



Lucas and Karen talk with Equine VIP

by Susan Ashbrook,, owner Equine VIP

things that we both enjoyed doing and were mutually fun. They are a natural outcome of happy exploration - a very reciprocal and interactive activity - not really an end in themselves.

With a solid foundation of trust, confidence and love you can then teach anything in a very effortless and spontaneous way.

The bond between Karen Murdock and her horse, Lukas "The World's Smartest Horse", is abundantly clear. Lukas has an extreme desire to please Karen and Karen considers Lukas a dear friend. If they were a married couple, they would finish each other's sentences! Karen bought Lukas as a "project" horse and quickly discovered he had a natural curiosity to learn tricks, all at liberty. Lukas and Karen have appeared on NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, HLN and are our featured Equine VIP this month.

your results will be strongly impacted by your abilities to develop a systematic yet fluid program. I use shaping, clicker training (my voice and whistles being the clicker) and positive reinforcement

along with intermediary markers that signal the direction that I want.

This combination has the advantage of combining two major training components into the most powerful and effective system that I have ever seen. I developed this style over

many years after studying everything from circus to jumping,

barrel racing to Dressage and across all species including dogs, birds, marine mammals and zoo animals.

LUKAS AKA "JUST ASK MIKE" NEVER HAD MUCH OF A CAREER AS A THOROUGHBRED. TELL US HOW YOU FOUND LUKAS?

After three unmemorable races and two bowed tendons as a two year old, Lukas left the track and changed hands several times. I saw him listed for sale in the local Horsetrader magazine as a "Green project horse." His then owner had rescued him out of a yard out of pity. She described him to me as neglected and emaciated and his tail being a "solid bat of mud and debris." Her plan had been to rehabilitate him and incorporate him into her amateur jumping program, but after almost two years "he still wasn't fitting in."

DID YOU KNOW HE WAS "THE WORLD'S SMARTEST HORSE" WHEN YOU FIRST MET LUKAS?

Not exactly - he was quite a handful to begin with (which is why I let his mane grow long, a natural bucking strap!) What I did notice was an intense curiosity, endless eagerness to learn and a total absorption in our games. All of our lessons being at liberty (free/no equipment), he showed that he preferred learning to even eating. When I bring out his desk he nickers, when he gets an answer right and feels especially proud of himself he'll actually quiver and pose as if to say "Look at me - I'm great!" He defers the treat while he's basking in his accomplishment - something I haven't seen before in a horse.

YOU WERE A PSYCHIATRIC NURSE FOR 25 YEARS, DID YOUR CAREER PROMPT YOU TO TRY AND TRAIN LUKAS TO DO TRICKS?

My background has certainly influenced my approach: the positive effects of eliciting cooperation in a gentle, non-coercive manner while maintaining the dignity and individuality of others is extremely important, in my opinion. The tricks evolved from our play - it was a matter of finding

PATIENCE AND LOVE ARE YOUR TWO BIGGEST TRAINING TOOLS. CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW THOSE HAVE WORKED WITH LUKAS?

Yes, very important - patience and love form the basis of this system, but not in a conditional or calculating way whatsoever. The patience is to allow the animal (or person!) time to absorb and process the lesson - in this manner the learning is internalized and the student learns to learn. The beauty becomes apparent in subsequent sessions: you can pick up where you left off without tension and the progress is genuine and lasting. The love has to do with having the best interests of others at heart - definitely sensed by other creatures. The techniques that I use should also be mentioned here to give a clear picture that



WHAT IS HIS REPERTOIRE OF TRICKS?

Smile, Yes, No, Kiss (dry and "wet"), Fetch, Pose, Blindfold, Catch, Yawn, Wave, Pedestal Work, Spanish Walk (forward and backward), Stay and Come, Going to a Mark, Jambet (three legged pivot), Obeissance, Passage, Bow, Crossing his legs (front), Lay Down (and I sit on him), Feet Together (front and back), Hide and seek, Acting Lame, Pushing a Cart, Rear, Spelling, Counting, Identifying Shapes, Discriminating Colors, Object Permanence, Spatial Relationships,

Proportion (bigger/smaller), Same/Different, Absentness. What is most amazing to me are not the tricks themselves, but Lukas' extreme desire to please me and his ability to do



everything at liberty (free/without any equipment). I don't really think of him as a "trick horse" - more as a very willing friend that I can always count on.

