

Coaches listen to the horses

By PAUL TAYLOR

THEY can be obstinate and highly-strung, fiery and overbearing, or just lazy and scared. So it's not difficult to deduce why Sport New Zealand believes working with horses can help its top coaches.

Six coaches on High Performance Sport NZ's coach accelerator programme spent two days in Queenstown last week learning the vagaries of horse handling with one of the country's premier horse trainers, Andrew Froggatt.

Horse whisperer Froggatt relocated to Queenstown 18 months ago and teamed up with Wakatipu Riding Club president Sam Glazebrook to create "Leading the Way".

The venture offers horse training courses designed to improve leadership, communication and relationship skills, held at a Dalefield farm.

High Performance Sport NZ's Alex McKenzie, the coaching programme manager, said while adapting to horses' personalities was a factor, the course was ultimately an exercise in self-awareness for the coaches.

"Horses are an emotional mirror," McKenzie said. "They're very attuned to who's working with them. So the coaches have to use body language, energy levels — non-verbal communication skills — to give clear instructions to the horse.

"Working with a group of athletes who are not doing what you want, it's very easy to say they're not listening. But the horse wants to please, so the coaches have to look to themselves."

Taking the reins last week were ex-All Black Scott Robertson, now Canterbury and New Zealand



Horse sense . . . All Whites coach Anthony Hudson enjoying the High Performance Sport NZ programme in Queenstown.

PHOTO: PAUL TAYLOR

under-20s All Blacks coach, All Whites coach Anthony Hudson, Rowing New Zealand Waikato and under-23s coach Gary Roberts, Athletics New Zealand coach Raylene Bates, assistant coach of Black Sticks Women Sean Dunne, and Waikato-Bay of Plenty Magic netball team assistant coach Margaret Forsyth.

McKenzie said previous coaches who had been through the three-year programme felt the course was one of their "most profound and memorable experiences".

Robertson agrees. He was appointed head coach of the next generation of All Blacks, the under-20s, last year after leading Canterbury to an ITM Cup Premiership title.

"It's been fascinating," he said. "I've got no history with horses —

they're big, strong, but they've just got personalities like us.

"So you've got to figure them out, what makes them tick, and how you can help them.

"There's some great lessons in it, especially about building relationships, and assessing strengths and weaknesses and what you can fine-tune to make them better."

Froggatt has worked with more than 6000 horses in the 20 years since he started his business helping owners with problem horses.

He has been involved in the Sport NZ programme for seven years, with a client list including All Blacks coach Steve Hansen and Black Caps coach Mike Hesson, New Zealand Army officers and corporate bigwigs.

This is the first time he has held

the course in Queenstown, with previous courses held in the North Island.

The two-day session ended with a confidence course in blazing sunshine. Coaches coerced the horses to complete tasks such as putting one hoof in a tyre, walking across a tarpaulin, or straddling a wooden beam. "It's challenging and gets these guys right out of their environment," Froggatt said.

All Whites football coach Hudson said: "Do you know what, I've loved it. I wish I'd been on something like this years ago — it's been superb.

"It's opened my eyes to a new level of leadership and coaching — skills around creating boundaries and gaining trust, which is about self-awareness." — *Mountain Scene*