

Emotional Conformation Profiling:
“Discovering the Communicated Equine...”

By:

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Any pedigree expert will tell you that you can breed a high standing sire to a wonderful, proven mare and, yet, two of their full-blood offspring, seemingly equal in physical stature and racing ability, will often have vast differences in performance levels on the racetrack. One horse may be an excellent runner while the other is a mediocre or poor runner.

At stud, the excellent runner may have offspring that are less talented than the sire while the mediocre horse produces offspring that excel at the racetrack. Both horses have the same genetic origin and, yet, their history and the history of their offspring can be vastly different.

Indeed, genetics, alone, is not the determining factor for success or failure. But, rather, it is the mind of the horse that is in complete control of the will and, thus, performance, on and off the racetrack.

This makes it very clear that while physical ability is important, *the mental capacity of the equine controls the physical output of the athlete.*

What is Emotional Conformation?

When buying, selling, training or breeding, all horses are graded on Conformation which is an analysis of the overall *physical* horse. In addition to *physical conformation*, I grade a horse's *Emotional Conformation* which is a term I use to describe the *psychology* of the horse and I use it to analyze the behavioral dynamics, as well as the social tendencies, that impact the potential of the individual horse. Because the overall mental capacity and aptitude of each horse is made up of both seen and unseen *emergent properties and tendencies of behavior*, the mental preparedness of a horse, to react and interact with environmental and social dynamics, becomes a vital indicator of its ability and a source of important information for anyone working with horses. It matters not whether you are preparing an Emotional Conformation Profile of a therapy horse, a high-end thoroughbred or show horse, *Emotional Conformation* is the indicator of that

horse's ability and understanding that is important if one is going to help that horse become a successful competitor and or stallion.

In addition to physical characteristics, if you believe that each horse has obvious individual *personality traits*, then you must also realize that the horse is more dependent on one of those traits than the other for survival. The machine, if you will, is the physical conformation. The pilot of that machine is Emotional Conformation.

Physical conformation only gives one a partial glance at the ability of an individual horse. Emotional Conformation can reveal if it has the heart and mind of a potential champion.

How Do We Do It?

Emotional Conformation Profiling can best be described as an attempt to fit together the pieces of the behavioral puzzle of the horse. To meet this end, I designed a *personality test* called the Thomas Herding Technique EthoGrade Scale which measures the Emotional Conformation of the horse. The EthoGrade Scale came to be out of necessity of proper note-taking while studying and researching wild horse herds and was then reworked where needed so that it was relevant for me to apply to horses living in a domestic environment. The environment is the only thing that changes. The subject matter and the way Emotional Conformation is determined is mostly the same.

The EthoGrade is made up of 28 different, though congruent, *answers* to behavioral and personality questions I created. Since the horse is incapable of answering questions on a piece of paper, one has to *observe* and research the horse in as non-invasive a manner as possible, in as many different but normally occurring circumstances as there are in a given environment.

Preparing an Emotional Conformation Profile can be likened to putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Think of a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle inside a box. On the cover of the box is the picture of a lovely horse – in all its splendid beauty. You can clearly see the physical conformation in the picture of the horse. The pieces within the box, once opened and strewn across your table, are the separate pieces that when put together make up the whole of what you see on the box cover.

Like the jigsaw puzzle, your horse comes in two parts - the *physical* (puzzle box) and the *emotional* (puzzle pieces). When profiling for Emotional Conformation, I am observing to identify those individual pieces and make note of them by way of the EthoGrade. Much like the many pieces of your jigsaw puzzle, the individual nuances, behavioral tendencies, emergent and obvious behavioral dynamics, are all the parts of the equine psyche or *mental aptitude*. When fit together, a very unique *profile* comes into view.

I must stress here that an Emotional Conformation Profile is not a tool for changing the horse but it is an indicator of its ability and potential. The horse is what the horse is and Emotional Conformation goes far in unveiling that. Emotional Conformation establishes a *Personality Propensity Typing* profile which translates the behavioral dynamics of a horse into a letter grade and potential number that I refer to as the P-Type. (For more information on the P-Type you can refer to www.thomasherdingtechnique.com as well as www.pineknollfarm.com, which is the Lexington, Kentucky farm base of the Thomas Herding Technique.)

Once you have a *P-Typed* profile of the horse, you have a foundation point from which to start and you have the opportunity to help it reach its fullest potential.

How Do We Use It?

The Emotional Conformation P-Type profile becomes highly efficacious for many avenues from pre-purchasing to breeding as it is an immediate indicator of the psychological profile of the horse. The P-Type grade is a powerful tool in the tool shed because it is information that adds value to your equine investment you own, purchase, breed or have in training.

One of the ways to work toward the development of your horse is to use the profile as a cornerstone for the development of an individual *playbook* that is designed to elevate the “*who*” into “*what could be.*” Mentally nurturing your horse is vitally important for overall health and success. An Emotional Conformation Profile of the horse can go a long way in your decision making process – be it for therapy horse or athlete. (To read essays and articles such as *Breeding for Behavior...*, please visit <http://thomasherdingtechnique.com/research/a-view-from-the-hoof.php> .) A profile of the *in-training* athlete or therapy horse also is an essential asset when seeking to find ways to elevate the horse, or work through potential withholds by finding the *sweet spot*, that comfort zone that releases your horse’s true ability.

Aside from individual profiling other options are available. Maternity Band Profiling, as well as total Herd Profiling, are useful tools for culling your herd and separating individuals into the best possible protocols for success.

An Emotional Conformation Profile can answer the myriad of questions one often has when working with horses: should my horse go into training; be a broodmare; what is the best situation or environment to maintain my horse’s mental health while it is convalescing in the stall or shipping; should I buy this horse.

In then end, the more you know about your horse, the better your relationship will be and it matters not what the goals are for that relationship. The concept of Emotional Conformation Profiling operates in three ways: Investigate, Evaluate and Apply.

My main goal with Emotional Conformation Profiling is to help bring the horse into focus.