

KDCTA HOOFBEATS

FEATURE ARTICLE: Positive Reinforcement R+ Training is for Every Horse!

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Have you recently been hearing about Positive Reinforcement (R+) training? Also known as clicker training, this method is widely used with dogs but has also been shown to be quite effective with horses, helping handlers build a strong relationship based on trust and affirmation. People often think their horse is not a good candidate for R+ training, fearing that the horse will become overly eager or even aggressive if treats are anywhere near. This is exactly the type of horse that needs clicker training the most! The very first thing the horse will learn is that he will not receive any treats unless he behaves respectfully. With consistency and repetition, this becomes such an ingrained behavior that you will no longer have a “food monster.” Your horse will learn this respect without any confrontation or reprimand.

R+ is something that can be used on any level of horse, from untrained two-year-old to a seasoned veteran. It is a wonderful first step in building a relationship with a youngster before ever putting a foot in the stirrup. It is also a way to develop more advanced skills at liberty or achieve precision in higher-level movements under saddle.

KDCTA is thrilled to announce that we will be hosting a clinic on June 4-5 with a true pioneer and master of R+ training, Shawna Karrasch! She is the author of [You Can Train Your Horse to Do Anything!](#) and is the host of the popular podcast [Equine Clicker 101 on Horse Radio Network](#). Shawna recently relocated to Williamsport, PA and has partnered with Jessie Hillegas of Edgewood Stable. You can learn more about Shawna on her [website](#), and you can follow Shawna and Jessie through their [Facebook group](#) as they travel throughout the warmer regions of the US this winter and spring. They will also be at the [Horse World Expo](#) in Harrisburg with their horses, Henley and Santino, teaching five sessions between Thursday, March 3 and Sunday, March 6.

Winter is a perfect time to practice clicker training basics. Those of us who are not fortunate enough to have an indoor arena are not always able to ride much through the winter months. R+ training allows us to build our relationship with our horse in a way that is fun and safe, and as the sessions are best when they are short, you don't have to be out in the cold for long periods of time. But how can you get started?

Several of us (myself, Karen Schuckman, Sharon Briggs, and Claire vanOgtrop) were lucky enough to participate in a clinic with Shawna last November. In preparation for the June clinic, we would like to get together to support each other and to introduce other KDCTA members to R+, using Shawna's podcasts as a learning resource. If you are interested in participating, email Carmel or Karen, and we will start scheduling some local sessions as weather permits.

Give it a try! You have nothing to lose and only a closer relationship with your horse to gain!

Shawna and Karen Schuckman's horse, Tomorrow's Graduate, who is learning to be a good citizen.



Shawna Karrasch



Shawna and Sharon Briggs' horse, Odie, an 8-year-old Friesian who is learning Working Equitation and Dressage