



Horse Breather

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Post viral lethargy, weight gain and irritability

Natalie Lascelles

I bought Jack as a 3 1/2 yr old cob cross trakhener 16.1... black with four white feet with a cheeky personality and an abundance of energy. We worked hard and attained prelim - novice dressage standards very quickly, his want for learning was vast. Then he had a virus .. no cough initially, and as a resident of the New forest where Strangles is rife, thought it was that .. but no. Dull, no energy, anaemic tissue, membranes white... ??? then the deep hacking cough..

Blods were done .. twice in fact... as they couldn't believe his white cell count.. Apparently as high as an aged horse... ? so I said to the vet .. what's wrong ?

Well I was told 'it could be anything... poison or a chronic virus ..basically they hadn't a clue... So having given him very high doses of antibiotics and with no improvement (his temperature initially was 104 !!!!!) I was told just carry on as normal with him... I was incredulous .. WHAT ? RIDE him like that ..yes I was told ... I just couldn't believe their advice.

So then I pretty much gave up on the veterinary profession and went my own route through a nutritionist guy without whom, I doubt Jack would have ever regained any 'life' back at all. So since then I have given blood tonics, herbs, nutritional supplements, the dearest to the cheapest, hard feed that would make even the quietest pony orbit in to space... **with absolutely NO effect**. So now feed just a basic diet.. oat by product nuts garlic, salt carrots.

That brought us to 2007.. February... I had, over the last 6 years (Jack's now 9) tried everything to get my springy sprightly fun cheeky healthy zest for life horse back.... Folk that met him having never known him before the virus just looked at me as if I were mad or made me feel that I was lying to myself about how he used to be. But as a therapist I COULD see physiological changes , in his skin/ eye drinking/eating habits.

In the end I stopped saying anything, but quite honestly I was aching inside. We continued to hack, jump, dressage (affiliated and doing well)... BUT whilst he had odd days of brilliance he could be moody/ grumpy always ravenous for food (weight gain had become another issue for him) all the time me thinking/ hoping a miracle for a go faster food/ supplement would give me my horse back.

He had muscle tightness issues which then gave training problems as roundness was impossible without impulsion. We went to do a dressage test in Feb 2007... I had pneumonia so my friend rode Jack. I watched her warm him up.. it was like watching a beautiful racing car that had no accelerator and the engine was useless. He came down the centre line , obedient and calm..... and as flat as a pancake. I could have cried.



I knew that something was wrong but everyone saw him as this lovely well (fat) looking horse that was just lazy !!!! But he never used to be !!!!!!! I took him home and decided not to compete him anymore, just hack him and have lessons if I felt he had enough energy.. I just still hoped that one day something or someone would come along...

Then one day out of the blue on a wet wild February day a lady came to the yard to see a friend, and she started to talk to me about Equine Breathing. As she started to speak my heart started to race... THIS WAS IT !!!! This was what I had been waiting for.....and so Clare came and taught me and Jack how to breathe again.

As a therapist you know change takes time, old habits, disease, illness, miasms that get imprinted in to the bodies very core can only be changed very slowly.... So when I started to get results in days that yielded different personality, behaviour, eating patterns, drinking patterns and best of all riding manner, it was hard to believe. If I hadn't kept a diary and other people where I keep him, commenting without being prompted on how different he was, then I would think I was merely imagining it in my hopes to get my beloved horse 'back'.

But my diary speaks for itself and everyday I now see a more relaxed, less greedy, grumpy, less bad stable habits, and now well hydrated (he used to drink 3 inches off a bucket of water a night now he drinks at least one whole bucket). He has lost weight at a time of year that quite frankly was inconceivable to me.. gone up 3 girth holes ! and his work...better focus, concentration and MORE ENERGY Clare tells me there is more improvement to come, I feel there is too, but its keeping trust in what I am doing and ignoring the comments about what weird stuff I am doing with Jack that sometimes is hard !!

Had an excellent day at his first dressage competition for so long. He came 4th in the Elementary 43 and 5th in the Elementary 58, both with 62%, so very respectable percentages. He comes out calm as you like, not grumpy, travels, loads, goes to a new venue etc .. can't fault him.

Oh and reference to the vets. I changed my vet to one who now has as much respect for me in my methods of looking after my horse as I have for his expansive knowledge in horse physiology and anatomy. I would never be put off trying any method of keeping my horse healthy and happy.

Clare even taught me some of that 'funny ground work' stuff that as I said below .. isn't so new really.. and made me realise that in order to follow your heart sometimes you have to have a bit of a leap of faith. I think they are the old ways (methods) really, just lost in translation, or put in a modern context. I thought I was doing those things, but I so obviously wasn't as Jack's behaviour towards me proved.

My idea on what I thought was correct methods of horsemanship were tested and I was brave to change it and agree it was better... So another part of Jack's and my journey. We are still on the path .. but I feel now we are together as a team again, with Equine Breathing and Clare as our guides forwards. For her, we are ever in debt.



Jack in Grazing Breather with fly mask in his own style

About Natalie

I have owned horses since I was about 14, but first sat on a pony when I was 3 and a half back in the days when health and safety issues didn't spoil us from having fun! That was a few eons ago now and as my Mum used to say I am older than my arm but a bit younger than my teeth !!

I am self employed and work as a sports therapist for horses and people, and also practice reflexology and use herbs, nutrition and homeopathy as my first choice of health care. I have always been rather fond of the idea of complimentary methods of horsemanship, but have rather favoured the sort of traditional methods of schooling, training (ie classical) with a few of what some consider the 'new' ways of today.

I like to keep my horse in a structured routine, with his work / training / competing, but his leisure or 'horse' time with other field companions kept as important as the tasks I require of him. I spoil him ... he gets humanised with far too decent clothing (ie better than mine!!) posh carrots apples... or watermelon (his fave !) but allow him to roll, get muddy, gallop about with his horse mates ... ie BE a horse. Balance being my key word...

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For a 6 month update on Natalie and Jack's progress go to '*Horse Breather*' issue 36, November 08 and for a report after a year go to issue 41, June 09.

If Natalie's story strikes a cord or raises questions for you I am always interested to hear your views and experience so do email.

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Till next time
breathe easy
Clare