

Racing Maxims and Methods of Pittsburg Phil -- by Edward Cole (1908)

CHAPTER 11 -- Drugs and Their Effect upon Horses

One custom among owners and trainers of horses in this country has done more harm to racing than any other practice. It is the stimulation of horses before their races, the purpose being to make them exert themselves to the fullest extent. It is a custom that every racing association has tried to overcome, but sorry to say without complete success, for stimulating horses has been carried to such an excess that there is a certain amount of suspicion attached to almost every horse that goes to the post, especially among the common lot.

It is not the use of a stimulant that is so much feared as the abuse of it. If an owner is consistent in its use, it can be tolerated, for anything that will make a horse run consistently is all that officials should desire. It is the inconsistent running of horses that creates scandal. There are horses, that can run, and won't, unless given some kind of stimulant, whether it be mild or forceful, much depending upon the temperament of the animal.

Some stimulants have just about the same effect upon horses as a cocktail upon a human being. One cocktail is often sufficient to "oil up" the good humor and knowledge of a person that otherwise would riot be brought out, while it will take ten times the quantity to have the same effect upon another person. So it is with stimulating horses. And while some drugs will have the desired effect upon one horse, they will act in a decidedly different manner upon others.

It is all a question of temperament and physical condition of the subject. Hence it is that a thorough knowledge of administering a stimulant is required as well as a thorough knowledge of the disposition of a horse. To diagnose the traits of a horse properly many experiments must necessarily be tried, and when once a satisfactory result has been ascertained, a trainer knows just what drug is best for the disposition of the animal and how to use it.

It is the lack of this knowledge, and careless use of stimulants, that cause horses to become positively uncontrollable. In many cases horses have been known to run until they fall exhausted and in more than one instance have died on the track. Stimulating has had bad effects after a race, if an overdose has been applied, or a stimulant has been administered that did not act in accord with the physical make up of the animal. A high strung, nervous, ill tempered horse, if given a powerful stimulant, will act much as an individual who possesses the same sort of disposition, and has drunk too freely of liquor. He will want to fight and break everything in sight. The horse will desire to run and not stop until nature is exhausted. This does not infer that every horse that has run away with a jockey has been stimulated as there are some horses crazy enough to do almost anything in the line of contrariness.

What the speculator on horse racing wants to know is to be able to tell when a horse is stimulated or not. In these days of science, and the constant attention horsemen have paid to the stimulating question, it is safe to assert that even the most experienced veterinarians are at times deceived by

the condition of a horse and cannot always detect the use of stimulants. In experimenting, veterinarians have administered a certain stimulant to a horse, raced him, and after investigation, have found nothing out of the ordinary in the cooling out process, in fact the animal returned to his stall normal in every way except for a natural increase in heart action and temperature, which is to be expected after a severe effort of any kind in horse or man.

A veterinarian, who is conversant with all the tricks of the stimulating process, has made public much desirable information on the subject, which is quoted in his exact language. He has described all the drugs that were used. It is not necessary to enumerate them here. For the information of the majority it is believed expedient to enlighten them as to the effects that certain drugs have on horses and how they can be outwardly observed if a careful search is made.

Said this celebrated veterinarian, "Stimulating horses, or as it is vulgarly called 'Doping or Hopping,' has been in vogue in America for a great number of years. My earliest recollection, was at Clifton, Guttenberg, and Gloucester, when these were famous winter meetings. I have seen it also at various minor meetings.

"There is no doubt in my mind that an animal so highly sensitive, and of such a temperament as the thoroughbred can be made by the judicious use of stimulants, to do his utmost when called upon.

"Here it is where one trainer, who has a knowledge of the action and uses of stimulants, has an advantage over his brother trainer who does not possess such knowledge. All horses are not alike and the dose administered to one, which will be attended by the best results, may be a total failure in another animal.

"What I am going to endeavor to explain is, how one may know (not being an expert) whether the animal is stimulated or not. Various drugs used produce various symptoms. I will now try and explain how and when to tell that an animal has been stimulated.

"You enter the Enclosure or Paddock, where the finishing touches are given previous to going to the Post. The first thing you look for is the expression you see in the eyes of a horse. If he has an animated look, eyes bright, dilated, a look of expectancy as it were about him, is restless, nostrils dilated, perspiring or sweating, (the latter may only be slight) excitable, in fact he acts and looks as if he were in a very anxious mood, you can safely infer a stimulant has been administered.

"You must not mistake a nervous, high strung, excitable animal for one that has a stimulant. The nervous animal does not have that anxious expectant look. He has a wild or scared expression. He may be perspiring freely, but it is not always a sign with him of stimulation. If watched closely, you will invariably find the animal's bowels move very often. This is due to the excitement attendant upon his nervous temperament induced by his surroundings.

