

My Lessons From Strider:

Strider's Case History

By Nancy Camp

Strider came to me in June of 2003. An Oldenburg/Thoroughbred cross, he had just turned four years old. I had the highest hopes of schooling him to be an all around horse and hoped to show him at low-level dressage and horse trials. His mission, should he choose to accept it, was to help me take the notion of a "kinder, gentler" way with horses to the show ring. Unfortunately, through no fault of his own, he was unable to fulfill the mission.

When I looked at him, the breeder mentioned a persistent runny nose, which was brought up at the prepurchase exam and dismissed by the vet since he had known the horse since birth and was not concerned. He was low energy for a young horse and I put him on some supplements to help his dull coat, some herbs to bolster his immune system and some homeopathic remedies for his runny nose and lackluster demeanor. He was pushy and overly reactive when handled so TTeam bodywork and leading exercises were in order. My equine dentist balanced his mouth, my farrier balanced his feet (we kept Strider barefoot so his feet could improve), and my equine chiropractor worked on him. I did some ground-work schooling to help establish a rapport with him and improve his manners. His education in how to better use his body had begun, and was necessary before too much

riding was to be put into the program. I did take him on a couple of trail rides. He was obviously young and green but the first several rides went okay and the ground-work was helping him find comfort in a lower head carriage.

During the second week of July, I rode Strider in the outdoor arena. We had been turning and circling at the walk successfully and were about 6 or 7 minutes into trot work. Strider was paying reasonably good attention and was beginning to lower his head. Just as we were coming around to the left, an automatic sprinkler started up. It was aimed right at us; Strider freaked, understandably so. I did my level best to stay on and almost managed, when he put in one last powerful rearing lunge and ducked out from under me.

A visitor to the ranch caught Strider while I got some Arnica for me and Rescue Remedy for both of us and I hauled my bruised and battered body back onto him. We walked around until he settled which really didn't take too long, considering the extreme panic he had projected only a couple of minutes earlier. I surmised it was my attempt to pull his head around to the right that elicited the final explosion that unseated me, I talked to several trainers about dealing with a disciplinary problem of this nature and got several suggestions including hiring a cowboy to "buck him out" and



Strider - This photo was taken in July, 2003 shortly after I got him home. It shows a tight poll and over development of the muscles on the underside of his neck. He had been started under saddle but was ungainly when ridden and tended to carry his head high.

using side reins and/or martingales to better control him (none of which I thought appropriate). After that, I had a few uneventful rides on him, and then about the third ride, I was suddenly dumped a second time, after a gentle right turn. I got up, caught him, and walked him a little. Again, he was inordinately calm for having just blown up in such a big way. He stood quietly while I got on and walked off from the mounting block on a light contact. I asked him to stop and petted him. He seemed fine so I picked up the reins and asked him to step his shoulders over to the left. He resisted. We stood a minute and I asked him to step his shoulders over to the right, when he

unloaded me again.

Getting back on wasn't an option this time. I was hurt and there was obviously something wrong with this horse. I took him in, untacked him, and fed him his grain in the arena in an effort to abate any possible fear of going back in there. I was completely baffled. He was scared and all I could think was, "Something has to be wrong."

I spent days speculating about why Strider would be so suddenly violent. These were not spooks or bolts of a common nature; it was sudden panic. He had passed the vet's prepurchase exam, his teeth had been done, and the chiropractor saw no reason for it, so I



To date, the last time I rode Strider was at the Harry Whitney clinic in September of 2003. That he trusted me enough to allow this ride fills my heart with respect for the kindness and generous nature of horses.

convinced myself it was in his shoulders, since the last thing I had asked him to do was take his shoulders around to the right side. So I set about doing High Touchâ Jin Shin, acupressure, stretches aimed at releasing his withers and shoulders, and wither rocks while he stood and walked. I did ground work to release his shoulders and neck so he could bring his back up, and I disengaged his hindquarters and had him pass in front of me, crossing over his front end as he turned, all with no problem.

We had a clinic with Harry Whitney scheduled in a couple of weeks, so I decided to wait to get on Strider until that time. If it were a disciplinary problem, I could trust Harry to know how to address it. By the time Harry arrived, I had convinced myself that Strider's

horn and pulled the saddle to one side then the other. Strider was quiet and not at all phased by the experience. Harry said he didn't believe the shifting weight of the rider was an issue for Strider, because horses that don't like weight shifts usually react to that feeling when the saddle is roped. So another of my theories was conclusively shot down. The third day of our clinic, Harry worked Strider in the round pen and was pleased with the way he went. He saw no discipline issues and asked

shoulders did hurt, his withers were stuck and he was afraid of the rider's weight shifting in the saddle. Body issues don't loom large in Harry's work but he certainly had a solution for a horse that was unsettled by shifting weight on its back. He put a western saddle on Strider and, working off one of his horses, moved Strider around the round pen and turned him back. Then he roped the saddle to one side

if I'd feel better if he got on first. I said, yes. Harry put his foot in the stirrup. Strider immediately tensed and Harry paused, looked at me and said, "This doesn't make sense to me." He stood there, patiently, with his foot in the stirrup and then said, "I'm going to get on but I may not stay on long, just so long as things go really well; even for a short ride." He rode the horse for about ten minutes without incident.

