



My year round with horses

Like perhaps all people I do not like preaching or lecturing. Well, preaching and lecturing is not the same as teaching. Even learning is something I do not like but I know that it is necessary. After all I chose a profession in which I will have to learn till the very end of my life. What more, all our life is actually an attempt to learn something. It is up to us how attentive and responsive pupils we are going to be. I am deliberately not using the word „diligent“ because the way we perceive stimuli from our life has nothing to do with diligency. I confess that I have not tried to lecture anyone as well as I have not tried to teach. First, I was a little bit influenced by my mother who herself did not want to teach, and, as a popular actor, being offered a teacher position at the School of Art she did not accept the offer answering that she would hardly be able to judge anyone's gift and perhaps affect his or her life in a hard way by a possible false judgement. Second, I do not know what and which way to imprint things into the brains of my possible pupils and I also do not like to be disliked, as mentioned above. And last but not least I am too busy and there is no time to teach in my schedule as well as I have no teaching system.

Nevertheless I have decided to write these words because I was feeling the need to tell you something. There were several impulses for it. First, it was Mr. Dalibor Gregor, author of the pictures in this book who brought me to this busy activity. Second, it was the fact that after many years of sharing my household with my dogs and seven years since I got my first horse I started to feel the need to share my feelings with somebody who might be interested in. To share feelings that might help him or her to go the way of mutual understanding as well as to enable to avoid mistakes I did and am still doing frequently. And third - I would like to help this way those many unhappy animals who have to live with unhappy human beings.

It took many years untill I understood some things and proved that they work. I also happened to read several books that showed me that there is someone else who already had described experiences which I have gained in such a hard way. And, that that person possibly came to that experiences in a quite different way. Well, I also understood, that it is the path of mutual trust, respect, learning each other and friendship resulting of it. And fourth, I have the feeling that people less and less regard each other and therefore – less regard themselves, even though it is not so apparent at the first look.



And –that they fail to grasp the essential part they are supposed to play in this world. That they should learn how to be better. I came to this idea seeing some fellow citizens who getting involved in the policy and public service they develop a feeling that the general public would be here to serve them and help them to accomplish their ideas and they failed to realize that it should be the other way. The thing is, they are no feudal lords the ordinary man would have to admire and fear from them. On the contrary, They are at service to the „ordinary man“ and they should be very modest and attentive to make the life more easy to those by whom they were elected and by whose hard-earned tax money they are supported.

This problem does not concern just the politicians. Subsequently it concerns anyone. If you go to the restaurant you want the waiter to be nice to you – you are paying him or her for it. And – vice versa – you can do it more easy for him or her if you e.g. smile and if you are nice. It does not cost you any money.

I am not going to pretend that I would not know that most people in my country recognize me if seeing me. And I must say that the waste majority of people are very nice to me. They make the impression to be happy to see me. I try to respond to it by being nice myself. Smiling, at least.

Well, I know, that they know me as actor from the TV, they are not nice without reason. But, nevertheless, would there be a reason just to smile at a strange person? Or even help him or her as much as we are can? Or – at least – not to do any harm? As I was a little boy I hated being called with my family name. I wished to be called Vašku (the informal way of Vaclav). My family name is quite good (Vydra means otter) but I found calling me Vašku more nice and friendly. And later, when I grew adult, if it was on a formal occasion and I was called with my second name, I wanted to be called „Mr. Vydra“. I am quite astonished hearing in TV or reading in newspapers: Havel (the Czech president) delivered to hospital... Klaus makes a visit abroad... Paroubek nominates Rath... Vydra shows nothing special again in this part... Would it be too difficult to insert the little „Mr.“ to the space before these family names? Certainly not. Anyway, it is the matter of elementar propriety, matter of mutual dignity to use this little word whomever we are speaking about. And I may demand the same between the human beings and the other creatures as well; aren't you demanding too much, Vydra?



Recently, something very unpleasant happened to me. I was going to fly to Canada via Amsterdam (Netherland) and New York. Five days before the flight i learned that a U.S. visa is necessary just for the transit in N.Y. So i phoned the U.S. Embassy and they sent me per fax the necessary forms to fill in and invited me for Thursday for an interview. I came in time, after half an hour it was my turn and after another half an hour the US officer, smiling, told me that it was an honour for them to provide me a U.S. visa. Frankly, I was pleased. He flattered me. Two days later one hour prior to the scheduled departure I was standing at the Prague International Airport. The flight from Prague was delayed by more than one hour and we had just about 20 minutes for the transfer in Amsterodam. The airport of Amsterodam is quite large but I was running and crossed it in 10 minutes, went through the security check and arrived in front of our flight gate. And then, a very strict female airport officer emerged in front of me and told me that the flight was closed. Ir shocked me but I started to demand in a polite but assertive way a reversing of that vicious dicision. In the meantime an elderly American couple arrived running at the gate and started to demand the same. The airport officer, a lady or young lady, who knows, showed in her face a mixed expression of severity, compassion, stubbornness and, I dare to say, being pissed off, she pointed her finger at a passing-by man telling that this was the US officer who had closed the flight.. I started screaming at him: „Mister, mister...mister!!“. The „Mister“ turned, looked at me, showed me a cold face and then he took a slow stride towards the aircraft. I was completely helpless and consternated. Due to this missing I missed all the connection flights and actually my whole journey schedule. And the „Mister“ did not mind at all. Well, the door of the plane was open and he could have helped us just by giving a signal with his hand. He did not. He was not interesting in us. Two American retired people and one desperately hysterical, a poor English speaking clown. And then, it was just there, the idea came into my mind: well, the officers were supposed to be here for us! To ensure our comfort payed by our money! But, in the reality, they were behaving as if we were some kind of begging people who want to worm at the last moment into the officers' own aircraft and spend vacancies at the company's costs. They (the officials) were blaming the terrorism. But, is it not such kind of behaviour, that awakes terrorism?



At that moment I remembered my horses. Demon, whom I left in a village where we were participating in a show and from where my friend Pavel Korecký took me directly to the airport and then he went back to the village to transport Demon back home.

I remembered how my horses behave to me and how I treat them. I remembered Ferda, my dog. I saw in my mind how they try to understand me, to satisfy me. They are far better than that Mr. Officer and the Ms from the airport. And they do not care whether I am a famous actor or just a simple man speaking a foreign language. I would like to ask you to think about your coexistence with your animals and not only with them. I am afraid that I used to appear to my horse and dog like that Mr. Officer too.

If someone suspects me of teaching or even instructing someone I must protest against it and just point out that I am just trying to explain my thoughts that could show someone the way I consider the right one. I would be a really poor teacher because I am permanently short of time and time is absolutely necessary for teaching. On the other hand I have to say that I try not to be in a hurry when I am with my horses which means that I set a goal that I am able to meet in time. I have been inspired by books written by Monty Roberts. I have learned that a human being must at first understand and educate him- or herself before he or she can see some results of work with horses.

