

Chapter 1: Introduction

With horse ownership comes great responsibility, we have a responsibility to manage our horses to the best of our ability and to do this *sustainably* and *ethically*.

The development of horsekeeping practices has progressed in a very ad-hoc but human focused fashion ever since horse domestication began several thousand years ago. It is not surprising that horsekeeping practices developed in this way; throughout history, horses have been kept as a resource or as a tool, be it for war, agriculture, general transport and as a leisure activity for the wealthy.

Very little thought has been put into how this affects the way we manage the modern domestic horse. For example, the workload for the horse has reduced dramatically; horses are now being confined in increasingly smaller areas as pressure for space grows. They are often fed on feeds that are nutritionally unsuitable for their workload, and increasing awareness in issues such as equine health and welfare, combined with growing concern for 'The Environment' has led to questions being asked about how and why we keep equines the way we do.

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It is only in the past few decades that rapid change has come about, not only in the role of the horse, but also in the socio-economic makeup of horse owners. Horses, certainly in the western world, are now used primarily for leisure activities and are owned by people from a huge variety of backgrounds. There are now many new challenges facing contemporary horse owners.

The modern domestic horse is much more likely to be kept for leisure purposes than for work. This can have huge implications on the health and well-being of our horses and create heavy demands on our time and resources. We need to rethink how we keep horses today, rather than carry on doing things traditionally simply because that is 'how it has always been done'.

It is clear that something has to change, traditional management systems do not fit into the needs and expectations of modern horsekeeping. We need to ensure that the physiological and behavioural needs of horses are met without compromising the environment and our own lifestyle. This means looking at how and why we keep horses the way we do and acknowledging that there might be a better way; a way that takes care of their needs, takes care of the environment and saves us time, money and energy - all at the same time - a true win-win situation all round.

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Forward thinking horse owners are beginning to look for alternatives. This book looks at some of the issues facing contemporary horsekeepers *and* the equine community as a whole. It offers solutions, culminating in a total management system designed to address the issues of keeping horses in the 21st century. This is called **The Equicentral System**.

We have been educating horse owners around the world about this *sustainable* system of management for many years now, to great effect. This system integrates natural horse behaviour *and* good land/environmental management and also helps humans through reduced workloads and costs.

Chapter 2: How 'traditional' practices developed

In the last few thousand years of human civilization, horsekeeping has been an integral part of everyday life for many cultures around the world (opinions vary as to exactly how long, but it is thought to be around 5000 years). Indeed, many civilizations were said to have been built from the back of a horse.

Initially, horses were purely an animal to hunt and eat along with other grazing herbivores. At different times in history, many cultures on various continents transitioned to capturing and keeping horses (domesticating them). This was done initially for their meat, skins etc. but then over time, developed to using them as work animals.

Many cultures transitioned to using horses for work instead of or as well as for their meat, skins etc.



Many cultures that first domesticated horses were actually nomadic people, and so the horse became part of this nomadic lifestyle. As these people began to settle and develop agriculture, so too horses began to be more confined, so that humans had more control of them and could access them easily as and when needed. Initially this was done by keeping horses in large 'corrals'.

In cultures that developed farming and remained static, this meant that horses then had to be fed and cared for. At the same time, the manure and urine that these confined horses produced was seen as a valuable fertiliser with which to

grow crops. This mirrors the keeping of other farm animals which were also seen as valuable producers of fertiliser, as well as the more obvious producers of meat/wool etc.

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Horses have been kept in captivity for many centuries now, but the greatest influence on how we keep them in the present day came about in the last few hundred years. Stables, although having existed for many centuries, did not become commonplace until around the 16th century with the advent of urbanisation. As urbanisation developed and huge numbers of people migrated to city living, huge numbers of horses were also moved to the cities.

Stables were a means of keeping horses near to humans so that the horse could be put to work quickly and easily. Indeed, in the rapidly growing cities, areas to turn horses out to pasture were rare.

In those days, horses were the equivalent of the cars, trucks, trains and buses in use today. 'Horse power' was the main form of power before the combustion engine. Therefore in most cases, even though horses were often fully stabled with no access to pasture, they worked many hours a day (often 12 or more). Their stable was a necessary place to rest, recuperate and eat concentrate feed so that they were able and ready to work again the next day.

So, at this time in history, horses existed in various settings; as wild animals (which were still hunted by humans and other predators), as rural work animals (predominantly on farms), as city-living work animals (doing a huge variety of jobs that have now been largely superseded by machinery). A number of horses were kept for pleasure, mainly for riding in hunts by the wealthy (aristocracy), but most horses were simply work animals.

