

FOSH VS PETA -

They are not the same!

By Destrat Schild

I keep hearing FOSH and PETA lumped together as if they had the same mission statement. Nothing could be further from the truth.

PETA appears to be working toward ending any type of harm or discomfort for any animal on the planet. In a nutshell, PETA is a group of activists that promote animal rights.

The FOSH mission addresses only horses. We try to ensure that horse owners, exhibitors and trainers follow the Horse Protection Act, a law created more than 30 years ago to end the abuse and torture of horses, specifically (at that time) Tennessee Walkers, in the show ring. In a second nutshell, FOSH promotes the humane treatment of horses.

We work to provide a sound show circuit that assures each participant a level playing field. FOSH provides education, updated as the collective body of equine information grows, to promote the soundest, safest methods for owners to enjoy the most from their horses, in the ring or on the trail.

PETA is against using animals for food. Although I'm sure some FOSH members are vegetarians, many of us enjoy a good steak. Refusing to accept deliberate abuse of horses for show ring gratification has nothing to do with any member's diet. Yet, some people assume one goes with the other.

Actually, I don't think the people who say FOSH is PETA really believe it. They're just angry they are going to have to clean up their acts and want to blame any organization that might cause that.

PETA opposes using glue traps for mice and wearing fur. FOSH doesn't address either. We do address showing practices that have proven detrimental to a horse's emotional, mental and physical health.

No two-year-olds may be exhibited under saddle at a FOSH show. That's because there is irrefutable, scientific proof that horses of that age are not physically mature enough to endure the rigors of the show ring. Their knees are still open and irreparable damage can occur from putting too much stress on young legs. The spines also are at risk. Remember, a horse exhibited at two was started long before that first show, probably at 16 to 20 months old.

The 4 1/2 inch toe rule has been upsetting for many and I'm not sure why. Horses' hooves were measured at FOSH shows the year before this rule took effect and only one horse all year had a toe longer than 4 1/2 inches. People have argued that the larger horses need longer toes. I live in an area proudly populated by Clydesdales and Shires, neither of which needs a toe longer than 4 1/2 inches.

However, there is an option for each owner feeling their horse must have a longer toe because of its size. A letter from a vet will open the door for negotiations. Everyone showing a horse is going to the vet for health papers anyway. If the toe length is a big deal, get a letter and submit it to Dianne Little, IJA Director of Judging, for an in-depth, fair analysis.

There is a great deal of evidence that longer toes, shaved heels and such practices lead to tendon and ligament problems, as well as putting the horse out of chiropractic balance. I know vets that regularly perform surgery to correct horse's legs that have been damaged by too long toes. Please note the story of Coder on page 11.

Now, for the rules FOSH respects and enforces but had nothing to do with creating.

The one currently causing the ruckus is that all horses must be unsaddled for DQP inspection. This is because some people were using bit burrs under the saddle to "steward" the horses. Theoretically, the pressure and pain of the bit burrs distracts the horse from the pain in its feet.

Cries against FOSH and PETA immediately went up. FOSH members were as surprised and will be just as inconvenienced as everyone else by the new rule. We will respect it as we do all USDA rules. If you want to damn someone for necessitating this extra measure, look to the people who used the bit burrs to steward the horses—probably not FOSH members doing that.

The USDA's announcement that the scar rule will be strictly enforced this year also has people cursing FOSH. Why be mad at us? The rule was created decades ago and abusers have been warned for years that this day was coming. If they had obeyed the law, there would be no scar rule concerns. So, put the blame where it's really due.

Finally, for those people who complain when they are ticketed for USDA rule violations—again, look in the mirror. You knew that horse might not pass and you tried to sneak it through anyway. Sure, other people may agree to your face as you rant against the ticket. What you are really doing is underlining the fact that you tried to cheat and got caught. And, you tried to cheat against most of the people to whom you are complaining. Ever wonder what they really think?

All exhibitors know that tickets are not written lightly. The DQPs are fully aware there will be lots of paperwork, complaints and hard feelings. They won't ticket unless they are sure a violation has occurred. Then, they are bound by law to respond appropriately.

FOSH is trying to provide a venue for the showing of sound horses. Our DQPs are enforcing existing laws and trying to assure all exhibitors have an equal opportunity in the ring. That's not crazy or radical. It's just the right thing to do. ■