I would like to stop for a moment: Work with horses. I think it is quite obsolete and misleading phrase. Horses are mostly not used for hard work but for pleasure nowadays. And this pleasure should not be just one-sided but it should be double-sided. I really appreciate people working with horses, but it is all about the feeling. I work at the theater too - I do my job. I have never said: "I am going to my work", though. Well, I do not say that I am going to enjoy myself either, although I know I must enjoy myself if I want the audience to be enjoyed by my performance. The relationship is very similar. This is the only way how a relationship between an actor and a spectator can be established as well as the only way how a relationship between a man and a horse can be established. This relationship is based on mutual confidence, understanding and joy. Joy not just for what we achieved together, but how we did achieve this. We must take advantage of having some human brains. and we must use it for the dialogue between a man and a horse. After all we expect the same behaviour from him as well. We do not want him to be violent against us and we should not use violence against him either. We accept that he is stronger than we are. Do we accept that he is more clever too? If I meet a smarter creature than me, I will obey it and try to learn something from him or her.

I will not hit it, of course. And this creature if it is willing to lead a dialogue with me will not beat and torture me when I do not understand it immediately. That just rude persons do. I hope no one of us would like to be a rude person. On the other hand, all of us certainly have had this experience. We may have lost patience and tried to "sort things out" by needless violence. It may have been even successful at the time. But was it worth all the suffering and remorse afterwards? If you have tried to find the cause of this behaviour, it is good. If not, there is time you should maybe learn something from your horse.

Have a try to ask your horse whether he is satisfied and fine but in "his" way. Not in the "human" way. I am sure, you can recognize if he is desperate, angry or resigned. Have a try to find out the cause of this and to eliminate it. You would certainly do the same in a human communication. Now I would like to recommend to you the book written by Hiltrud Strasser, Dr. Med. Vet. "A Lifetime of Soundness". Do not be confused about this title. It is not just about feet. Have a try to give back to horses the most valuable thing - their way of life under condition that we can provide at least.

Certainly, there is no doubt That a slave can not be a good friend or an employee. He will always be just a manpower who would do just what he is forced to do without any pleasure or conviction. Only a good partner with the same intention can contribute to your goal. There are certainly many methods how to train horses. There are certainly many good methods how to treat dogs. There are many good ways how to educate people. But I consider that the most important thing is to set up a relationship based on friendship, confidence and understanding. A relationship in which you feel happy together and a temporary indisposition does not necessarily mean any aversion to cooperation. The key is in your head and heart.



If someone wants to ride a horse for the first time, he or she usually asks: "Where is the brake?" "How can I turn to the right or to the left? The usual answer is: „Pull the reins if you want to stop, or pull either left or right one if you want to turn“. I do not want to suspect anyone of not knowing what the reins are for, but I would like to remark something: Reins are attached to the bridle bit. It is mostly a metal snaffle or a curb bit which is placed in the horse's mouth. I have even heard that a horse has a special space between his teeth. As my mare had a foal I started to think, why ever should I put the peace of metal into her beautiful, soft mouth as I do not pull the rein any more. I put the bridle bit away and promised her to fill her mouth just with carrot from now on. Since then I started to use a head collar (the best one is Parelli's one) Nelly, my mare rewarded me for this many times having proved that all what I want from her to do she actually wants to do and that it is not a bothering duty for her. She wants to please me I suppose. I started to understand that I must not be just an owner riding her and enjoying the world from a horse's saddle (the most beautiful view) but I must be a friend and partner too and each of us have our own space in this relationship. These spaces must be linked with trust and understanding and not with fear and rein. And then came the time and I took her head collar off and we jumped over show jumping obstacles. It is a really beautiful feeling. We started to ride together into woods being followed by Navarra, Nelly's foal.

In the last autumn I experienced an unbelievable story.

I left Navarra at home and took Nelly for a four hours long ride. I reached a farm 13km off home, put Nelly in a paddock had a bowl of soup and then set off back home. It was getting dark and when we went into wood and I had to go through ravine with a pond and pathway with low branches it was totally dark. I had to get down from Nelly groping in the dark over roots and narrow track slowly forward Nelly followed me patiently. We reached a road, crossed the bridge the over Vltava river and I grew a bit proud of myself walked down the road and came back to wood again. I realized my mistake almost immediately because it was pitch dark around us again. So I groped my way to the creek, crossed it, went to the place where I expected to find the crossing of paths but I did not find any. For a while I tried to climb a steep slope, sliding down again and then I found myself standing helplessly, pondering whether to take the way back to the main road. Suddenly I felt Nelly's head on my back, whose nostrils pushed me softly but firmly along a path leading stright alongside the gorge with the mentioned creek on the bottom. The path was quite plane and led to a crossing where there was the next turn towards home. When I arrived at it stumbling, I could not find it again, milling around the trees. But this time Nelly pushed me in a determined way up to the proper road back home. We emerged out of the forrest and I was filled with a mighty wave of love towards her. I was feeling like a little boy holding his mother's hand, knowing, that he can not loose his way being with her.



At that moment, my mare and me, we became partners and friends, belonging to each other, having one common way, and, whatever reason she had to do what she did, perhaps being hungry or hurrying back home to her foal, one thing was sure: she did not deserted me in the woods at the moment when my underdevelopped perception failed to help me find the way out. She did it out of her own impulse, never having been trained to do it. Well, if I had been on her back and this had ocured I would have taken it normal. But, this way, for me it was an evidence that our relation is something more than an usual relation between a rider and a horse, but, that it is a friendship between two quite different creatures, each of both having quite a different values, different needs, diet, different ideas how to enjoy herself, how to live, two creatures who meet each other on they travel on the Earth – Earth that might be beautifull. And I came to the idea that it would be great if we return our friends at least a piece of their freedom first and, second, to design in a new way the time we spend with them so that they would not perceive it as drawback, sufferyng or bullying but, on the contrary, that they would consider it as a pleasant varying of their quite monotonous life in the space we provide them – even if it is as large as possible, it is still too narrow for them, moreover, they share it with a herd set by the Man, not chosen naturally by themselves. Well, here I am actually speaking of the best achievable state of things, because nowadays most of the horses spend the essential portion of their time in cages. Cages, called boxes, which are – in the better case – up to 10 square meters large.



Recently many TV viewers were pretty shocked as we showed them a lady who was keeping her dog in her appartement - and the dog was locked in a transport box. I guess she was disqualified to keep this dog afterwards. Of course, it is horrible and unacceptable to confine and keep a dog permanently in a cage. Now: does anyone consider the fact, that, related to the body size, the stable boxes provide the horses even less space than a transport box provides to a dog?. And -what more – there is one more important difference – the dogs are designed by the nature to sleep most of their day whereas the horses, on the contrary, spend their day moving. And – we purchase dogs and horses because we love them, don't we?

If we purchase a horse we mostly decide according various criterias: These criterias are sometimes good, sometimes less good but I think that we never take into consideration whether we are liked by the horse we chose. In the old days the mates were chosen this way, the parents chose a bride for their son, they set the marriage and the newly married couple were suppose to deal with this fact. That's why I think it is necessary to get the confidence of that four-legged creature whom we have chosen to spend the life journey together with us.