The aristocracy were able to employ teams of people (grooms) whose sole responsibility was to ensure that the horses were ready and available for the 'master' or 'mistress' to use at a moment's notice.

Stables were 'space efficient', whether it be in overcrowded cities, on valuable agricultural land or in military camps.



Running parallel with horses being kept as work animals, horses were an integral part of warfare and the military, in fact horses, along with other equines, have always been important for warfare and the world would be a very different place today without them.

The intricate stable management practices that are often still taught today (mainly in Europe) have foundations based on a military system of horsekeeping; they are labour intensive and time consuming. This was not a problem for the army of yesteryear when each recruit usually had just one horse to take care of and the routine and hard work involved was a useful way of instilling discipline and simultaneously taking up the time of these young men.

Military horses were kept both in mobile management systems *and* permanent management systems, with the mobile management systems generally being used when the army was 'in the field' on campaign.

Running parallel with horses being kept as domestic work animals, horses were an integral part of warfare and the military.



Horses were at the forefront of the Agricultural Revolution (mid 1700's). The Agricultural Revolution was the predecessor to the Industrial Revolution (1800's) and was a time of major development in farm machinery (most of it horse drawn). By the end of these periods in history these horse management practices had become entrenched in western culture.

Horses that were used for agriculture were often kept in a more simplistic and efficient manner. A farm horse would be at pasture when pasture was available and would be brought into buildings such as barns and fed hay and grains only when necessary. As their time and resources were usually limited, a farmer had to keep their horses in the most efficient way possible; the horses were part of an integrated management system within the farm. However, as farming techniques progressed and the pressure to glean as much as possible from the land increased, there was usually increased pressure to house working farm horses in as small an area as possible in order to maximise the productive space on the land. This resulted in some working farm horses being stabled for at least part of each year. By-products of cereal production such as straw (for feed and bedding) were used to aid this process.

Stables *also* evolved to provide a relatively warm and sheltered environment for humans to work in while taking care of horses.

Certain styles of stable buildings allow people to handle and care for horses in relative comfort, whilst also protecting them from the elements. 'Barn style' stables are a good example of this, with a central aisle between two enclosed rows of stables and large doors at either end of the building. These large doors can then

be opened in warmer weather and closed in colder weather. The horses can usually put their head directly outside for fresh air in better versions of this style of stable building. This style of stable building evolved in parts of the world where the winters are extremely cold (northern Europe e.g. Scandinavia).

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Over time the 'industry standard' for stable size has become 12ft x 12ft (approximately 3.6m x 3.6m) and this tends to apply whatever the size of the horse. This is a very small area and would not be acceptable for animals that are more often on public display (such as zoo animals). Some horses spend many hours, or even all of their time, in this confined area, so it is not surprising that they can develop abnormal behaviours as a result.

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It is only very recently, and mainly in the Western world, that horses have become predominantly a leisure 'accoutrement' rather than a work animal. This change has become even more pronounced during the last 30 to 40 years and the current situation is that horses now rarely 'work for a living'.

As already mentioned, many of the traditional horsekeeping practices still in use today have developed from practices used hundreds of years ago, long before the first Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876 (in the UK). Traditional management systems were human focused by necessity and did not take the horses' needs into consideration. They were developed in a time before animal welfare was a concept; unsurprising, as this is a relatively new ideology.

Since the legislation was first introduced, many of the animal welfare issues, (including those relating to horses) have been addressed, however there are many more which still need to be examined. As public awareness grows, so we as horse owners need to be proactive in addressing some of these issues.

Animal welfare is a relatively new ideology.



We now have many practices that are both more convenient for humans *and* have been anthropomorphised (which is to ascribe human form or attributes to something), with owners often assuming that their horse's needs are similar to their own.

For example, a horse owner commonly thinks that a 'cosy' stable, warm rugs, meals of high energy feed etc. constitute good horse welfare, because that is what they would want for themselves. They tend to not take the horse's natural behaviour and needs into consideration.

Because humans sometimes find it difficult to see the needs of animals as being different from human needs, they readily fall into the trap of allowing themselves to believe that their horse chooses to live more like a human than a horse.

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This is why it is so important that horse owners have a good understanding of what natural/normal horse behaviour is and try to apply as much of that knowledge as possible to the way that they manage their horse/s.