



MARK RASHID and JIM MASTERSON

THE U.K. INTERVIEW

Back in October 2019, I was fortunate enough to speak with both Mark Rashid and Jim Masterson while they were conducting their U.K. clinic held at Sovereign Quarter Horses in Cambridgeshire. To say I was a little starstruck would be an understatement and it is highly unusual for me, but having spent

years reading Mark's books, and following Jim's work too, I was acutely aware how talented both these men are in their respected fields. I needn't have worried in the slightest, as what unfolded was an interview with the feel of chatting with old friends.

Firstly, I spoke with Jim Masterson about how he and Mark came together.

Hi Jim, lovely to meet you, so what circumstances brought you and Mark together?

Well, there are a lot of similarities between the two of us. I was at a horse expo in Minnesota and Mark was there, and I had never met Mark, but I knew about his books, and I knew a lot of people were interested in his thing and thought that there were similarities. We were both at the expo giving demonstrations, and I thought to myself – how do I get to meet Mark Rashid, do I just go up and introduce myself? I decided that the next day I would go to his demo or up to his booth and introduce myself. So, I showed up at 8am at their booth only to find that Mark and Crissi were over at my booth! They came as Mark was interested in learning about the physical bodywork as he won't train a horse that is in physical discomfort and was sending people away to go get their horse worked on, so they wanted to do something themselves. They came along to one of my weekends, then the five day. Later Mark's wife Crissi became certified in my method, and she treats the horses now in their clinics that Mark feels needs work before he trains them or works with the owners. So that is how we all got together.



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At some point, we talked about doing a joint clinic and played with the format, like this, let's just try it and see how it works. We will see the horse move if Mark can work with the rider, then he will, if not he will say let's get the horse worked on by Jim, and then he will do a second session where it is a regular lesson. We tried that in Colorado, and it worked very well. The cool thing for me about it is when you take what Mark has to offer, and you take what I have to offer, and you put it together it is a lot more than just two parts. Then when we share it with the auditors and spectators they get huge value because we are talking about what we are thinking; we look at the horse, we share what we are seeing from our points of view and each horse is just a huge education. It starts to build a '3D picture' – and everyone learns, from every horse.

What led you to go into bodywork Jim?

That wasn't my plan, I was grooming hunter jumpers in Iowa for a show barn, and they wanted to travel and show on the road. The trainer had local grooms that worked in the barn, but she needed somebody who could haul the horses and groom them at the show. Before then, I had never worked with horses professionally, I had had a horse as a kid and had been around them periodically in my life, but it hadn't been my work before. When I was on the road, I used to watch other therapists at the shows, massage therapists, chiropractors, cranial,

psychotherapists – all the modalities that are similar in the human field. When I watched them I started to notice these small changes in behaviour in the horses, such as licking and chewing, or stretching and flexing at certain points when they would release tension in themselves, I was intrigued by that, so I started messing with it. I just followed the horses responses and since I wasn't trained to do anything else say massage – if the horse indicated tension somewhere, I didn't have a modality to work on it so I would just wait and see what happened. I learned that the horse if you bring it's awareness to where it is holding tension, in a way it can't brace against it, it will start to release it on its own. They are programmed for survival to just block out pain and tension, they don't have an option when you think about it, they can't go to the therapist, they can't show it because otherwise, they become a target for predators. So there is a certain level of survival response that blocks out pain and tension so they can keep going

and so I learned if you pay close attention to what the horse is telling you with his body language. By not applying pressure they can't block it out, so they will start to release it. Pay attention to their body language, look for subtle responses. If they tell you something is there you either keep their attention on it, or you can add movement and mobilisation to it a way they can't brace against it, that their nervous system will let it go. That is how this works, and it has led to really effective bodywork. Spending nine years on the show circuit was a huge education.

How many practitioners of *The Masterson Method*® are there?

Around 300 practitioners across here and Europe. It takes around a year to eighteen months to go through the process to become a practitioner, and we have just added a further thirteen newly qualified people in the U.K. and Europe in October 2019.