For a long time I used to keep saying that I would not want to have a horse on my own. It was convenient to me to visit various stables and lend horses. Of course I did not want to make any close relationships to them. I just wanted to ride. But, despite of this, in three cases a certain relationship came into its being. I had that feeling, at least.

For the first time, it was almost 30 years ago. I was a novice rider at riding centre nearby the town of Młnik, where a friend of mine kept her horse in a livery stable. The horse was an young gelding called Noricus. We kept going there for two years and one day she asked me to bring the horse to another stable which was some 30 km away. I was delighted by her proposal and agreed. So, one afternoon in autumn we set out for the trip.

After an hour we found out that we were going in the right direction but we were going alongside the false side of the river. We had to cross it but the nearest river bridge was too far away. And I had to act in a theatre the same evening. I descended to the river bank and found there a little ferry boat and the ferryman's house. I knocked the door and the ferrywoman appeared.

I said: „Good afternoon, can you bring me and my horse over the river?“

She asked: „Oh, what's the horse's weight?“

I said: „Well, how much load can your boat take on the board?“

„About twenty people“.

„It should be sufficient“,

I said: „So, will you take us across the river?“

„Humm, yes...“



So, I take Noricus on the reins, went onto a little platform leading to the boat, he following me, then we entered the boat and it set for crossing the river. As we were in the middle of the current the farrywomen said: „I have never transported a horse with my boat. So, when getting off, mind the platform at the opposite bank. It is a little bit foul. Might break down underneath the horse's weight“.

I had not much knowledge but one thing was sure: we have to avoid the platform. I asked: „Can you bring us close to the opposite bank?“ She said: „Yes, I can, as close as possible“. We came to a place about 10 meters off the river bank, I jumped off and the horse followed me. The water was just about one foot deep, so just a little water came into my boots and Noricus got a minor scratch on his pastern – just a little. I wawed at the ferry woman and we were over – not only literally but symbolically as well. I mounted the horse and we continued over fields, villages, through a very narrow street with many dogs barking at us from all sides – it was not easy to persuade the horse to enter it. Finally we arrived at a littel pull-up facility at a short section of something what was supposed to be a highway of that days. There was just one hour left to my theatre performance. Both of us, the the horse as well as me, were tired. Then, my friends came by ca, theyr took the horse and I was hurrying to the theatre.





I was proud on myself as well as I was proud on the horse. Even though I took it for granted from his side. Even much later I realized that this had been a fantastic performance from his side. And, I realized, that because of having no experiences we were acting in a relaxed way. Neither the horse nor me had any doubts and therefore a mutual trust developed.

For the second time it was much later because I seized riding for various reasons (job, family). Then, around 1993, during my vacancies, I got on the horseback again and re-started to ride more or less regularly. It was nearby the town of Jílovišt where I lent a mare called Romana and I was allowed to ride her on myself in the surrounding hills. It was there where I started to understand that a relation between a horse and a rider develops best if they are alone in a forest, not being disturbed by anyone and they can and they often have to concentrate just on each other. I loved Romana very much and I learned from her a lot, even though I did not realize it yet by that time.

And, the third horse was the mare called Viky from the village of Nedvzí. I did long rides with her, we explored the surrounding countryside and discovered various paths in the area of Slapy Lake. And there I met people who were going to change my approach to horses. They were Mrs. Helena Korecká and her husband Pavel Korecký and they were managing the farm. One day they left and I started looking for them. I found them running their own farm in the village of Hn vší. I started to ride at their farm. I liked it there very much, the lovely countryside, happy horses, spending whole days in large corrals. I rode a thoroughbred called Grimas there for some time but during one ride his old racing injury appeared again, he could not be ridden and there was no other horse at the farm for me to ride. The vet who treated Grimas told me that he would not be a horse for me anyway. He mentioned that there was a man at a nearby place who was going to sell a mare that would match me. The place was a lovely, newly rebuilt farm where in a tiny, dark box a brown mare with windgalls on her legs was standing. It was Nelly. I would have bought her even if she had been completely lame. Two days later, on the Easter, I rode her to the next place – the farm in Hn vší. It was about 35 kilometers far. We were accompanied by our dog called Axe and after about five hours we arrived at her new place, being quite groggy. Before we started the journey – I was already sitting on her back – I asked the previous owner whether there is something I should know of the mare before starting the journey. I was advised that there would be nothing special, just she would sometimes be reluctant to cross a creek. After an hour of riding we came to the first creek. She did not want to cross. So I dismounted and walked first. When I was on the other side Nelly decided to go and jumped towards my back. Fortunately she did not stamp on me and the creek was crossed. And there were about ten more creeks on our way. After crossing the third one everything was going smoothly. And, suddenly, I had a horse. It was my horse. The horse was belonging me and I was belonging to the horse.

If we bind someone to us, we are responsible for, Saint Exupery said. I would leave neither my dog, nor my horse. She knew it. All at once I did not want to see other places and to ride other horses. And we started to teach one another. I was riding her with more power then, that means that I wanted to unnecessarily have it one my way. I was not listening to Nelly's attempts to tell me something.



Now I know, that it is very important not to be pushy, because it takes some time for a horse to understand, what we are asking for. If we want less at beginning, we get more later. Once it flashed through my mind that the less we want her to do for us, the more she actually does. We just have to want it strictly. You will grow together, trying to accomplish your goals and your confidence and trust will increase. I have never liked a riding hall. I was bored and horses seemed bored too. On the top of that, it is a hard work all over again. I think that riding in woods, fields and ravines is more amusing and educative for both of you. One friend of mine, the French globetrotter André Slavkov told me that instead of brushing my horse, take him to a round pen for ten minutes. He was right. If you have some difficulty with communication between you and your horse, you should buy Monty Robert's book and a round pen. It is a fantastic device. Just try to be patient and calm. It does not go easily sometimes, but if we really love our horses we have to try again and again. The Czech actor Jan Werich once said: We can not win the struggle against stupidity, we must never give up the fight, though. I add to this - we must not forget that sometimes it is hidden inside us.

I had a great experience with many trips from one place to another one, just me and my horse. I rode Nelly to Hn vřín and a couple of years later with my most recent horse Demon, whom I took from Hn vřín over to various places, e.g. to K ivoklát, to Nezabudice, Bradá v dv r. I know that it is always hard to relocate a horse from his familiar environment where he is accustomed to this and from the herd he is part of. I wanted to make it more pleasant for Demon on our first way home. I wanted to tell him that we were going there and would be riding there together. I will be bond between environment and the herd. I think it is very important. A horse senses everything. Our mood, feelings, fears, determination and mostly our relation between him and us. Our love, anger and disinterest. He needs that we know it and then he will do anything for us, even if it's not so wise from his point of view. We must learn from each other. You will have noticed that I present neither scheme, nor method for communication with a horse. I am sorry but I think that both scheme and method are in your head. You have to think. Think about your horse and about yourself. Every horse is different and every man is different too. This method is in your head and in your fantasy. There is one thing I consider very important. To allow horses a greater space and a physical activity together with other horses. I could not have horses at a place without pasture land (there is alternative arrangement - outdoor boxes with paddocks etc) I could not stand that he is locked up somewhere just waiting for someone to take him out. Then, full of energy he could put in jeopardy himself, other horses and even a man.