The final day of our clinic with Harry, I rode Strider for the first time since my third fall. Strider dealt with the situation and with me beautifully. This ride produced the proof I needed to stand by my intuitive feeling that, "*Something has to be wrong,*" a feeling I, unfortunately, still had.

Strider had been kept out in a large field with other horses since I had brought him home. I had noticed the runny nose on occasion when he would run to greet me at the gate, but his condition was improved and he looked so much better



Strider drinking. This photo shows how severe his condition became. Water can be seen pouring out of his nose; food will do the same.



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than when he arrived, I was not concerned. Allergies might be the best guess. Then the final piece of the puzzle fell into place.

In October of 2003, my friends, Kate and Marcia, and I were standing by a pen where Strider was awaiting his turn to see the chiropractor. Strider came over for a drink from the automatic waterer. Right before our eyes, the water he was taking in was pumping back out through his nose like a fountain. Our chiropractor suggested we get the horse scoped to find out the extent of the malfunction in his throat and was not encouraging about what we might find.

We took Strider to be scoped and discovered that he had a displaced soft palate; not only that, his epiglottis was huge and didn't appear to be functioning properly. There was suspicion that there might be nerve damage to the area, and there were pustules in Strider's throat from the constant irritation of food coming back out his nose. None of this was good news. The vet thought there was a slight chance the situation could be improved, if not fixed, through a relatively simple laser surgery, which would enlarge the opening so the epiglottis would fit better over it when it came into action. In



Strider, July 2004 - After about a year with me Strider's body had begun to come into balance. Here you can see that the overly developed underside of his neck has begun to lessen and his head carriage is lower.

the face of having to put Strider down, we opted to try the surgery. Strider was hospitalized for one week and then required a couple of week's treatment and medication at home. Two months later, we took him in to be scoped again since water was still pouring out his nose when he drank. At that time we saw an even worse looking throat than the first time.

Apparently, the chronic irrita-

tion we had seen the first time had been accompanied by an infection. The reason the epiglottis had appeared so large was because it had had a cyst in it and the antibiotics administered during the post-surgery recovery period had dissipated the cyst. Now the epiglottis was smaller. When it flipped into place, it could cover the majority of the opening but the opening had curled up on one side and was now asymmetrical. The only part of the apparatus that hadn't changed for the worse was the tiny spot that had been burned by the laser. Much of the tissue was a grayish, yellowish color and the worsening of the condition surprised even the vet.

This was looking like a permanently debilitating condition, with the coughing, the chronic irritation in the throat and almost inevitable prospect that Strider would aspirate food and develop pneumonia. The vet had done everything he could for Strider and was not encouraged by the results. He agreed that the sudden loss of air could

make a horse panic and felt that riding him again would be out of the question. Things were looking grim. I looked into possible alternative therapies, including Chinese Yeng Therapy, vibrational remedies, Reiki, Jin Shin, and applied kinesiology. All this was in addition to the standard course of antibiotics, herbs and nutritional supplements. Strider's condition improved and his body was changing shape. (See Fig. 3) But in light of the forecast for his future, I resigned myself to putting him down.

Still, several psychics agreed that Strider's life force and will to live was strong. I was in a real dilemma when I heard that a woman who wanted to open a horse sanctuary was interested in taking Strider. After speaking with her, I decided to deliver him to her. She is very kind and as of this writing Strider is happy and running on 40 acres in Oregon with five other horses - one has the same disability he has. Strider's new people call him their "Buddy" and I am grateful every day that he is happy. I am also grateful that I never fell into the training trap of not considering a physical problem. Finally, I feel I have learned to listen to the horses I train and I am thankful to Strider for all that he taught me in our time spent together. ♡

About the author:

Nancy Camp is a trainer and teaches riding. She specializes in rehabilitating horses that are breaking down within the paradigm of traditional horse management by practicing harmonious riding techniques, proper maintenance of teeth and feet, comfortable saddle fit and employing extensive body work. She teaches classes in Equine Energy Balancing and *High Touch*® Jin Shin and presents *EquiMotion*, *Feldenkrais*® Integrated Riding Workshops with Robert Spencer, a *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teacher*®. For information go to www.wholehorsetraining.com.



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