



Treatment on the horse back

Horses are our friends, pets and racing tools. But they are also living treatment benches for people with body problems. We are visiting Ulrika Standard-Olsson, one of Sweden's few hippophysiotherapists, at her farm on Söderåsen in Skåne.

TEXT: ANDROMEDA MATZ // PHOTO: ADAM HAGLUND

Kvöldsol is brushed and braided and Jonathan Olsson takes her out in the courtyard. Soon Birgitta Jönsson will start her training - but not a normal training where the horse is trained or Birgitta is trained as a rider. Birgitta has had back pain and joint

pain for 30 years, but now she has found a physiotherapy which has made her feel much better.

– Birgitta's back is almost completely healed now. We will now move the training to the neck and the shoulders, Ulrika says.

Birgitta puts on a belt before she mounts Kvöldsol and Jonathan leads the rider and

horse out towards the forest.

– The belt is necessary so that I can keep a firm hold on the patient, Ulrika says.

Ulrika is a certified physiotherapist since 1991 and wanted to further her education. As she was interested in horses already as a child, she chose a training of 2 years in Denmark to become a hippophysiotherapist.

Skritrörelsen får ryttaren att omedvetet slappna av och sträcka på sig, något som inte går att skapa med vanliga sjukgymnastikmetoder. Det gör hästen till en fantastisk behandlingsbänk.



“DET HÄR ÄR INGET HOKU-POKUS. DET ÄR EN GODKÄND BEHANDLING MED VETENSKAPLIT BEVISADE RESULTAT.”

– With this method I get fantastic results, which I did not experience in my former profession, she said.

Ulrika has private patients at home on her farm, but she is also part-time employed by Region Skåne as a hippophysiotherapist for children and young people. There she treats many children with functional disabilities, many of them with several types of disabilities. The results of the hippophysiotherapy have been evaluated and it was found that the treatment has a remaining effect of half a year after the end of the treatment.

– Many of my patients hardly ever speak, but here it has happened that suddenly new words were spoken. One patient who always is dumb, said the word “horse” for the first time in her life, Ulrika says.

That contact with animals and nature helps people to get well quicker, is well known. It is easy to motivate the patient to

train, if it is something he likes to do.

– The children come here and say that they are here to ride with Ulrika. They do not look upon it as a treatment, says Ulrika. And I do not have to consider how to make the treatment enjoyable.

But this is not the only reason for the good results of Ulrika’s treatment.

– It is no hocus-pocus. It is an approved treatment with scientifically proved results. Horses are fantastic treatment benches and the movement that the horse initiate cannot be achieved through other conventional methods, Ulrika states.

When the horse walks 1,700 to 2,000 changes of movement are initiated in the rider’s body. These movements cannot be prevented by the rider; it is the movements

of the horse which, so to say, are transmitted into the body. This is also important for patients suffering from paralysis or persons who due to their disability cannot control the body.

When the horse walks a three-dimensional movement develops similar to the movements of humans when walking. The body moves back and forth, to the sides and the hips rotate.

If our body hurts, we tense up and cannot keep the body straight when walking. On the horseback we get the natural movement back.

– The three-dimensional movement loosens up and relaxes the muscles. It influences the muscles, circulation and the spine, so that we automatically stretch.

If we are tense, we start to relax on the horseback.

Sometimes it feels like magic when a pa-

Birgitta får sin behandling på Kvöldsöl, isländska för kvällssol. Ulrika använder islandshästar i ridsjukgymnastiken eftersom det är lättare för henne att hjälpa patienten från marken på en lägre häst. Dessutom får rullstolsburna patienter möjlighet till fartfyllda upplevelser i tölt.

tient with severe functional disabilities, such as CP, sits on a horse and after five minutes you do not notice the functional disability, Ulrika tells us enthusiastically.

After a few exercises in the forest Birgitta rides into the riding course. Here she can look into the mirror and see how she moves and if she still sits straight on the horse. She rides at a walk and with the help of a riding crop she makes some exercises to strengthen the neck and shoulders. Although she is moving the whole time, she sits well and firmly on the horse. After that Birgitta turns around on the horse and can use the hindquarters of the horse as support when she does her last exercises.

All treatments by the hippophysiotherapist are based on a specialist's medical report and Ulrika and the patient together determine concrete aims, to which the treatment should lead. It could be e.g. that he should be able to make his bed without becoming a backache or be able to sit down on and get up from a chair free of pain. The patient comes to Ulrika 8 times during a treatment period and after each treatment Ulrika and the patient discuss the exercises and how the patient felt before and after.

– It is important that the treatment is understandable, meaningful and manageable to the patient. And the exercises must be just right to prevent aching muscles afterwards. This is a medical form of treatment that calls for education and competence, Ulrika says with determination.

In countries such as Denmark, Norway and Finland patient can get a letter of referral from a medical doctor. In Sweden this is not possible. Ulrika regrets this, thinking about the good results she achieves.

– I feel quite alone in the job. As far as I know there is besides me only one physiotherapist in Göteborg who works as a hippophysiotherapist in the public sector. When I see the results I achieve, I wish that we were more therapists who work with the horse as a treatment bench.