I do not want to go into details as this book is supposed to be just an inspiration with beautiful pictures of my horses and myself taken by Dalibor Gregor, yet I would like to mention that jeopardy what I had been talking about can be far worse if a horse is shod. I am convinced that we can avoid a necessary evil. Having read the book written by Hiltrud Strasser, Dr.M.V. „A Lifetime of Soundness“ I was completely persuaded. I can cordially recommend this book to you. Thanks to it we live quite a happy life. If horses have a good quality of life they do not need horseshoes. It was invented by people putting them into stables for the own comfort and honor and glory as it is written in the „Horse's Prayer“. I think that now is time to take off the horseshoes and make the horses happier and healthier too. A friend of mine (hope I can call him this way) Standa Blecha – by the time this book is being written the only one Strasser hoofcare practitioner in my country - once told me interesting words: The horse became an instrument of the Man's pride and this is his bad luck. That is true and it will not change. Have a try to give him a little piece of freedom to make it up at least. If we really listen to his own prayer, we might hear some words about freedom, pastures and life in a herd as well, I am sure. As I bought Demon I would not believe that I would be able to ride him without a head collar. He was nervous, fast and very sensitive and careful to his own body. He did not like jumping, because he trusted neither me, nor himself. He did not jump over any barrier until he looked at it thoroughly. Then he decided to overcome it. Somewhat He must have been betrayed by someone. I decided not to turn him off the jump. We approached the obstacle - and he stopped. I let him take a look at it, then we made some back up strides and negotiated the jump again. He jumped. And so proceeded from one obstacle to another. Of course using a head collar. I started to take him to public trainings, then we passed the license exam and we started trials to get over the one meter limit. I would not expect that the last ten centimeters were going to be such a big problem. Allways, all of the sudden, Demon did not like either people or profile of an obstacle and mostly the fourth jump was our last one. I was not angry, I understood him giving him a plenty of time. I knew he could jump. At exhibition in Man tén we jumped 140cm. It has been for us unbeatable limit so far. To be honest, I have not tried to overcome it yet. He did not have any problems with other horses at hunts and Hubert's. Once we had ended at third barrier and when I was passing by onlookers, a "horse trainer" told me: „If you lend me him for a month, you will be surprised how he is jumping“.





I wanted to tell him that it can not be done- he would probably mock me, or that I myself teach him to jumping, although I did not know how to do that, so I just uttered: „No, thank you" and thought I would not lend that man even a sledge.

The problem with jumping continued during several next show jumping competitions and I started feeling that Demon was blocked, having the idea that it just should be that way. And, I was making mistakes as well – the rider's mistakes, which were difficult to correct for me, because of being a self-learner. Well, the riding hall... But, me and Demon knew each other so well that I knew that he was finding escape ways knowing from his side that I did not have any tool to make him overcome this block.

And there was the next showjumping where we got stuck at a „scarecrow" again and I got a healthy anger; borrowed a pair of spurs in the theatre at which I was acting, brought Demon to a place where there was a permanent show jumping field, I constructed a course consisting of several „scarecrows" and after a short warm up we – Demon and me – started. I did a backup of several yards, then used the forward aid and at the moment just before the taking off point I spured him slightly. Demon was not expecting this from me and was so surprised that he jumped the obstacle leaving enough of space over it. And, he jumped all the other „scarecrows". And this was the breakthrough. I put the spurs on several more times but did not use them for some time.

After a period of no jumping we went for a show jumping again and I asked a friend of mine who was a horse trainer: „Shall I put on spurs?" He said: „Put them on, just to be on the safe side". And then – in front of an obstacle – I probably spured Demon more than necessary and Demon stopped.

As if he was telling me: „That was too much! I did not deserve it!" So, I apologized. I put off the spurs and now I even do not remember any more where they are. And then, I came upon the idea to bring Demon to the show jumping fields some days prior to competition and exercise them there. When it was far from my home I stayed overnight. And it worked. We even brought home some winner's ribbons from time to time. I think we made an important step towards a mutual trust. And I am just going to do my best not to disappoint him. But I expect him the same. And I must say that he really does his best. We are trying jumping over chairs and we even have done an official basic level show jumping competition with no head collar. I pulled the head collar away from Demon's head, the starting bell rung and we started. After five jumps the bell was ringing again, the reason was clear – we were eliminated, but still we continued jumping the course with no penalty points. The main reason for our elimination was the fact that the horse was not bridled. Never mind. I was extremely happy. Because I started to go to competitions not only to compete but also to show that it is possible to jump with a horse with just a head collar and that it is not necessary to fight the horse and prove one's superiority by using various tack that is not always pleasant to the horses.



Well, I would not be accused of condemning those people who use such tack. Not at all. I just would like to show them the way further. Or – another way. To show them that such tack is not necessary and that there is something that can bring you more pleasure: it is the harmony with a happy horse which does out of joy what you want him to do or, which at least, does it to make you happy and not because of being forced to.

And it is even not necessary to exercise a horse too frequently. I am a very busy man and have unfortunately always a shortage of time. Because of having four horses I can not give them too much of my time. But principally I know that it is necessary to provide them the possibility to live their own life. To achieve that they are happy and good-tempered and this is not possible without providing them enough of movement and contact with other horses. Because nowadays there are not many people who live with their horses and spend whole days and nights with them to make them busy and taking the part of the horses herd.

I wonder where the idea comes from that horses enjoy being inside the stable. Maybe because they get their food there. Well, the horse is not born for a jail. He was born for plains and grassland and his entire body is designed for a permanent movement and for being free. The horse needs freedom to be sure that in case of a danger he can use his most efficient mean of survival – the flight.

A horse whose needs are met is good-tempered and has no need to run away with you on his back or try to get rid of you and it is up to you which way you choose and what you are going to demand from your horse. Whether jumping, dressage, western riding or just to rove through the countryside, it's the matter of your skills and your time. I myself enjoy jumping and especially jumping over various nature obstacles in the countryside. Therefore I set our mutual efforts in this direction. But I spent most of the time with my horses just riding on various terrain, climbing hills and condition the horses this way. We jump only from time to time because I take all my four horses for the rides.

The same way I removed the bridle bit years ago, now I am step by step removing reins and head collars. But this will probably be possible only if I ride just two horses at one time. If I take more than two horses the hand horses would let the saddlehorse „do the hard job“ while themselves choosing their favourite areas of rich grass and just grazing. Well, if I want to make a progress I have to choose just one horse and make a single ride. This way it used to be with Nelly first and then gradually with all my horses. One day I was riding Demon in the hills, heading home, I had the feeling that he was responding well to my seat and voice and that we already know each other enough. I took the head collar off his head. And – nothing occurred. We came quietly walking home. Next time I tried it trotting and then even cantering. These were the first steps to try jumping this way.

