

The Animal Welfare of Trail Horses

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When we hear on Animal Welfare, we think immediately that this is about vivisection, circus animals or even Rodeo animals. We never pay attention if our own actions to our animals, are contributing to the well being of our horses, that are frequently submitted to the trial judgments. In fact, **the welfare of an individual is the relation between its state and its adaptation on the environment** and it can be classified as adequate or poor, or even as high and low level of welfare.

Animals, like humans, have several functional systems that control body temperature, nutritional status, sociability, and others. Together, these systems control the interactions between the individual and the environment while maintaining their status in a tolerable variation. When the animal is in real or potential mismatch, or when it is required to perform an action due to an environmental situation, it is said that this animal is in NEED. Of course, when this need is not met, the well-being is poorer than in a situation in which it is satisfied. The Show events are clear examples of drastic change in environmental conditions that affect the welfare of the animal by numerous factors.

A specific example of poor welfare are the animal accommodations in the agricultural events, such as bays, by which the animal suffers a serious reduction in the ability to exercise, causing, over time, weakness in the bones and serious problems in the joints, generating defects severe increasingly of angulations defects. Many put the animal performance in first place, closing their eyes to the basic needs that assure the well-being of the animals. For many years I have been able to follow closely on visits to farms and work in exhibitions, as many animal owners prioritize their disputes over points, which makes them see the horses as "objects", not "animal".

Not always offer the best animal feed and supplements means to treat the animal well. We are always facing classics examples of colic in exhibitions, problems that could be avoided by a more appropriate and careful management. Of course, the food is not the only factor that leads to these kind of condition - the heat and stress have a strong influence on that – it is also necessary to take into account the amount of feed supplementation and that a horse needs to meet their own needs, not providing exaggerated quantities in search of ideal body condition in a short time period.

Confinement of Youth

Also, because of the Expos, we see today younger foals being confined, suffering a lack of freedom to run free and socialize with other animals and submitted to stalls or limited paddocks, that generate and increasing several angulations problems and because of that the animals become obese during delicate phases of development. These two factors, in association with exercise on hard surfaces, causes, among various aplomb problems, a very common one called "navicular bone syndrome, that is a chronic progressive disorder, characterized by changes in the navicular bone and its ligaments, the tendon of the deep digital flexor and in the navicular bag.

Also called "Podotrocleose", this pathology occurs due to large forces applied to these structures during move, in which the extension of the joint pushes the distal tendon of deep digital flexor muscle against the palmar aspect of the navicular bone (TEICHMANN, 2005),

causing a and chronic pain resulting in lameness. In the National this year, several animals showed limping during the judgments, it was diagnosed after specific medical tests for navicular syndrome in one of the animals.

Bridles and Stalls

When we refer to bridles, unlike what is seen in other breeds, Campolina breeders and trainers often don't seek for help from skilled professionals, so that a bridle is produced for each individual animal, or at least get more suitable for oral constitution of each individual bridles. That means respecting its teeth, mouth width and depth of palate, causing a perfectly adjustment of the curb or a snaffle to the mouth of the animal. In Campolina breed, we noticed during judgments that animals are constantly fighting against the bridles that are clearly unsuitable for them, as it is common to see extremely tight dewlap with the intention of creating artificial head movements and postures, which leads to bleeding lesions on the animals.

During the exhibition we proved that the handlers, and the event organization, also contribute to a low level of animal welfare. Regarding the organization, we can point the lack of supervision on the quality of hay and grass offered to the animals, quality and quantity of material to be placed as bedding in the stalls, which causes lesions in the animal body, and when the animal poisonings ingest or inhale the material. The position of the stalls in the sun and the material they are made can also be harmful, causing stress due to thermal discomfort and causing changes in the animal metabolism.

On the track show, it is very common to see the restless animals, eyes fixed on the presenters - often reluctant to get close to them and by being aggressive, sticking and moving toward the coach to bite him. Such situations are observed as avoidance reaction - a sign of low degree of well being, which shows that the animal is scared and waiting for some hard rebuke of his host. The presenters, in the other hand, beyond nervousness caused for the competition, feel pressured to dominate the animal, often through violence. Again, the points interfere with the welfare of animals.

Conclusion

I could keep on writing a thousand pages on this subject, for which no shortage of topics to be addressed, but I will end the article with a quote from naturalist and humanist Alexander Von Humboldt, who says "The civilization of a people is measured by the way that their animals are treated." With this in mind, I wish this can touch every reader, and that day after day, handlers and breeders can see our horse as alive beings that although can not express with words, they suffer, have feelings, rights and should be treated with respect.

(Box)

Some signs of poor welfare have its evidences on physiological measurements - such as increased heart rate, adrenal activity, reduced immune response after a challenge - and abnormal behavior - eg, stereotypes, self-injury and aggression in excess. The act of animal escaping heavily on an object, event or person also provides information about their feelings and, consequently, on their well being. As stronger is the reaction, poorer is their welfare. (BROOM; MOLENTO, 2004)

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