"Look carefully over a horse you believe stimulated and observe if there is any froth or saliva about his mouth, if so, he has had heroin which is given on the tongue. One of its symptoms is

the frothing saliva or drooling. The attendant frequently keeps sponging his mouth as he walks around, by this means hoping to divert attention from the saliva.

"Take a look at the next horse walking around the paddock, very calm and taking no notice of his surroundings. Do not be fooled (he has been stimulated too) but it takes a thorough horseman and an expert to discover it.

"This animal has a stimulant to which codeine has been added which checks the excitable propensities. Some animals are more easily affected than others, and it was to this knowledge, acquired by some noted plungers, that their success was due. They were able to tell when an animal was so stimulated by having an expert in their employ who could at a glance invariably detect the fact. The writer knows of a well known veterinarian who was often sent into the paddock to give his opinion, and large wagers were made on or against the animal according to his judgment.

"The system of stimulating animals is in universal practice, nearly all stables from the highest to the lowest using every known means to animate their charges and make them do their utmost. Trainers contrive to get the best of prescriptions which can be relied upon to give extra stamina and endurance, and also to cause the animal to do his best, without unduly exciting him.

"The following drugs are the most used in the practice of stimulation: cocaine, caffeine, codeine, coffee, digitalis, strychnine, nux vomica, strophanthus, kola, heroin, sherry, whiskey, brandy, and last, though not least, nitro glycerine.

"The following will give an idea how these various drugs have been and are used. The earliest system by which the animal was stimulated was by giving a strong drench of coffee about one-half hour before post time, or a pint of sherry, whiskey or brandy. Then came later the hypodermic by which means doses of cocaine, varying from 1 to 15 grains, were introduced by the needle under the animal's skin just before he went to the post. There were no paddock judges then and such measures were used without fear of detection.

"Now all is changed, the skillful trainer tries that which, except to the trained and observant expert, will be least noticed. He hunts up all kinds of formulas, discusses the 'pro's and con's' with his brothers in the profession, and administers a stimulant to the animal under his charge, which will give the best results and which is as little noticeable as possible. Sometimes the dose given is too strong. The animal either wears himself out in the paddock, or at the post, or runs away with the jockey. Very often an overdose will take the animal's speed away and many unscrupulous trainers employ this method where they wish to retard speed. The horse will stop to a walk, as it were, when he is called upon for a final struggle.

"Cocaine is very extensively used. The muriate being the salt preferred. This is a great cerebral stimulant producing mental excitement.

"Its action upon the circulation is pronounced, though less than on the nervous system.

"Codeine is used where there is a very nervous excitable animal. It is obtained from opium. Its action, while it quiets, does not interfere with speed or endurance.

"Digitalis exerts great power over the circulation, the work done by the heart under its influence being far more than normal. It is slow in its action and is generally given in conjunction with other agents. Strychnine and nux vomica are identical in their action. They are great stimulants of the brain and spinal cord, but seem to have greater effect when used with other drugs.

"Strophanthus in moderate doses is a stimulant. In large doses it retards the speed. Capsicum is used as a base for other agents.

"Kola and its preparations are largely used. The powdered kola nut is used in capsules with other ingredients. The fluid extract, however, is the most used preparation.

"The muriate of heroin is a salt generally used, and is placed on the tongue. it is also used in conjunction with other drugs and can be detected by frothing at the mouth and a continuous scraping of the tongue against the upper teeth.

"Nitro Glycerine (spirits of glonoin) is one of the best heart stimulants known. It is always given with other agents, thus increasing its action.

"If a horse going to the post has an animated look, eyes are bright, and expectant, moves in a brisk, jaunty manner, is slightly breaking out, as it is called, or sweating, he is under the influence of some stimulant. Kola, cocaine, digitalis or strychnine or a mixture of them will produce these symptoms. There comes another one that does not have that bright, jaunty air about him, but around his mouth there is saliva or froth. He champs his bit and is sweating slightly. By the time he gets to the post he may be in a lather. In that case heroin has been used. no matter how used, either by itself or in conjunction with other drugs, it has this infallible sign. Another may be nervous or excited, but the muscles of his chest and thighs are shivering as if he were cold. Rely upon it that he has been stimulated either with cocaine, strychnine and digitalis combined or alone. Any of these will produce these symptoms. Another that shows no excitability or nervousness, is not even breaking out, has no animated look about him, may be stimulated with codeine and other stimulants combined which take a longer time to work. He is kept working in the paddock, and his jockey is told to keep him moving about at the post and very often is given instructions to canter him there. When you see an animal as dry as a bone, to use a slang term, no animation about him, he either has not been stimulated or he has been given something such as strophanthus that will retard his effort to do his utmost."