I have seen the growth organically, and I knew people would want to learn how to do this as when I worked on horses, their owners would be interested and be curious to what was going on. I started doing teaching seminars and weekend clinics, and it just grew and grew. Then I got a website, but it has all been word of mouth, social media is word of mouth, people don't see an ad for a therapist, they usually see you working on a horse or know somebody who's horse you have worked on. It is a very visual thing to see the horse releasing tension, so people will go online and see it and want to learn it.

My philosophy is that you just share it, and if people like it, they will want to learn more. So I have lots of Youtube video clips on my website of how to do the bladder meridian, how to do the lateral flexion because what happens is they get really good results and they want to learn more.

I think that your generosity says a lot, as you are doing it for the good of the horse. Absolutely, the more people who are doing it, the more horses are getting the benefit. For the horses, it is a pretty huge thing too, as they've just been holding this stuff inside and you do something as light and as simple as the bladder meridian, and they are light and let go, and all of a sudden and can move, it is just a simple thing, it's giving them the chance to let it go.

About ... JIM MASTERSON

■■■ In 1998, while Jim was grooming horses on the U.S. hunter-jumper show circuit, he noticed while watching physical therapists work on horses that the horse exhibited certain subtle changes in behaviour that correlated to what the therapists were doing. He learned that if you trust and follow what the horse is telling you as you work on it, the horse's body will participate in the process of releasing tension. The result is not only an improvement in performance, but also in the trust that develops between the horse and human.

Since 2006, over 4,000 horse owners have attended The Masterson

Method®. Weekend Seminar-Workshops, and he has trained over 330 Masterson Method Certified Practitioners in 20 countries.

His book and DVD, *Beyond Horse Massage*, has sold over 50,000 copies and been translated into six languages. It is the No. 1 seller in the equine veterinary category on Amazon.

Jim and his team of instructors continue to travel the world teaching horse owners, trainers and therapists *The Masterson Method*®. His goal is to have every horse on the planet have experienced the Bladder Meridian Technique at least once.

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NEXT, I SPOKE TO MARK ABOUT HORSEMANSHIP AND LIFE.

What does horsemanship mean to you on a personal level?

It's not a horse thing, it is a life thing. I have worked with horses so that I can be a better person. I am just lucky to be able to do that with horses, and with my martial arts training.

Is that what you find when you run clinics or have horses in for training, that it is the people you are working with more than the horse? How much of this is teaching people about their physical and emotional awareness to enable them to help their horses?

I would say it is ninety percent and ten percent working with the horse. The horses are pretty easy as they are straightforward if they don't feel good, they just want to feel better, and if you find a way to help them do that, then they feel better. We don't have to interject ourselves into everything that happens if we let them do it, they will, we are just there to support them as they go through it.

Do people find that difficult? You mentioned in the clinic, we always feel we need to be 'doing' something. Do you find that sometimes the human can make situations with their horse more troublesome because of their constant need to 'do'?

There are many horses that would do better from 'professional neglect', in the sense that, part of it is knowing when to step in and when not to. For example, the horse grabbing at me in the clinic. I had to step in as the horse was grabbing, so I created a boundary and stuck with it and being clear about it – which took maybe ten seconds and it was then over with. It is interesting because doing something like that and by doing it in that way people almost get offended when they see it, whereas horses are so clear cut. I could faff about with that for 2 hours, I don't know how long that horse has been doing that, but it's been a long time, or I can fix it and be done with, and we can move on without him thinking or feeling like he has to keep doing that.



Do you think people can misinterpret having a boundary for being mean?

Some people do. Some cannot bring up their energy without bringing up their emotions and so doing something like correcting a horse for grabbing at you, which is just business to me – a simple you can't do that, isn't possible for them.

Is that where the Aikido comes into play, to help with self-awareness?

Yeah if you run into someone that is coming with you with a knife for instance, you can try and be soft with them, or you can defend yourself and take the knife away and do what you need to do and use whatever you need to use, to do whatever that is - or you get stabbed. Those are your options.

The idea to me is to be as soft as you can be, which may not be as soft as you want to be.

As soft as I want to be maybe just a thought. As soft as I can be, given the situation, may be everything I've got. Always aim for as soft as you can do it, staying soft internally and soft as you can be externally.

External and internal release is that the physical release, along with the emotional release?