One day I tried it in front of spectators for the first time. It was during a CSIO competition – don't be afraid, we were just making the entertainment. I was jumping over two chairs and after that I pulled off the head collar and jumped with Demon three obstacles in a row to the right hand bow. After a year I tried it again and this time I was going to jump the complete show jumping field. It was during the „General Custer Memorial“, an event. about which I am going to tell you more later. So, we did it – with just a makeshift neck collar made of spare reins. One time I dropped the makeshift neckstrap and had to stop because of being unable to explain Demon clearly which obstacle to take. I pick up the neck strap, we continued and completed the showjumping.

After this event. It was just a matter of time till we tried it in a competition and then in a Hubertus autumn ride at Kladruby. This time within a field of horses. And I can assure you, it works.

I have not mentioned the other two of my horses yet. One of them is Navarra, foaled by Nelly. I took her with us when I rode Nelly since she was two months old. She ran with us in free. As she grew bigger I started to take her as a hand horse on a leading rope. Sometimes it was a problem, several times she almost bruised my leg as she tried to be close to her mother. But she learned to respond to my voice aids that I gave her mother. Nelly responded to my voice aids and Navarra did the same simultaneously. Later I mounted her and was surprised seeing that she knew what „whoa“ or „back up“ meant. As she was a year and a half there was a little child which wanted to try riding. I put the child on Navarra's back because I knew that she would not mind. She trusted me fully. I led her in a circle and she was actually started this way. I waited till she was three and half years old for mounting her myself for the first time. Concerning the saddle she was used to it much earlier, by the age of two.





Now, I was sitting on her back and nothing happened. She was just standing. The thing was she was not responding to my leg aids, she turned her head back just to find out why I was digging her with my legs.

Therefore I arranged the things in a different way: I saddled her and we went for a ride out.

I was sitting on Nelly's back and on the way home I stopped, set the mare and the filly exactly side by side and then transferred my body from the Nelly's saddle upon the Navarra's back. Holding the long leading rope of Nelly I let her go in front of us. I patted Navarra on her back behind my own back and Navarra walked on. Then we overtook Nelly and went ahead. On the way home there was a meadow and we trotted a little and the goal was met. Navarra understood. She had been started without having realized it or taking it too much to her heart. As it were fully normal for her. She sorted it out the same way she saw her mother do it. And she was the only one of my horses she never had a bridle bit in her muzzle. Now she is five years old.

Unfortunately she was shod already by the age of half a year in order to „correct the conformation“. I believed then that it was necessary. Now I know that I made a mistake. I have been trimming her hooves for half a year the barefoot way according the Strasser Hoofcare, make rides with her and observe how her hooves are improving. It is still going to take a long time, maybe two years but I will wait. It is definitely worth to do it. There is no hurry.

The fourth of my horses is Gustav. As I bought him I had no experiences with trailer loading and I was looking for ways how to persuade my horses to get in. Gustav kept inventing various tricks to escape. There was no power to hold him. I was trying hard. We spent many hours at my trailer. A good thing was to develop a pressure on the leading rope and when Gustav showed a willingness I released the pressure and appreciated his effort. When he was reluctant and wanted to back up I drove him out of the ramp by waving the leading rope in such a way which was not pleasant to him. It started to work. I could load him and shut the trailer gate on my own. But it was fully unpredictable how much time it would take. Sometimes it took ten minutes and sometimes a full hour.

This was a trial of patience, the most difficult thing was to stay calm and not to give up. Then I tried to use a round pen. Gustav was running around for about quarter an hour, then he „told“ me that he would do whatever I want him to do, we went to the trailer and he got in. So, I thought: „excellent, we got it!“ But next time we went to the trailer and Gustav showed immediately: NO GO. Then we went to the round pen, he spent quarter an hour running, then he showed that he would do whatever I want but as we approached the trailer he said: „Not at all!“

So, we went back to the round pen, I positioned the trailer to the round pen so that the trailer gate was the only exit and the only possible way led into the trailer. Gustav kept running around and after half an hour he got in.

Next time I immediately parked the trailer to the round pen exit. Gustav looked at me with an expression saying: „Isn't it unnecessary?“ I do know that we managed it last time“. So I let him run around a couple of circles, just not to appear stupid and then in about five minutes he was inside the trailer. I already thought that the goal was achieved. But, next time Gustav stated: „NO GO at all!“ It took an hour and a half. He kept telling me that he would go wherever I want him to go and do whatever I want him to do but whenever I said: „Come into the trailer!“ his answer was: NO GO.

I was already sweating, Gustav had run about 10 km, myself a little bit less, being on the inside circle and both of us were going to take part on a 20 km long St. Hubert ride. I was already swallowing the idea of exchanging the horses and ride Demon instead of Gustav. I was promising Gustav to shut him inside the round pen, let him be there all the time during the St. Hubert ride and after my return provide him water and food but only inside the trailer with the only way out via the trailer. Well, I am more stubborn than him...

Finally, he got in and I could drive him to the place of St. Hubert ride.

I felt helpless. Next time I noticed that there was a problem with the horizontal bar inside the trailer. I put the bar aside and Gustav entered. It seems to be working as far. Let's see.



There were much more funny stories of Gustav tricking me out. He kept taking his way home suddenly and there was no power to hold him. It cost a lot of effort, imagination and invention to make him do what I needed from him. In Autumn when St. Hubert rides take place I am quite busy at weekends.

I have had a bad experience recently because I realised how a bad destiny some horses have. In 1999 I took part in a St. Hubert ride at Chlumec with a borrowed horse, because Nelly had been injured. I turned up there rather late and did not have any time to become friends with the horse. He was a 3,5 yrs old gelding. A beautiful horse, full of energy. We started at the second lot and the first barrier was the easiest one. We just flew over it. Brilliant. He missed the second one. I did not like it, turned him around trying to do it again. But my leg fell out of stirrup and the horse wanted to catch up with time. We rushed towards the third obstacle, the so called Thrakenen jump. I was a bit scared, seeing myself in a curb. The only one manoeuvre I dared to do at that moment was to turn the horse and came to the rear to the third group whose horses and riders were quietly preparing at a grass field.

Well, there was another more trouble: for some reason I could not make my upper body upright and had to bow. So, galloping, we arrived among the horses and riders till we finally stopped. Then I found out that my reins were caught on my neck preventing me to stretch. After solving this trouble we joined the third group and continued riding. We did not do very good both of us, I know. He was too young and I myself did not have enough of experience.

His name was Martell. This year I found his name in the websites of an animal home. By the age of not completely 5 years the vet found him suffering from the „navicular disease“, a movement apparatus disorder, which prevented him to be involved in sports. He was sold as a hobby horse then. After about 3 years he got completely blind.

Now he is living at one Lady's place nearby Ostrava and I went with Jana to see him. I was very sad. Everyone who keeps horses should do everything possible to provide the best care for them, including prevention and not rely on sort of "fix it shop". On 17th May in Bismarck, the home town of the Seventh Cavalry, one squadron after another are parting from the town. General Custer in a perfect uniform is leading this parade. Ladies are waving their hands. The town is saying goodbye to the future heroes and the cavalrymen are singing their traditional anthem "Gary Owen" again and again.