LUKAS IS AN AMBASSADOR FOR THE CALIFORNIA THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS ASSOCIATION. WHAT IS HIS ROLE AS AMBASSADOR?

Lukas is the Spokeshorse for TROTT (Training Horses Off the Racetrack) and the poster-boy for the California Thoroughbred Breeders' Association (both non-profits). In these roles, our mission is to educate and promote awareness and responsible horse ownership.

LUKAS IS THE STAR OF AN EDUCATIONAL VIDEO? WHERE CAN WE SEE THE VIDEO?

Oak Tree Racing Foundation funded a grant to the C.T.B.A. for an extraordinary web segment on Lukas and interview session with me. It is currently being edited and will be posted on the new C.T.B.A. web-site in the near future. In the meantime, Lukas' you-tube videos (www.youtube.com/profile?user=PlayingwithLukas#grid/uploads) are all available for free public viewing and enjoyment.

LUKAS HAS QUITE A FOLLOWING ON YOUTUBE AND FACEBOOK AND HAS APPEARED ON A NUMBER OF TELEVISION SHOWS. CAN YOU TELL US SOME OF THE SHOWS AND APPEARANCES WHERE LUKAS HAS PERFORMED? HAVE YOU BEEN SURPRIZED BY THE INTEREST IN LUKAS?

Thank you, yes, Lukas has been on NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, HLN, Equisearch, RFD-Radio, Pet Life Radio and the Associated Press released a feature story on him. His story has also been in countless magazines, on-line sites, newspapers and newsletters, blogs and forums. He has appeared at the Grand Prix HITS Desert Circuit Horse Show, The Equine Affaire, and our next scheduled event is at the America's Family Pet Expo at the Orange County Fairgrounds April 16 - 18. We have been invited to Kentucky and Florida as well, but we'll need to come up with a business partner/sponsor to manage such expenses in the future.

BESIDES BEING AN EQUINE PERFORMER, WE UNDERSTAND LUKAS IS AN AUTHOR AS WELL. "PLAYING WITH LUKAS" REALLY SHOWS THE UNIQUE BOND YOU

SHARE WITH LUKAS AND IS A TRAINING GUIDE. TELL US WHERE WE CAN FIND AND READ THE BOOK?

"Playing With Lukas" is available at Lulu (www.lulu.com) as an e-book or a print version. It is a tribute to horses, hope and happiness. I am currently working on the Training Manual and expect to have it finished this summer.

YOU AND LUKAS HAVE BEEN ADVOCATES FOR EXPANDING HORSE AWARENESS AND OWNERSHIP. WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Our mission has several purposes: to show the happy results of kind training and how wonderful and smart animals are, and to include children as they are our future. This calling has to do with my firm belief that we are made kind by being kind and my hope is for Lukas' message to go far beyond the barn. By practicing being responsible and respectful this will create the qualities that are necessary to enhance and improve our lives and that of our fellow inhabitants.

DO YOU HAVE A WEBSITE WE CAN FOLLOW TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU AND LUKAS WILL BE DOING IN THE FUTURE?

Lukas' Home Page: www.playingwithlukas.com

E-mail: info@playingwithlukas.com

Lukas' Videos:

www.youtube.com/profile?user=PlayingwithLukas#grid/uploads

Lukas' Facebook Fan Page:

www.facebook.com/playwithlukas

Lukas' Twitter Page: www.twitter.com/playing-wlukas



2008 - 3H SLANT, DRESSING ROOM, REMOVABLE REAR TACK



2008 - 2H STRAIGHT, WALK-THRU DOOR INTO DRESSING RM, MANGERS, SADDLE STORAGE UNDER MANGERS, GRAVEL GUARD AROUND FRONT, REMOVABLE CENTER GATE



2009 - 2 HORSE STRAIGHT, WALK THROUGH DOOR INTO DRESSING ROOM, MANGERS, SADDLE STORAGE UNDER THE MANGERS, GRAVEL GUARD AROUND THE FRONT, REMOVABLE CENTER GATE



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