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The Equine Times

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Dear supporters of the Bergen County Horse Rescue,

Welcome to another edition of The Equine Times newsletter! In this issue, we highlight the exercise regimen of our rescues which is just another way the BCHR cares for a horse's mind, body and soul.



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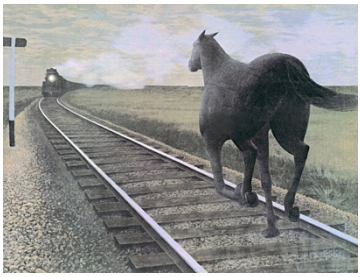

The Iron Horse

Behold the Iron Horse, the mechanical beast of black, oily linkage and hissing steam as it awakens from its slumber and moves agonizingly forward. With a roaring belly of fire, its complex musculature creaks and groans as water turns to steam and powers its pistons, the transfer of energy complete. As the cycle repeats and the frequency of its panting and clanking increases, it gains speed and momentum; till finally, its shrill whistle signals its authoritative presence and departs

The running gear – a mesmerizing, Rube Goldberg contraption of long, iron connecting rods, wheels and axle boxes – resembles the muscles in a horse's leg, expanding and contracting as it traverses a wide-open expanse of a prairie. Each rhythmic rotation of movement provides a thrust against inertia until the goliath seems no longer bound by earth's gravity, wind at its back and limitless possibilities ahead.

A fitting allegory, for if the Iron Horse was never oiled and exercised, it would eventually seize with rust. The same could be said for an actual horse. In the old days, horses would draw tractors, turn grist mills and pull carts and wagons for exercise. Today, however, the internal combustion engine has supplanted the horse as the prime mover in everyday mechanics, although it's ironic that motive force is still measured using a horse power rating!

So, without the purpose of something to pull or push, how does a horse receive its daily exercise requirement?

At the Bergen County Horse Rescue in Mahwah, N.J., exercise is an important part of a horse's daily routine for health and psychological well-being.

First, exercise is important for the horse's blood circulation, especially in the lower limbs. Horses that are confined to stalls can develop Edema, a swelling of the legs from excessive fluid build-up. And not only is exercise necessary for proper circulation, it's also imperative for proper digestion. Horses that are left in stalls can suffer psychological and physical issues.

"Horses by nature enjoy being outside and chafe at being cooped up in their stalls, where they can develop stall anxiety, disrupted eating and voiding habits," says Anne Barretta, a long-time volunteer at the rescue. "If a horse is ill, generally he will remain in his stall and, depending upon doctor's orders, will be walked several times a day."

An exercising routine for an unfit horse usually consists of simple walking for increasing periods of time for about three weeks. When the horse is reasonably fit, lunging can be employed to increase the exercise regimen. Lunging is a way of simulating riding a horse without actually doing so, and involves leading the horse in a circle until a trot or light gallop is established.

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Secondly, exercise needs to be consistent. Many horse owners exercise their horses, but not at regular intervals, which invariably leads to inconsistent feeding times, the combination of which can cause Azoturia, a condition that causes stiffness and pain in the hindquarters.

According to Barretta, only nine of the rescue horses can be ridden so for them a schedule of ring and trail rides was developed. This regimen includes a thorough grooming, physical examination and warm up and cool down period. The remaining horses that can't be ridden exercise in their turnouts, usually when the border collies Sunny and Nico chase them. However, these "chases" are currently being developed and implemented into a scheduled activity to add consistency to the horse's routine.

At the end of the day, after a cool down period, all horses are led back to their stalls to rest. As in Emily Dickinson's eloquent poem about the Iron Horse coming to rest after a day's work…

And neigh like Boanerges -
Then - prompter than a Star
Stop - docile and omnipotent
At its own stable door -

We hope you enjoyed this edition of The Equine Times. If you'd like to become a volunteer or sponsor one of our horses, please email us at info@bergencountyhorserescue.org. Your dollars go toward dental work, hay, grain and medicinal treatments, as well as general upkeep of the facilities. Any amount you can give helps our cause! Thank you.

Remember to like us on Instagram and Facebook!

BERGEN COUNTY HORSE RESCUE, 350 RAMAPO VALLEY ROAD, MAHWAH, NJ 07430 INFO@BERGENCOUNTYHORSERESCUE.ORG