

## **Pain Is Not Acceptable**

### ***An insider's report on Hollywood's horses***

I have been a professional, natural horsemanship trainer and instructor for nearly twenty years, and work primarily with abused, neglected, and mishandled animals. My career is devoted to the education of horse owners in how to properly care for and work with their equines. My knowledge and experience have led me to conclude that the most common misconceptions on how a horse should be handled and treated are promoted in front of the entertainment industry's camera lens.

If a film displayed a character walking a dog with inverted spiked collar and choke chain, people would be up in arms. In an action/adventure where a bear's leg was caught in an actual trap, there would be incredible backlash. What would animal welfare activists say to a sea-faring epic whose director chose to shoot a whale with an authentic harpoon? Quite a lot, I would imagine. Nobody wants to see an animal suffer for real.

Why, then, is it acceptable when a horse is involved? Viewing any media with an educated eye will instantly show that these animals are upset, confused, and pained. This suffering is almost entirely due to the archaic devices these horses are forced to endure. Put these mechanics in the hands of an amateur, and the result is devastating.



*"Dreamer", 2005.  
Monitored: Acceptable*

I have done a great deal of research and investigating on this matter. In doing so, I was led to the organization known as American Humane. They are the company that awards the “no animals were harmed” claim at the end of a feature film. American Humane has a “Guideline for the Safe Use of

Animals in Filmed Media”, which is freely viewable on their website.

Chapter Eight, (pages 75-104), focuses on equines and other hoofstock. Paragraphs 57, 59, and 63 specifically state that the use of sharp spurs, severe bits, and electronic stimuli are strictly prohibited. Paragraphs 57, 59, and 63 are unique to the rest of this 175 page document, in that they are the only

paragraphs that contain special ADVISORY\* sentences. This ADVISORY\* sentence specifically states that, “in some areas, use of [sharp spurs, severe bits, and electronic stimuli] are prohibited.”

The question is, why would the Guidelines say that those devices cannot be used, then go on to say that in *some* areas those devices cannot be used? The asterisk leads you to the bottom of the page, which reads:

“\*Notes a federal, state, or local animal welfare statute, code, or permit consideration.”

Therefore, we may conclude that the use of sharp spurs, severe bits, and electronic stimuli are subject to federal, state, or local animal welfare statutes. To the best of my knowledge, there are no state or local animal welfare legislations that define what can or cannot be used on a horse's face and body. On the federal level, the USDA's Horse Protection Act does not contain any reference to the aforementioned devices.

On August 31<sup>st</sup> of this year, I spoke with a representative of American Humane regarding this odd double-speak in Chapter Eight. Her best response was, “It is written specifically vague so that the rep on set can make their own judgment.”

I queried as to the qualifications of the reps on set: their experience, training, etc. The answer was, “They are [mostly] race-track folks, dressage people, and people that have had horses.”

Anyone with a remote understanding of a horse's health and welfare can attest, putting mostly race-track “folks” and dressage people in charge of horse's physical and mental well-being is equatable to giving the fox the keys to the hen house. Furthermore, simply having a horse does not automatically qualify someone in all matters equine. Just as having a car in your garage does not make you Mario Andretti.



*"Appaloosa", 2008  
Monitored: Outstanding*

In 2007, W. Robert Cook, FRCVS, PhD, and author of “Metal in the Mouth” wrote the following:

*“A metal bit is an invasive foreign body in a sensitive body cavity. It inflicts pain, and obstructs*

*breathing. It is the final link in the long and potentially severe line of communication with the rider's hands and the horse's mouth. It must be handled with the delicacy and finesse of a neurosurgeon if it is not to become an instrument of torture and a liability."*

The bottom line is this: American Humane's Guidelines have been purposely worded in such a way that when it comes to horses and other equines, painful devices can be, and are, acceptable. This negates their "no animals were harmed" claim. Inflicting pain onto an innocent, (be it with severe bits, sharp spurs, and/or electronic stimuli), can never, under any circumstances, be deemed "acceptable".

I do not intend to imply that American Humane is the axis of evil. Great strides in awareness have been accomplished through their efforts. When it comes to equines, however, they are falling very, very short in the humanity aspect. The deliberately vague sections of Chapter Eight stand as proof. The fact that horses and other equines are suffering is inarguable, and the claim that "no animals were harmed during filming" can be considered misrepresentation. I speak on behalf of the horse when I say that changes need to be made.

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