

New Zealand's Horse Whisperer

Courtesy NZ Thoroughbred Racing Monthly

The Horo horse whisperer Andrew Froggatt has dedicated the best part of his life to bringing out the best in horses, and now he's turning his attention to the racing industry with immediate success.

Andrew grew up in the North Island and started riding at age ten. After he'd finished school he studied Horse Management at the renowned Marcus Oldham College in Australia. After he'd graduated he spent the next 10 months working extensively on horses with behavioural issues (mainly buckers and rearers) in Melbourne before returning home to New Zealand, where he did a yearling prep at Windsor Park Stud.

Right from the outset, Andrew showed a special affinity with horses. Having seen a lot of 'hard' breakers in his younger years, he was determined to find a new approach, developing his unique 'talkinghorses' programme which focuses on building a relationship with the horse which will help them fulfil their true potential. It incorporates techniques including establishing leadership, sending clear signals, building trust and respect, and helping the creature become a team player, rather than using brute force and punishment.

For the past 16 years Andrew has worked as a natural horsemanship trainer, a so-called horse whisperer, specialising in breaking in horses that no-one else can touch, many of which have spent their early lives running free on remote high country stations such as Mt Nicholas or St James, to ones that have been written off as un-trainable, destined to be put down. He's frequently called in as the last resort.

Using a mixture of loose and ground work, Andrew has the ability to turn even the biggest nutcase into a winner. "It's very satisfying; I love the challenge of it," says Andrew. "Most horse problems are generally caused by people so fixing them is easy. You can change a horse's lifelong habits in about two weeks, but it may take an owner two years to learn new habits. It's about looking at everything, including the horse's health and general attitude.

It's usually a combination of things. Fixing the problems is about breaking things down and then putting them back together again."

From his well-appointed 50-acre property near Te Horo, just an hour north of Wellington, he takes horses in for re-educating, breaking and training. He and partner, Janine Sudbury, also offer a number of courses and corporate training for managers where they use horses to teach people about themselves, their own personality, leadership qualities and how to communicate effectively.

With the corporate side of the business proving a winner, Andrew's focusing his immediate attention on the racing industry. Ultimately he wants to be able to provide a service for trainers where he can come into a stable and clear out all the problems – a trouble-shooter – whether it be for horses with barrier issues or horses with ability but no will to win.

He firmly believes fitness and training is only part of the success with a racehorse. Like all athletes, Andrew says being a winner is just as much about the mental preparation at it is the fitness. And that's where Andrew's skills become invaluable. Not only does he have the tools to be able to change a horse's mind-set and reduce the tension associated with racing, but he can be likened to a 'mental coach' for the horse, ensuring each horse will give 100 per cent in every race. He can also give jockeys a number of tips to help each individual horse on the track.

So far Andrew's trainer-clients have included John Boon, Alby MacGregor, Jonathan Riddell, Matthew Eales and Andrew Campbell. His success stories have included Chunkmeister, Rayzn Dust and Jungle Talk.

Matthew Eales couldn't speak highly enough of Andrew's work. Matthew called him in as a last resort to work on the Black Minnaloushe gelding Rayzn Dust, who was a serious barrier rouge. "He was so bad we never thought we would get him to the races but Andrew completely turned him around," explained Matthew, who had tried almost everything with no success. The gelding has now had six starts since and hasn't had a barrier problem. Other trainers have reported similar successes.

www.talkinghorses.co.nz

