



TO THE RESCUE

Pain is Not Acceptable

An Insider's Report on
Humane Treatment of
Horses in Film



by Stacy Tanner

A good example of how it should be, can be, needs to be done. This horse's name is Storm, one of the lucky ones who has never, ever had a bit in his mouth (I started him when he was five). Read more about Storm below.

“No animals were harmed during the filming of this movie.” We are all familiar with these words that appear at the end of a motion picture. If you are a dog, cat, form of wildlife, reptile, fish, amphibian, or insect, the claim that you were not harmed is true. If you are a horse or other equine, however, you're out of luck.

If a film displayed an actor walking a dog with an inverted spiked collar, 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. *Why, then, is it acceptable when a horse is involved?* Viewing any media with an educated eye will show that these animals are often in pain, and this pain is largely due to the archaic devices they are unnecessarily forced to endure (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgMIaxyHoag). Put these mechanics in the hands of an amateur rider/ handler, and the result is devastating.

Wanting to find an answer to this question, I discovered the organization known as American Humane, sometimes referred to

as American Humane Association. 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.

But I've come to realize that just as what we see on screen may be misleading, some things labeled “humane” are not. So it is with a part of their lengthy and otherwise good guidelines for horses in film.

What about equines?

Chapter Eight, (pages 75-104), focuses on equines and other hoof-stock. Paragraphs 57, 59, 63, 152, 168, 170, and 202.2 specifically state that the use of sharp spurs, severe bits, and electronic stimuli are strictly prohibited. These paragraphs 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.”

What? 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 31st of 2010, I spoke with a representative of American Humane regarding this odd double-speak in Chapter Eight. Her 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. She answered, “They are [mostly] race-track folks, dressage people, and people that have had horses.”

My heart sank. We the people of the natural horse community understand that putting a horse’s health and welfare into the hands of “mostly race-track folks” and dressage people is a brutal juxtaposition. 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.

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”.

Storm (pictured), ironically enough, was adopted off the set of Hildago. His is an interesting story, as he was an orphaned, severely ill yearling at the time of filming, and was run with the herd, anyway. Read between the lines of the Guidelines, and you find that the “health and welfare mandates” of on-set equines do not apply to herds like Storm’s. You can see him in the last twenty minutes of the movie, when the penned horses are released.

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 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.

What can we do?

People always ask me what can be done regarding this deception. My response is to find the horses a good lawyer. I will be the first to raise my hand on the witness stand. But since American Humane is exclusively contracted and funded by the Screen Actors Guild of America, the battle would be a long one. And costly. In the meantime, you can contact Jone Bouman, spokesperson for American Humane, (818) 501-0123, and ask how she and her organization can deem medically proven, human-inflicted pain “acceptable”.

Educate your friends and family – have them watch www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgMIaxyHoag and then one of the movies labeled No Animals Were Harmed. Watch it frame by frame. They’ll get the idea. Not going to see, or refusing to buy merchandise from, any live film about horses or containing horses, is an option, as well.

Unfortunately, contacting the Humane Society of the United States and the American Humane Society is a moot point. When I asked them why horses are allowed to be harmed during the filming of motion pictures, I was directed to American Humane. It is both disheartening and interesting to note that American Humane was named in such a way that it is easily confused with well-known and recognizable organizations.

Lastly, write to the studios and personnel responsible. Ask them what their justification is to the continued mishandling and mistreatment of horses and other equines in their films. Here are some suggestions, all of which were deemed “outstanding” in their treatment of animals by American Humane representatives, and thereby earning the No Animals Were Harmed award:

“Appaloosa” - 2008, New Line Cinema / Rex Peterson, horse trainer, wrangler
“Robin Hood” - 2011, Universal Pictures / Nigel Oliver, horse master
“True Grit” - 2011, Paramount Pictures / Rusty Hendrickson, horse trainer, wrangler

Do not be surprised, however, when you and your thoughtful query are directed to the folks at American Humane. This is how the Hollywood machine works. Yet, my ambition remains strong. We can hold American Humane and the world-renowned motion picture industry accountable for their actions. On behalf of the horse, I thank you. 🙏

About the author:

Stacy Tanner has been a professional natural horsemanship trainer and instructor for nearly twenty years, and works primarily with abused, neglected, and mishandled animals. Her career is devoted to the education of horse ‘owners’ and guardians in how to properly care for and work with their equines. Her knowledge and experience have led her 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.

To see Stacy and Storm in action:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNxDdooFWi4>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vusZmOGoeAM>
Contact: stacy.tanner12@gmail.com
www.purelynaturalhorsemanship.com
www.hollywoodhorses.org

