

Herbal Remedies Back to Basics

Article Sophie Love

Having horses has become so hi-tech that it's easy to lose sight of the basics of health care – good nutrition, correct supplementation and proper physical function.

Horse owners are normally busy people who feed for convenience, trusting that the mixes they spend their hard earned dollars on contain everything that their horse needs for optimum health and peak performance. We place our trust in vets, farriers and feed merchants and it is only when something seems wrong and all the traditional routes aren't working, that we look for alternative solutions. Desperation drives us on incredible healing journeys and my horses and I have become willing guinea pigs in our investigation of the different healing modalities on offer to modern day equus.

Angela Davison was always horse mad. She started working in a jumping/dealing yard aged 11 and later competed as a professional show jumper until an accident forced her to take a break from riding. Moving to Australia in the early 1970's saw her training and riding horses for movie, TV and advertising at Bloodwood Park in Terrey Hills until she was offered a job riding for T J Smith's breakers at Randwick, where she learned how much she didn't know about riding! She was riding the gallops for a couple of months before T J realized she was a girl! Under his tutelage and encouragement, Angela became one of the first females in Australia to be granted a professional jockey's licence in 1979, and notched up an incredible 366 winners in her years in the saddle. Angela is rightly proud of the fact that she was the second person to ever sit on the phenomenal Kingston Town's back, and also rode work on some fabulous horses like Mighty Kingdom, Imposing and the great mare Emancipation.

Any jockey deals with pain on a regular basis and Angela was no exception. As a child, growing up in the UK, she had been fascinated by the local gypsies and their amazing ability to turn even the most broken down old wreck of a horse into a saleable proposition in a matter of weeks, just using ancient herbal lore. So it made sense to her to seek herbal solutions for her physical breaks, aches and pains. When she retired from the track she decided to train to use herbal lore to heal horses and try and curb some of the sickening wastage from the racing industry. After all, if a horse wasn't good enough, strong enough, healthy enough for the track, it could still be healed and helped to live a useful life in some other discipline. It was also a way in which to give something back to the noble and beautiful beasts who had given her so many years of thrills, spills, heartache and joy as her partners in the race to the finish line.

Angela graduated from the Dorothy Hall College of Herbal Medicine in 1987, studied Cranio-sacral therapy with the Upledger Institute of Florida

in 1991 and 1992, and Mineral Science with Blackmores in 1993. She studied both with and under some amazing horse healers – some who didn't even have a name for what they did, but whose magic hands cured all sorts of ills. New Zealander Graeme Boyd (who is still one of the world's most respected equine chiropractors) was a contemporary, and remains a life-long friend and together they explored biomechanics, muscle massage, stretching, posture and muscular/skeletal support. Later Angela studied Equine Muscle Release Therapy (EMRTTM) and developed her own courses in Equine Massage and Stretching.

As is so often the case with those in the healing arts, the more Angela learnt, the more she discovered through her own trial and occasional error, and in 1991 she pioneered a revolutionary method of hair testing which offers unique insights into the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health of the horse as well as its relationship to the owner, environment, diet etc. Unlike commercial hair testing techniques, this is a non-chemical method where Angela picks up the energy or vibrations from the hair in order to obtain a clear picture of its overall health and fitness. Once again my horses went into the fray for the journalistic cause!

We were asked to send a mane sample from each horse in an envelope with a detailed history of diet, treatments, medicines and diagnoses (it's important not to handle the hair very much – one quick pull and straight into the envelope!). I was warned that because this service is so popular, and each individual case time-consuming, that I should expect to wait about two weeks for the results. Exactly two weeks later, Angela called. As I had thought, their flights from the UK two and a half years ago had interfered with lung function and compromised their immune systems – particularly the little one. But from there on I was on a voyage of discovery as Angela detailed every facet of their physical and mental health. I was told that the little one had been poisoned by some form of chemical about two years ago and that her liver and digestive system had been upset since that time and that her muscular tightness, low energy, and poor health (laminitis, excessive weight, temper tantrums) all stemmed from then. In the middle of the night I figured out what the chemical was! While in the UK she was never exposed to any agricultural chemicals, but since we have been in Australia I have had to use commercial weed killers and this particular little monkey loves to eat the dying grass – obviously with disastrous results. The emotional information was spot on – Angela said that the little one took all her emotional and physical frustrations out on me (so true!), that she always wanted control, that she didn't believe I listened to her, that she worries about herself and her place in the scheme of things, adores her surrogate Mum/equine friend and quite likes me (charming!).

