

# Hands-On Bonding

## AQHA Professional Jenny Lance on Grooming & Massage

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The touch of a mare's gentle nuzzle is usually a newborn foal's first communication with the world around them. That feeling, of one living creature touching another, initiates a bonding experience that remains integral to a horse's learning process and development.

Throughout life, touch remains an important means of equine communication and connection. AQHA Professional horsewoman Jenny Lance, of [www.LiveToRideHorses.com](http://www.LiveToRideHorses.com) and co-author of the series, "Who Says a Trail Horse Isn't a Performance Horse?" sees massage and regular grooming as not only integral to assuring a healthy coat and body, but as a means of bringing us closer in our relationship with our horse.

And as any horse owner will tell you, the stronger that bond, the richer the riding experience.

"Grooming is the perfect opportunity to improve your relationship and connection with your horse," says Lance. "There are times we rush through grooming. When we do that, a horse is not even sure what happened. Grooming can be enjoyable and relaxing for both you and your horse. It should be done daily, regardless of what you are or are not going to do with your horse that day.

"A great grooming session can help in finding inner peace and a connection with your horse. A beautiful day is not just perfect for riding, it is perfect for a relaxing day in the sun spent grooming and talking to your horse.

"When you approach grooming with awareness of your self (are you being 'soft' in body and mind?) and of your horse, you are making a deposit in your relationship account with your horse that will pay off big. Don't let the quickness of today's society creep into your horse life."

Healthy grooming starts with an energetic currying, from front to back, to loosen dirt and dander, followed by use of a firm-bristled brush to lift debris up and away from the skin and coat. Also brush the mane and tail, using a detangler to softly work out knots.

Once dirt and debris has been removed, it's a perfect opportunity to give your horse a careful 'once-over' with your hands. Are the legs hot or swollen? Are there lumps or bumps you haven't seen before, or any changes to the skin? If a horse is light-colored, they may have sunburn on fine-haired regions. Grey horses are prone to melanomas and skin cancers. And

all horses suffer the painful bites of insects in barns and paddocks.

Using a year-round coat conditioner that contains a blend of essential oils is a safe solution to keeping coats shiny, healthy, and resilient to the effects of the sun, skin rashes, and other outdoor irritants.

While Citronella is probably the best known oil, thanks to multiple properties as a deodorant and parasitic, SORE NO-MORE® Ricochet Horse Spray has other fungicidal and conditioning oils -- Cedarwood, Eucalyptus, Lemongrass, Neem, Rosemary, and Tea Tree -- that also make a horse happier in the skin they're in, while smelling better to humans than to insects.

The importance of equine comfort is more than skin deep. In addition to a healthy coat and skin, massage can reinforce that bonding experience of grooming while increasing a horse's mobility and comfort.

"A sore, uncomfortable horse can spell D-I-S-A-S-T-E-R," says Lance. "Because they may not be able physically to negotiate the terrain or an obstacle. Or, they may get fed-up with the pain and become disobedient, either unloading you or leaving you stranded."

More than half a horse's body weight is composed of muscle. So a good massage can greatly enhance performance, wellbeing and movement by eliminating pain, stiffness, tension or spasms.

Signs that your horse may be in discomfort include:

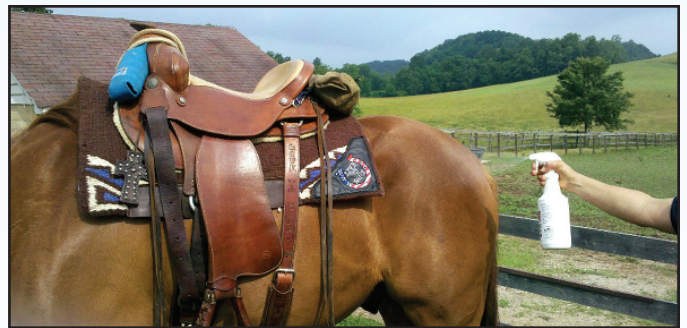
- Limited range of motion, not fully engaging limbs, not stepping under, not extending
- Refusing to take a lead
- Unwilling to change gaits
- Hollowing the back
- Throwing the head up during gait changes
- Feeling 'disconnected' (hind and front not moving in unison)
- Bucking or crow hopping
- Not relaxing, rounding, etc.

Massage can help increase blood flow to muscles, release tension in soft tissues around joints and vertebrae, break up soft tissue adhesions and muscle spasms, encourage muscle de-

velopment, relax connective tissues, improve flexibility, and activate the body's self-healing mechanism.

Lance trusts SORE NO-MORE® products to keep her horses looking and feeling their best.

"My main partner for trail clinics and big rides is Taz.," she said. "He has a chronic hind leg issue. Because of this, he can become uncomfortable in the back, hips, and neck. His health and comfort are my top priority so I use SORE NO-MORE® Gelotion before every ride to help him be more comfortable, and after, I love to use SORE NO-MORE® Shampoo because I know I am doing as much as I can to



help his muscles relax, his skin feel great, and for him to be all-around soothed."

Both products use Arnica Montana, for centuries one of the best-known herbs for dealing with bruises, sprains, and traumas to the body, plus Lavender, Lobelia, and Rosemary to enhance circulation and reduce cramping.

"My other partner, Cappuccino, has early arthritis. I apply SORE NO-MORE® Gelotion to his joints to give him some relief, and I find that it also soothes his sensitive skin. He tends to get big bumps from bug bites, so I rub it into those spots to relieve the itch."

Keeping your horse clean can alleviate skin and pain issues down the road, says this AQHA Professional. "Your horse is exposed to sun, rain, bugs, scratches from underbrush, etc. A shampoo with relieving, natural ingredients goes a long way after a long ride, and if there are skin sores or bug bites, SORE NO-MORE® products can help you relieve some of the uncomfortable itch and contribute to the healing process."

Because when it comes to showing your horse how much you care, a great grooming or massage can say it all. 