



## WHAT IS CLICKER TRAINING?

Clicker training refers to a new method of teaching behaviour using a "yes" signal or conditioned reinforcer, to tell the horse precisely when it has done something right. The "click" in clicker training refers to a small plastic noisemaker, similar to a child's toy cricket.

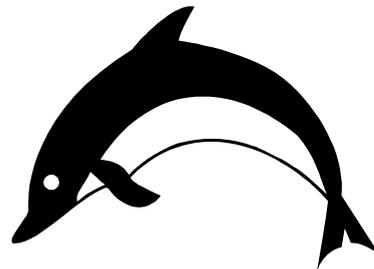
### CLICKER ORIGINS

Clicker training began with dolphin training. Thirty plus years ago when dolphins were first put on display in marine aquariums, people had no idea how to train them. Just imagine what you would do if you had to teach a dolphin to jump through a hoop on command.

- **Clicker training began with dolphin training.**
- **The click tells the horse precisely when it has done something right.**
- **Once a connection is made, you are well on the way to training very complex behaviours**

None of the traditional training methods people knew thirty years ago seemed to apply to an animal that could just swim away. That

training depended too much on restraints and punishment, things you just can't use with dolphins. The solution was to shape behaviour using positive reinforcement, but even that presented a problem. How do you tell a dolphin that you liked what it just did? You can throw a fish in the water, but by the time it finds it,



the reward won't have any connection to the behaviour you were trying to reinforce. This problem was solved by introducing a high frequency whistle. The trainers blew a whistle just before they threw the fish into the water. The dolphins very quickly learned to expect a fish every time they heard the whistle. The next step was to link the whistle to behaviour. For example, if you lower a hoop into the water and blow the whistle only when the dolphin is swimming near that hoop, pretty soon the dolphin will be spending the majority of its time orienting around the hoop. This is a

beginning step towards learning that behaviour leads to whistle leads to fish. Once that connection is made, you are well on the way to training very complex behaviours.

The whistle is a bridging signal (or secondary reinforcer to use the more technical term). It gives the animal very clear and precise information. It acts as a "right answer cue". It says to the animal, the behaviour you just did will get you a treat. CLICK!

### **WHY CLICKER TRAINING?**

The most important point to make here is that we can always benefit by establishing a better relationship with our horses. Clicker training does not replace any training method that you might be currently using with your horse. It is simply a communication tool. From early psychological research in animal behaviour it was discovered that animals respond promptly to food rewards. This is not to say that forever more we will need to treat our horses with food each time we wish to communicate "well done". What it means simply, is that in the early stages when we introduce

the clicker to our horses, your horse will learn the connection between the clicker sound and the communication of "yes" much more quickly. Later, other tools can take on the properties of food

### **WHAT KINDS OF THINGS CAN YOU TEACH WITH THE CLICKER?**

Anything you want. From basic manners to advanced upper level performance, anytime you need a clear "yes" answer signal the clicker can help out your training.

For starters go down a checklist of basic stable manners. Does your horse lead well? Will he walk right onto a trailer?

Does he ground tie? Does he take his bridle easily? Will he stand quietly on cross ties? Is he good for grooming and saddling? Will he accept clippers, pick his feet up for cleaning, etc., etc. If the answer to any of those questions is no, try a little clicker training.

**Remember Clicker training does not replace any training method that you might be currently using with your horse. It is simply a communication tool.**

*The printed information contained in this fact sheet is kindly provided by Judy Ryder-Duffy and Alexander Kurland; author of "CLICKER TRAINING FOR YOUR HORSE" & GETTING STARTED: CLICKER TRAINING FOR HORSES. You can purchase Alex's books by printing off the order form at <http://www.crisny.org/users/kurlanda> & mailing it to; Alexandra Kurland. 110 Salisbury Rd Delmar, NY 12054 USA. The Australian Clicker Connection Website can be found at <http://www.equilog.com.au/clicker.htm> & Clickers can be purchased in Australia through Equilog ( ph) 02 49 986095. <http://www.equilog.com.au>.*