mind, she and her family last year staged the first Equine Marketplace Event in nearby Dixon. Participants brought sales horses and stallions and stood by their stalls to answer questions. Christa provided a demonstration of John Lyons techniques and a variety of clinicians shared their expertise on other subjects. The event will return by popular demand Oct. 6-7 at the Dixon County Fairgrounds.

For more information on Christa Petrillo's Total Horsemanship Training or any of the clinics or events coming up, please visit www.christapetrillotraining.com.