



Horses Inside Out

Get an Inside Look at How the Horse Moves

by Amy Harris

On the surface we see horses as these majestic creatures, capable of incredible feats of athleticism. We are awed by their power and impressed with their stamina. We also know how fragile they are, how intricately designed. But how much does the average horse owner, trainer or rider really understand about the way a horse's body functions?

Anyone with the inclination can pick up a book on conformation and anatomy and learn how, in theory, the systems of the horse are supposed to work. It can be difficult, however, for this textbook knowledge to translate into real understanding.

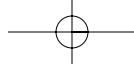
Gillian Higgins, a sports and remedial therapist for humans and horses, from Gloucestershire, England, has a wealth of knowledge in her field and is eager to share it with the horse industry – from riders and trainers to judges and course designers – in the hopes of teaching people that “understanding how their horses move, can improve performance and reduce the risk of injury.”

As an off-shoot of her business, Massage and Manipulation Equine Therapy, Higgins developed Horses Inside Out, a lecture series using horses as models, in 2005. Combining her knowledge of anatomy with her artistic

skill, Higgins paints the systems of the horse on her models' bodies in order to literally illustrate her points.

“The lectures are appropriate to all ages and stages from about 13 years upwards, although we do present specialized lectures to colleges, universities and clubs,” said Higgins. “The general lectures work because I have a live painted horse on which to demonstrate. This enables me to refer to the muscles by colour, name, position and function. The key is really is to keep referring the information to riding, training and management of horses.”

Higgins said her goal with Horses Inside Out is to “bring a serious subject



Lectures relate to understanding how the horse moves from an anatomical perspective. This can be static, on the lunge or over jumps.



Horses Inside Out has an expanding collection of bones, which Higgins uses at her demonstrations. She said the audience is always fascinated to see these, as many people do not realize the size or shape of some of the bones.

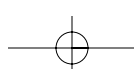


to life! I take pride in my method of presentation, which is lively and enthusiastic and allows a sometimes complex subject to be presented in an easy to follow and fun way without losing the accuracy. By really understanding how the horse moves, it enables riders and trainers to set realistic training goals and have realistic expectations."

Painted Ponies

Higgins credits physiotherapist Mary Bromiley, whom she studied under, with the idea of painting the horses.

"She used paint to indicate various muscles to teach therapists and I thought what a great way to show riders how the musculoskeletal system works, and how if they understood more they could better understand the 'way of going' and



improve the performance of their horses. I have taken this idea and refined and improved it. The painting style and design improves each time I do it!"

Higgins uses non-toxic children's paint for her illustrations, each of which takes about three and half hours to complete, with assistance.

"I do all the painting," she said, but "because it takes so long to do, other family members help fill in once I have done the outlines."

The stars of Horses Inside Out are Freddie Fox and Henry, both grey geldings.

"Freddie Fox loves being the centre of attention and is quite happy to be painted. The audience always loves him. He is a real character. My young horse Henry was introduced to an audience this year and is also turning into a bit of a character," said Higgins.

Spreading the Word

The family-run business has flourished and today Horses Inside Out is very much in demand. Higgins has traveled all over the UK and conducted lectures for several universities and groups, including British Eventing. She will appear at several shows this fall such as Your Horse Live, the Holistic Horse Show and Blenheim Horse Trials. In addition, Horses Inside Out runs a series of indoor winter lectures with prominent speakers such as Yogi Breisner, the British Eventing National Coach as well as the sports psychologist and assistant vet to the British Team. In March 2009, the first Horses Inside Out Conference will be held, featuring Gerd Heuschmann (author of Tug of War - Classical Versus "Modern" Dressage).

"The main highlight [of the lectures] is probably the comments and the satisfied audience," said Higgins. "We only get very positive comments along the lines of: 'Everything I was ever taught makes sense now' or 'I wish I'd seen this 20 years ago'. I have been really flattered when experienced and



Horses Inside Out focuses on the musculoskeletal system, but Higgins can adjust her illustrations depending on the focus of the lecture. She is able to paint any biological system.

Gillian Higgins

Following her A Levels, Gillian Higgins trained as a human sports and remedial therapist for a year, then went to The Royal Agricultural College, majoring in Business Studies, where she graduated with first class honours. Alongside her degree, Higgins trained as an equine therapist with world renowned physio-therapist, Mary Bromiley. In addition, she graduated from the Oxford College of Equine Physical Therapy with distinction, studying Manipulative Techniques.

Always keen to expand her knowledge, Higgins attends regular updating courses. She has studied with veterinarian and conformation expert, Hilary Clayton, and recently attended a conference in France featuring Jean-Pierre Pailloux, an equine physical and massage therapist.

Higgins operates Massage and Manipulation Equine Therapy, where she treats humans and horses, including some well-known horse/rider combinations in the UK such as Andrew and Bettina Hoy, and her mount, Ringwood Cockatoo.

A former Advanced Level eventer, Higgins is also a BHSI Intermediate Instructor and stable manager.

knowledgeable people, who have much more experience than I, tell me all the theory now makes sense."

Higgins said she would love to bring Horses Inside Out to North America, and is actively seeking hosts. In the

meantime, she is working on a book, How the Horse Moves, which will be available in the spring of 2009. She is also planning a DVD, which she hopes will be available by this fall, or next spring. 