

# Xenophon Horsemanship

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First  
Published

1902

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“Riding Elements to Create a Successful Buzkashi Horse” with Viscountess Juliana of Avon OWGS

“*Treatise on Horsemanship*” By Xenophon

Excerpts from (*The Art of Horsemanship* translated by M.H. Morgan PH.D 1894)

About these excerpts: There are many extant books on the subjects surrounding the care and development of the horse. Xenophon’s “*Treatise on Horsemanship*” written in approximately 350 B.C. is touted as the oldest extant work on the subject in any language. The treatise itself is delightfully simple and if you are a horseman it will probably not shed light on any new secrets. But what is evident is that men have been selecting and bringing horses along for certain jobs for thousands of years. If you have not read *The Art of Horsemanship* by Xenophon I encourage you to read it. It is widely available online as well as in Google Books. ~Juliana

**Regarding Obedience**

“A disobedient servant is of course a useless thing, and so is a disobedient army; a disobedient horse is not only useless, but he often plays the part of a very traitor.”

**On Temperament and Type**

“As I assume that the horse to be bought is meant for war, trial should be made of all the qualities that war itself puts to the test. These are jumping ditches, going over walls, breasting banks, and leaping down from them; you must try him riding up hill and down dale and along the slope. All these tests prove whether his spirit is strong and his body sound. He should not be rejected, however, if he does not perform them all very finely; as many animals fail, not from inability but from want of practice in these feats. With instruction, habit, and practice they may do all finely, provided they are sound and not vicious. “

“But you must beware of horses that are naturally shy. The over-timid let no harm come to the enemy from off their backs, and they often throw the rider and bring him into the greatest danger.”

“Horses that are ready to submit to a task the second time, after having done it once, give proof enough of high spirit.”

“To sum it all up, the least troublesome and the most serviceable to his rider in the wars would naturally be the horse that is sound-footed, gentle, sufficiently fleet, ready and able to undergo fatigue, and, first and foremost, obedient. On the other hand, horses that need much urging from laziness or much coaxing and attention from being too mettlesome, keep the rider’s hands always engaged, and take away his courage in moments of danger.”

**Regarding Welfare & Care**

“... it is well, too, that the stable should be so arranged that the horse’s food can no more be stolen out of the manger than his master’s out of the storeroom. In my opinion, the man who neglects this matter is neglecting himself; for it is plain that in moments of danger the master gives his own life into the keeping of his horse. A secure stable is a good thing, not only to prevent the stealing of grain, but also because you can easily tell when the horse refuses his feed. Observing this, you may know either that there is too much blood in him, or that he has been overworked and wants rest, or that barley surfeit or some other disease is coming on.”

“As for his mouth, you must take as much care to make it soft as you take to make his hoofs hard; and the same treatment softens a horse’s mouth that softens a man’s flesh.”

### **On Handling & Training**

“The one great precept and practice in using a horse is this,—never deal with him when you are in a fit of passion. A fit of passion is a thing that has no foresight in it, and so we often have to rue the day when we gave way to it. “

“Consequently, when your horse shies at an object and is unwilling to go up to it, he should be shown that there is nothing fearful in it, least of all to a courageous horse like him; but if this fails, touch the object yourself that seems so dreadful to him, and lead him up to it with gentleness. Compulsion and blows inspire only the more fear; for when horses are at all hurt at such a time, they think that what they shied at is the cause of the hurt.”

“The gods have bestowed upon man the gift of teaching his brother man what he ought to do by word of mouth; but it is evident that by word of mouth you can teach a horse nothing. If, however, you reward him with kindness after he has done as you wish, and punish him when he disobeys, he will be most likely to learn to obey as he ought. This rule, to be sure, may be expressed in a few words, but it holds good in every branch of the art of horsemanship.”

“If you desire to handle a good war-horse so as to make his action the more magnificent and striking, you must refrain from pulling at his mouth with the bit as well as from spurring and whipping him. Most people think that this is the way to make him look fine; but they only produce an effect exactly contrary to what they desire,— they positively blind their horses by jerking the mouth up instead of letting them look forward, and by spurring and striking scare them into disorder and danger. This is the way horses behave that are fretted by their riders into ugly and ungraceful action; but if you teach your horse to go with a light hand on the bit, and yet to hold his head well up and to arch his neck, you will be making him do just what the animal himself glories and delights in.”

### **On Close Quarters Encounters (\*gaining the goat)**

“If they come to close quarters, it is well for one to pull his adversary towards him and then to thrust him back all of a sudden; this is the way to unhorse him. But the proper thing for the man who is being pulled to do, is to urge his horse forward; for by so doing, he will be more likely to unhorse the other man than to get a fall himself.”