That is part of it, when we learn how to be internally soft regardless of what's happening. In Japanese, there is a term mizu no kokoro which means mind like still water, in martial arts training we are striving for a mind like still water, the idea being that when you look at a pond in the morning. There is no wind or anything, you can see a perfect reflection of everything on the other side of the pond, like a mirror, meaning you can see everything exactly the way it is. The idea is when your mind is clear like that – mind like still water – you can see things clearly for what they are, and you don't have to build a story around it. Going back to the horse grabbing, I don't need to make up a story around it, it just needs to stop.

I find it interesting as a spectator how quick people are to build up a narrative around their horse's behaviour, not defining it as good or bad, as it is just behaviour. Still, there is a compulsion for people to use a story to put meaning to why their horse does something.

Horse behaviour has no value to horses, it only has value when we put one on it, and that is what gets us in trouble.

I thought a really interesting question you were asked during the clinic was about how important the energy and feeling work you do is versus the intellectual/knowledge-based work you do with horses?

It is the whole package, for me, it is anyway. We have just got a new horse, and I have no real connection to him other than I saw him in a video, and at first, I passed on it. Then I went back to it and initially I thought ah, I'm not too sure, there's nothing special about this horse, but something kept bringing me back to his video. At one point in the video, the woman is cantering this horse around in a small arena, she straightens him out and heads straight for the wall. She almost hits it head-on, the horse compressed himself and stopped, turned sideways, stood for a while with his head dropped and walked away like nothing had happened, then she cantered the other way, and everything was fine. I realised THAT is what I saw, that second or two right after she almost crashed him into the wall where he stepped back and realised he was ok, and then stepped him off; that is a good horse. Out of all the videos I watched it was that 3-second clip that subconsciously registered and kept bringing me back to that horse. So that is what it is like for me, I don't know this

horse, but he seems like a really good guy to be able to walk off after something like that happens, there is something in there that was worth looking at. We brought him home, I have only worked with him once just on the ground, and I really like him. I reckon he is going to be alright. It is the whole package, it is almost like that horse kept reaching back to me, to show me what he was offering.

If you had to give our readers one piece of advice, whether about life or horses; what would it be?

Do the best you can, and chances are you will be able to do better tomorrow. The problem is we don't do the best we can, most of the time we just sell ourselves short – there is always something left in the tank, and for me, I think let's use up all the fuel today and start again tomorrow. So do the best you can. My dad always used to say, "You're going to be ok if you show up, pay attention, and you do the best you can." It is what I live by, but back then I didn't think it made any sense and I didn't think much about it, but I think a lot about it now. He also said it is a lot easier to stay out of trouble than get out of trouble.

I feel if everyone did the best they could, the world would be a better place.



If you would like to find out more about Mark and Jim, please visit:
markrashid.com | mastersonmethod.com

About ... MARK RASHID

■■■ An internationally known author and horseman known for his ability to understand the horse's point of view and solve difficult problems with communication rather than force. Mark's clinics are structured as one-on-one work with horse and rider and are immensely popular with people around the world. When Mark decided to study the martial art of aikido as a way to improve his horsemanship, he brought the same quiet determination to it that he exhibits in his work with horses. After years of practice, he has earned a second-degree black belt in Yoshinkan aikido and now teaches the "way of harmony" in the local dojo as well as in his Aikido for Horseman workshops, which are known also by the name of "Aibado."

Mark worked full time on ranches for many years gathering herds, managing stock, and training horses. When time permits, he still enjoys working on ranches near his home in Colorado as well as playing guitar professionally with his friends.

He is the author of fourteen books including: *Considering the Horse*, *Horses Never Lie*, *Life Lessons from a Ranch Horse*, *Horsemanship Through Life*, *Whole Heart*, *Whole Horse*, *Journey to Softness*, and *Finding The Missed Path*, as well as a novel, *Out of the Wild*.

I could have talked with Jim, Mark and his wife Crissi for hours, and I hope I get the chance to cross paths with them again one day.

It was amazing to watch Mark and Jim work together. To see how much was achieved without it looking like there was much going on. Mark and Jim have the same goal for the horse and complement each other with their way of working that I didn't expect, but the effect on the horses is testament to its success.