„My brothers, I saw hundreds white riders in my dream. They were countless. But I saw, my brothers that all of them, till the last one, perished in this battle against us...“

On 14th June 1876 "Sitting Bull" predicted the coming of army horsemen. They were led by "Yellow hair" which was a nickname, given the hated Custer, by the Native American Indians. He was riding a beautiful horse.

After the battle, next to an unknown dead woman only one survivor of the battle was found. It was captain Keogh's horse called Comanche. Captain Keogh was probably the last defending fighter of the destroyed 7th cavalry for what he was not scalped by the Sioux Indians. The horse of this brave fighter was saved as well, obviously for the same reason.

Comanche obtained the lifelong honorary membership of the New 7th Cavalry. He attended all celebrations. A special command was issued and no one was allowed either saddle him up or even ride this famous black horse. The legendary veteran of legendary battle lived up to a ripe old age unlike his owner and his companions.

Extract from book by M.Štingl "The Wars of Red man"

I would like to say a few words about having fun with my horses and friends. The General G.A.Custer Memorial. It was created seven years ago as a mixture of my imaginations of battles long ago and romance of cavalry expeditions. We chose the 7th cavalry on a ride with my friends from Hn vřín as we were talking about it and riding on a cropped field. We were talking and imagine breathtaking sense of power to lead an attack, and horror having seen all the misery and dying friends and horses. And suddenly I realized all connections, relationship between a man and a horse, I remembered a beautiful, sad and agitating poem by the Czech poet Frá a Šrámek and I had feeling of joy being able to pick out of this terrifying beauty just romance and mutual relationship between men and horses. Well, I ordered two US swords, horsemen's caps, yellow scarfs, blue t shirts and braces resembling the movie „The Silver Lake Treasure“. In summer 2000 the first Hn vřín cavalry set off for the first expedition, counting 16 riders and horses. And we made a collective decision. Since then we have been meeting every next to last Saturday in August to celebrate horses and our friendship with them. Number of people present is increasing. The latest, i.e. the fifth expedition was attended by 140 horses and riders and countless onlookers. We are looking forward to reaching number 210 horses and riders which was the very number of men and horses who were killed by Red Indians in the Battle of Little Big Horn. Come to see us. It is well worth seeing.



You can see parade with maneuvers and attack against imaginary enemy, cross country eventing, show jumping, skillfulness and a favorite discipline- cutting of melons. After lunch, cavalry set off for expedition and onlookers can watch presentation of battles of American Civil War or Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. And imagine that all of it was implemented by sixteen riders who set off to meadows and woods close to the Słapy Lake under an american flag six years ago. They wanted to return to old days and to prove that this game could be played just for pleasure and joy, without pain and sorrow. Historical background of the 7th Cavalry and tragic battle of Little Horn are not important. Neither a controversial persona of Gen. Custer nor stupidity and cruelty of wars in general. Let's pass over suffering both animals and people. I do not say we should forget it all. On the contrary, let's have a look at it with little boy's eyes. We can see horsemen in uniforms, riding horses in compact formation, under waving flags and trumpet's horn in a beautiful countryside. This view should be always a part of this joyful play. - pain, blood and sorrow never more. And horses...horses who served heroes and villains with devotion in good and bad times, experienced good and bad, love and injustice and saw much misery with their wise and beautiful eyes. Let them have a look into their history and let them play with us. The game, that always will be just a game, let's hope and for us with pulled out swords for sure.

If anyone was interested in the destiny of Gen. Custer, his 7th cavalry and the Battle of Little Big Horn I could recommend them the book by J. erník "Gen. G.A. Custer and The Seventh Cavalry. The book is distributed by LIBRI publishing.

St. Hubert rides and par force („fox“) huntings. They begin in autumn, at the end of September and finish in the middle of November. There are various opinions about these events: Some say that it is dangerous for both riders and horses, others think that it can spoil horses or that it is quite easy and everyone who is able to sit on a horse can take a part in it, some people regard it as nicely spent day, others as adrenaline fun or a boring social duty...

In my opinion all of them are more or less right. In spite of the fact that I am looking forward to these events I still feel a slight tickling in my stomach before the start and before the first obstacle. But I think that this discipline is really important both for riders and horses. It is necessary to learn it and make your horse familiar with it.



There is a big, appreciable benefit - being in a herd, horses are far fearless and they are able to overcome obstacles easily than doing so individually. It is up to the rider how to deal with it. Naturally, a horse must feel rider's willingness and courage to overcome obstacles. I always ride a horse whom I trust to and vice versa. I must be perfectly assured that the horse is able to manage St. Hubert's or a hunting physically, that he is healthy and well being. Wanting to spend a beautiful day this is essential. There is also a big difference between St. Hubert rides and Par-force-huntsings. The St. Hubert ride is actually a collective trip with various levels of difficulty, that should be specified in letter of invitation preventing situations where there are bored riders on one hand and desperately struggling ones on the other hand.

The St. Hubert ride has some distinctive features. There is a rider who symbolizes the fox. He or she is riding at a view distance in front of the lot which is led by the Master who must not be overtaken. During a various speed ride with numbers of obstacles, the riders should keep their position in the lot at jumping passages at least. Having some problems with horses or obstacles, riders should move themselves to the rear in order not to be in the other's way.

The obstacles should be robust so that horses respect them, as wide as possible, not to be easy to avoid them. I personally like small, winged jumps, or jumps between trees. Routes should lead in the countryside. It is not the best idea to cross one meadow to another one, do some jumping, waiting for onlookers and repeating it. In my opinion, onlookers should move themselves along the route, so that they could see passing riders and at the same time their presence should not be disturbing. I prefer less and quality jumps to more easy manageable ones. Moreover, the jumps should match to the landscape. I know from my own experience how difficult it is to build such a track, but it will surely pay. Long time I thought that the dress code is not important and at St. Hubert's I wore my own sport outfit. I have changed my opinion after my presence at Par-force huntings and tried to dress up my St. Hubert rides into "hunting style". Riders should be dressed up. If it is western style, I think, that a little of a theatrical performance is quite helpful and should be part of it. At the end of the St. Hubert ride, there is a race which means that riders are trying to catch a fox tail that is attached to the "fox's" (a rider's) sleeve. Another possibility is to hang the tail up a tight rope at a rider's raised arm level and to organize a race there, trying to seize the trophy again. The tail could be also hanged above an obstacle together with a prize. It is your choice. In Nezabudice next K ivoklát I got the idea to change the fox hunting into a "snakehunting". I think that it has established quite well. The par-force-huntings - it is actually the tradition in which the St. Hubert rides have their origin.