My big mare was found to have a major pelvic/hip imbalance (one of those things that I've sort of known about, and I remember the vet once pointing out to me, but he didn't have a solution and neither did I), impaired circulation, sore and poor joints, a nervous system and digestive imbalance since the big move from the UK. Both horses also presented with serious mineral deficiencies. Emotionally the mare rates me as a 9 out of 10 – very rare, apparently (phew!), but she was depressed, dull and then overwrought when excited. Angela confirmed that we have an amazingly strong partnership, but that she is too closely bound up in my emotional ups and downs and tends to worry about me over much (she has Eeyore tendencies, that one!).

As well as this verbal overview of what she finds with each horse, Angela also rates each joint, organ, energy level, foodstuff and supplement, which makes it very clear where the horse's weaknesses are, and what

benefits and what hinders healthy function and lifestyle. In addition she either faxes or mails out a detailed feed rating analysis for each horse in an easy to read and evaluate form, so the owner can start implementing changes to the feeding routine.

Next the Herbal and Flower Remedy mixtures she has formulated to address each individual horse's particular issues arrive in the mail. These are designed to facilitate a positive, permanent, healing change within the horse's body and mind over a six week period. At the end of that time, a reassessment via hair analysis is recommended and a further six week course of remedies supplied. Angela stresses that this course of treatment is a catalyst for change for any horse, and will likely only be undertaken once in its lifetime – she's not touting for repeat business - If the horse isn't getting better, you're not following instructions!

Needless to say I went shopping for linseed, sunflower seeds, sulphur, mineral mixes, pure salt rock lick, chaff, cider vinegar, rosehip etc for my previously grass fed only horses. They were hilarious about the taste of the apple cider vinegar but soon got used to it and I noticed an immediate difference in their energy levels. As a result, I've started reading about the mineral deficiencies unique to Australia and how simple supplementation can radically improve the health of both humans and horses, resolving a multitude of issues from fly strike to fleas, tick infestations to gait abnormalities, energy levels, digestive imbalances, loss of weight, inappropriate weight gain etc., etc. I feel like a door has been opened in my understanding of owning and managing horses in this amazing country of ours.

It's the old-fashioned way of feeding. The way good horse trainers the world over still feed their charges – individual feeding regimes as different as the horses themselves. Yes, it takes more time, more care, more money, but to have the horses at their peak, enjoying themselves and fulfilling my demands of them with ease and play is worth it! After all, that's what having horses is all about ...

Two weeks into the dietary change, and only a week after the addition of the herbs my big mare is jumping out of her skin! Acting like a two year old and bucking just for the joy of it as she races up the hill as soon as I whistle. The whole family is enjoying the taste and benefit of organic carrots (\$40 for a 20kg bag), and the little pony is improving – no more snotty nose, no more coughing from either of them, and the Queensland Itch is becoming less of a problem. They both look slimmer, sleeker, and shinier. And they haven't even started on the minerals yet! (They are still on order). It's so good to see them enjoying themselves, feeling good, and loving life, but to be frank I am dreading riding either of them as they've got too much bounce for my basic riding skills, and I don't any more (bounce, that is)!

Angela Davison says she never stops studying, learning and experimenting – every horse is her teacher and it is clear that she, in turn, is a powerful catalyst in helping horses heal and move past their blocks and limitations to realise their full potential in both performance and enjoyment of life.

If you are interested in learning more about hair testing or how herbs and dietary changes can help horses regain and maintain optimum health, go to www.angeladavison.com.au For more information on mineral deficiencies and supplementation refer to any of Pat Coleby's books on Natural Horse Care or Farm Management – available from www.lothian.com.au.

Sophie Love's articles can be enjoyed at www.thezenpen.com.au. 🐾



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1. Angela Davison
2. Angela in race mode
3. Angela mixing the herbs