This event is more demanding, concerning preparation and financing too. One of the reason is ordering pack of hounds from Germany which is the easiest. The second reason is this event itself, being a special social event with a traditional quality. It used to be a privilege of aristocracy. Part of it is an evening program and a dress code is required. I think that this is another opportunity to have a look back into history and to play the role which is quite unusual nowadays. The pack of hounds is led by whips on horsback and the huntsman is ahead of them. The fox is actually virtual - it is a smell trace placed by a whip and followed by a pack of hounds and a group of riders. First of them is the Master and the whips, then the Lord of the hunt – followed by hosts and the whole lot at the end. Everybody is trying to keep his position, not to cross other's way, especially while approaching obstacles. Always keep in mind that riders must not bring dogs into a danger. The pack of hounds is taboo and must me respected by others.

I was with Demon, Gustav and a few friends at two prestige hunting weeks in Hexenaggen, Germany last year. First of them took place in April and the second one in the beginning of October. I went there with a big respect because these huntings are considered as one of the most beautiful and also most difficult in the Continental Europe. I understood what it actually means if we speak of a perfectly organised hunt route and facilities there. This event has been taking place for several decades. The runs are about 2-3 km long with 3-10 big and respectful jumps, that if build on meadows can be 20 m wide. There are 6-8 runs during a hunting. It is quite demanding for both horses and riders. There are breaks for giving water to dogs and for walk riding towards the next run. Because I had my horses barefoot before a spring hunt and I had been preparing their outdoor stabling, I welcomed the possibility to have outdoor wooden boxes to which I attached a power fence, in this case without electric current. Gustav and Demon settled in there quite quickly and spent night there without problems. Next day we went for a ride with some jumps on the way. What I found interesting was a big heap of trunks under the slope waiting for collection.



The ride was led by the "guru" of Hexennager's hunts, Jurgen Kroll, about sixty five years old handsome gentleman with a white hair. I told him that this barrier seemed to be a bit "zu hoch" (too high).

With a smile he moved off down the slope, followed by me with Demon and in a moment I was hovering amazed over the pile of pines. It was a beautiful feeling. The day after there was the first hunt. I rode Demon and he performed greatly. He was the smallest horse there and other riders were really interested in him asking me about his breed and how could I ride him just with a head collar. There were many well prepared obstacles there but one of them particularly captured my attention. This was a bridge built of logs and planks covered with sand. The logs were not supported in the center and when horses were crossing over the bridge, it was swaying a bit. Most of them went at walking pace, but Gustav started to take a trot. A nice obstacle, really. The day after was free and I took Demon for a ride. Gustav absolutely did not agree with this and wanted to join us. Now I know that I should have taken him with us.

I locked him up into a wooden box and secured it with three horizontal bars. As soon as turned around I could hear crackle of wood and Gustav was out of doors. Two bars were broken. After that my friend Nader told me that he would keep an eye on him and his horse in his own corral and I left. When I came back I could see in the distance that something had happened. Gustav was not there. Nader told me that he had been keeping an eye on Gustav about thirty minutes and not having any problems, he went down to tournament boxes. Gustav obviously took advantage of it and went for a walk. But I had no idea when he could have gone, so still riding Demon I set off to find him. I went through a village, rode around a hill, Gustav was nowhere. Local people told me that they had seen a horse crossing a brook towards the opposite hill.

I went there immediately and found a saddled horse without a rider. So I took him to the chateau and returned him to his happy owner. The last news about Gustav was that he had been running towards a village where we had stayed at the hotel. I left Demon in a paddock and we went by car there. After five kilometers as we were crossing the bridge over the Danube I saw a moving point in distance. It was Gustav.

We turned around, went underneath the bridge, I got out of car and called at him. He trotted up to me. He was dry and quiet and I was sweaty and trembling. But everything was Okay. I came to him, stroke him, put him on the lead and we went back. I was sitting on him without a saddle reproaching him for his trip. He wanted to go back to the Czech republic - Hn vřín. I think that he would have gone for a long time. I have to say that it was a fairly good experience. The day after there was the main ride I rode Demon and not wanting any further problems I locked up protesting Gustav in a box. Autumn huntings were more aristocratic, they had tailored a redingot for me in the theater and lend me a suit for the dinner party. Autumn hunts are not only aristocratic, they are more difficult too.

There are difficult jumps like the Trakehnen jump over a creek, jumps over ditches and solid banks. For example, such a triviality like the trumpeters. They can bring about a fantastic atmosphere. I became convicted about it at gen. Cluster Memorial and I am sure that without them the outcome would have been just partial. Since bandmaster and trumpeter Jirka Bo ek founded the band no one could imagine these events without them. Huntings are also a good opportunity for me to spend more time with my horses. I take care of them, feed and water them, and simply I can spend one week with them which is more than I can afford at home where I am very busy. If you think that I need a regular training for all the things that I am doing with my horses, you are mistaken. From my incoherent story I would like you to understand that up to certain level needed for sport riding without having pretensions for top level riding, basic reciprocal understanding and respect is sufficient. It is all about tolerance, joy and happiness being together, discovering a new limits. A horse should regard you as the leader and in return for it you give him freedom, contact with other horses and you will not lock him up somewhere, simply you give him his own space for living.

I think that this is a basic precondition for further progress no matter which way you chose. My humble experience with a free stabling is that horses living in a large space with other horses company became too bored in some time. You coming and your creativity is a nice change for them even it is just a trip. It is up to us not to put them off. They should look forward to our common activities again and again. I am not a particularly good rider, I would never say that I can ride horses. I gained some experience, skills and independent seat after all those years, but riding is a bit like playing theater. You still learn until your death. And when you think that you know it eventually, you die. My biggest concern has always been not to disturb my horse. And i am still trying to become better in it.



A lot of stories happened to me I had never dreamed of. As Navarra was a little foal she fell asleep in my lap in the pub garden in Kobylniky. I was afraid of waking her up, so I did not move. Later at the same place she had taken a potatoe croquette from my plate and when she realized she did not like it, she spat it out into my glass of beer. She has been naughty recently, when she did not want to canter as a hand horse on a snowy plain. She was inspired by Demon, who took advantage of my inattention and lied down to snow. He really likes it. Previously he had tried to lie down in a ploughed field section of the racecourse in Pardubice. But I did not allowed him to do so then. Firstly It would have appear stupid and secondly he was saddled. Now, as I jumped down from Navarra, all horses were rolling around in the snow except Nelly (she does not like it too much, I have seen her rolling just twice), and I knew that I would have to find a stump for mounting or start with Gustav as a medium size horse to mount gradually. So I took advantage of the situation and while Navarra was lying on the ground I sat on her and waited. She was waiting too, quietly. And when the other horses got up, she got up as well, with me on her back. I have never dreamed about it as I have never had either time or desire to teach my horses to lay down on my order. However I am thinking of it now as it is really comfortable to get on a horse like that.

Once I went with Gustav to the next village to take part on the Easter Festival Riding (Easter Bunny) which is sort of St. Hubert's. It took place one week before a spring hunting in Germany and I wanted to train Gustav getting on the trailer. At the very day I was free, no duties, no appointments, I had a lot of time so I said to myself that I would take advantage of it. In the morning Gustav got on the trailer, after half an hour persuading him to do so. We reached Korkyn, Gustav got off and we had a lovely two and half long trip at a quick pace. I was happy that Gustav had a trailer and would not have to go home on foot. When we had reached Korkyn I let Gustav off the lead, he had a nice roll and started to crop on grass. There had been a break before competition of carrying eggs from one barrel to another one so I went to have lunch. After lunch I went to see Gustav. He came to me, I stroke him and then we tried one discipline- I am walking followed by a horse without a leash. But I did a small, tactical mistake that changed the rest of the day. I went to have a chat with my friends, who were standing at the exit on the way leading home, just wanting to show them, how I was followed by my horse. We came up to them, I stopped and Gustav kept on going. He went through the exit and ignoring my call (he may have thought that after meal it was time to go home) was trotting along the fence with horses looking at him. Then, to show them his freedom, he was running up the hill where he stopped. My exercise was finished.



There he turned to me and he seemed thinking. About one minute. Finally, he gave a nod and started running home. One girl rode trying to catch him. She caught up with him. Gustav stopped and went to have a look at her horse, but when she tried to hold his head collar, he winced from her and went on going. I took a car and with Pavel Korecký we went to the place where he had to run through. When we reached the place he just ran out of woods. I called for him and he started to trot along the road. I pulled away too, talking to him out of the car window. In After 200m he stopped, I got out of car and He came up to me. I praised him for it, sat on him and went back to Korkyn . I wanted him to know that going home early is not worth to do. We got there, won the competition (carrying eggs from barrel to barrel) and when it was all over I wanted to have a cup of tea with Easter cake. I did not want to risk and let Gustav off lead, so I put him to the box near a fast food stand where I had been sitting. He did not like it at all and demonstrated it kicking the door. I did not want him to disturb the pleasant atmosphere of the Easter so I took him outside and put him on lead, myself holding the lead, sitting and drinking tea.

After Gustav spilled my tea tea twice, we blocked the exit off and I made a second mistake. I let him off lead. Gustav, obviously spoiled by this run around the garden two times, smartly squeezed through a hedge and set out for home by another route. This way is a bit longer, about 2 km but we use this regularly. I had already hitched the trailer so we set off to chase him with all the stuff attached. Gustav had a good lead. We asked a gentleman in a village whether he'd seen running horse. Yes, he run over there he showed us the right way. We went around the hill and waited on the other side of the road. Pavel went to meet him up to the hill while I was waiting down the road. Suddenly the fugitive got out of woods. He saw us and he was astonished. He neighed an run down the hill. Pavel spread his arms, Gustav run elegantly around him and he did the same to me. He stopped on the road, looked around and words fail me, he started to trot up the opposite slope. We jumped onto the car, run around the last hill towards home and we wanted to run up the meadow next to wood and to catch the villain on a narrow, forest pathway. But he was quicker and we met up again in the middle of a meadow having seen his grin...The rest of this trip he was trotting and cantering on the road in front of our car. He did not care at all.



We caught him up in front of fence with horses whom he obviously boasted with his heroic performance. And I have known that it can not be finished like this. I came up to him, told him off, took him to the yard and having been upset (and he knew he had caused this) I opened the trailer, loaded him in - very quickly and took him back to Korkyn (It was my last mistake that day).

I should have ridden there so as he would not think that he could go out of there by himself. We got there and Gustav having been in the mood, had a roll. I took him to a fast food stand where I had couple of pieces of bake. In fifteen minutes was time to go, so I led Gustav to the trailer. And it was his moment to take revenge on me. I was loading him 75 minutes. Finally we were awarded by applause and we left. (PS: Me, Gustav and Demon went to training to Sundermuehlen near from Hamburg. It is a beautiful eventing area with many natural obstacles with various levels of difficulty. And I have to inform you, that Gustav has been getting on trailer without any problems since we left there. And for you, who got to like him from my discontinuous narration I have another story that happened in April.

My friend's mare Vendulka foaled a filly in the paddock with Gustav's herd; Gustav adopted her with such a vehemence, that we had to separate them so that the young one could suck milk from the udder. After the separating, Gustav kept standing at the other side of the fence watching and guarding them. When I let them be together he successfully tried to drive the desperate mother away from her foal and I had to take action against him and separate them again. About ten days later we transferred the herd to another corral because this one was quite damaged after winter, spring rains and maneuvers with the foal. I led Navarra, the other horses including Gustav followed us. But he stopped at the exit, thinking for a while, then he turned around and totted back to Vendulka and her foal. I let the corral open and we went to a new one. But Gustav stayed at the previous place.





He broke into his „family's“ corral and we found all of them in the best harmony next morning. They resembled the Holy Trinity. They lived like a family about one month. Gustav, Vendulka and the foal which I called Gustavia. Unfortunately my friend Nader, Vendulka's owner, took her with Gustavka to his home property and I took Gustav back to his herd, that had not been his any more, of course. He ended up bitten like an expatriate. We had to even put his bucket with water to another place so that he could drink. He was desperate and unhappy but it is over now and he is getting better. He had chosen his own herd and we humans have dashed his hopes, but I am trying to make it up for him. Time is a great healer too. So this is Gustav.

I am finishing this story talking about him, because he is a quite a hard nut and I have to think about him the most. But the biggest challenges make us keep going. So, what to say finally?

As I had promised I did not present any instruction how to treat a horse, what is right and what is wrong. I hope that you did not feel lectured by me. However if you open your hearts, eyes and ears and use your sense and emotion without anger and impatience, if you use your sense instead of rigidly following instructions then I achieved my goal and did something for communication with creatures who have the same right to live on the Earth. If you think that I am writing popularly known facts I apologize and I am pleased as well. Read books from people who care for horses all their life. They have a system and they know what they are talking about. But think about it all the time - nothing is a dogma. It is like a relationship between people. Stick to logic and to things that does not do any harm. Above all - let's still learn from our horses - they have a bigger head.



VACLAV VYDRA

It would be just waste of time trying to introduce Vaclav Vydra. Being one of the most popular Czech actors he performed many roles in the theatre, movies and TV.

But his name has been linked with horses for many years too. His relationship with them is by far not an amusement of celebrity but it is his second nature. This famous actor is well known on this field due to his candour to less comon methods of keeping horses and trying to find everything that is really good for them. He is a sort of rebel at the riding sport too, which is nice. Not being afraid of disqualification, he is trying to persuade the audience that the show jumping can be ridden with a head collar or even without it.

One of his activity is organising of the Gen. Custer Memorial at Hnevsin next to Slapy. The event is regularly attended by 200 riders and this is an unforgettable experience for all included.

ing. DANIEL GREGOR

The photographer from Opava has been interested in this hobby since his childhood. Since 1991 he is a proffesional. His works include animals, especially horses.

He produced hundreds of postcards, calendars and several photo books about animals. One of his famous books is called KINGDOM OF HORSES with Bolek Polivka.

*He presented several exhibitions too
BEAUTY OF FRENCH HORSES FROM CAMARGUE
CHARM OF PROVENCE
LIPIZZAN-HORSE OF KINGS AND KING OF HORSES*

*His motto is:
„Nobility and beauty of horses lead us to think about ourselves”*



Foto - archiv Václava Vydry