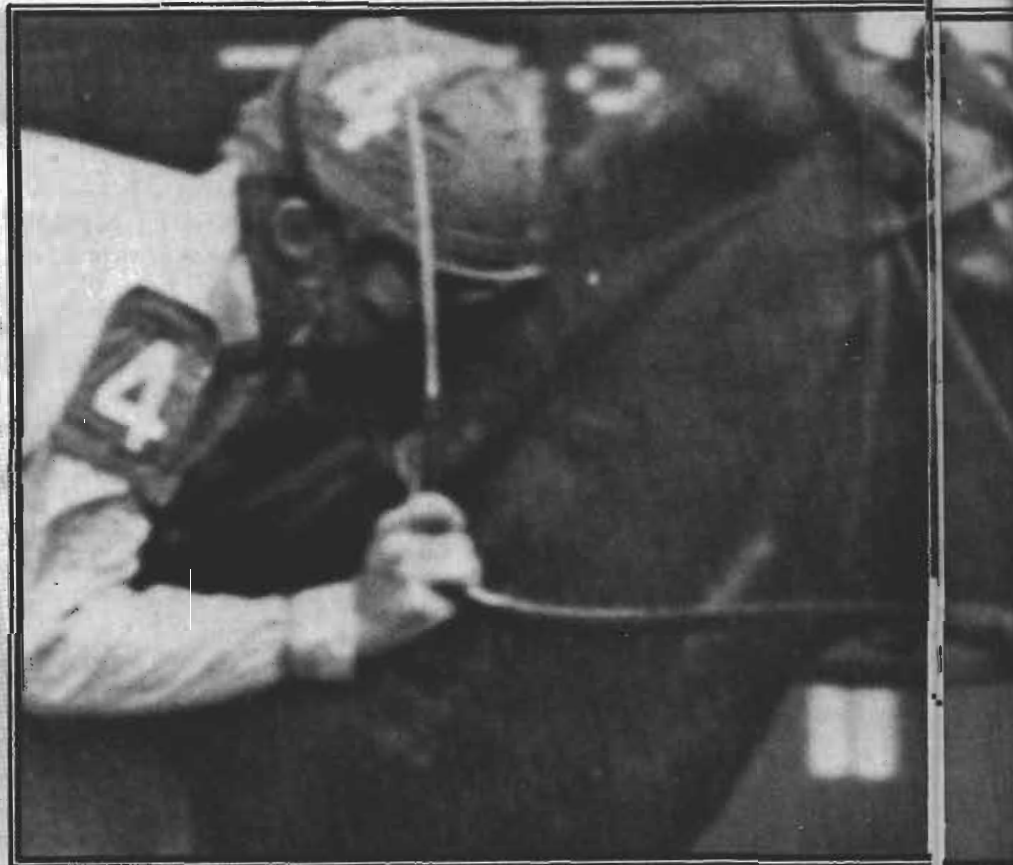




ACUPUNCTURE

LOW

GOES TO THE



RACE

THEY TREAT HORSES, DON'T THEY?

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY PETER BATES

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GES

// Sure I was skeptical at the start. Who wouldn't be?" said veterinarian Dr. Martin Simensen of Boston's Suffolk Downs Race Track. "But after watching some of the work he was doing on my clients' horses, I realized he had something to offer, that he wasn't just a charlatan. //

THE MAN SIMENSEN SPOKE OF IS registered acupuncturist Robert Banever, a talented and respected addition to the frenetic, often crazy world of thoroughbred racing. Five years ago a patient he was treating mentioned that her horse had a stifle, or knee problem, that had been operated on but showed no sign of improvement. Banever diagnosed the problem, anatomically transposed human acupuncture points onto the horse, treated it, and after six sessions, cured it.

Word spread of this feat, and soon owners and trainers sought Banever out to tackle both common, chronic ailments, and lost causes. Five Star Edition rotated his coffin bone, a painful dislocation to the foot that ordinarily calls for humane destruction of the animal. After ten treatments, Banever corrected the problem and the horse went on to win two races and get "claimed" (purchased) in a third. Excluder suffered from founder, an "incurable" condition in which the blood circulation to the foot is severely impaired. Again, after ten treatments, the horse was not only running again, but winning. Gerald Souto, trainer of both animals, was so impressed that he said, "In my experience, acupuncture has proven to be a highly effective therapy that should be used all the time."

Robert Banever arrived at Oriental medicine through the most direct route possible: pain. When he was eighteen, a friend suggested he try acupuncture as a means to heal an ailing back that hadn't responded to eight months of traditional Western treatment. Acupuncture not only healed his condition, but also won for itself another advocate, eager to discover more about its healing qualities. While learning physical therapy at Boston University, he studied Eastern medicine and philosophy in great detail. In 1972 he went to England to study acupuncture at the International College of Oriental Medicine. After interning for six months upon his return to the United States, he started treating people at the Acupuncture Center of Massachusetts in Watertown (now Comprehensive Medical Services of Newton). Concurrent with that, he taught at the New

England School of Acupuncture for six years. It was during this period that he was first approached to treat horses. The idea excited him, for he knew that animal acupuncture was at least as effective and exciting as its human application, bringing with it its own set of challenging and vexing problems.

VETERINARY ACUPUNCTURE is not new. Evidence of its healing techniques go back at least 3,000 years in Chinese history. However, detailed records correspond roughly to human acupuncture's "published" beginning during the Warring State Periods (403 B.C.-221 B.C.). The *Nei Ching* (The *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*)—the most important medical text in traditional Chinese medicine—was compiled then. It detailed, among other things, the size and shape of each needle, its use, methods of manipulation, and names and locations of 365 human acupuncture points. Around that time, acupuncturist Shun Yang took advantage of this manual, transposed some of its points to animal sites, and became the first full-time practitioner of Chinese veterinary medicine. Around 200 A.D., Chang Chung-ching further refined acupuncture theories, both human and animal and presented them in his *Treatise on Typhoid*. This book not only differentiates the use of acupuncture needles from moxabustion, the igniting of the moxa herb at the point site, but also details what should be expected if the wrong diagnosis and treatment are used.

Poor farmers were soon learning how to heal their animals rather than slaughter them every time something went wrong in their systems. Like most pragmatic forms of folk medicine, it soon spread to other countries. In Japan, acupuncture's introduction coincided with the advent of Buddhism in the sixth century A.D. By the end of the Tokugawa period (1611-1867), as many as forty-five schools had been established

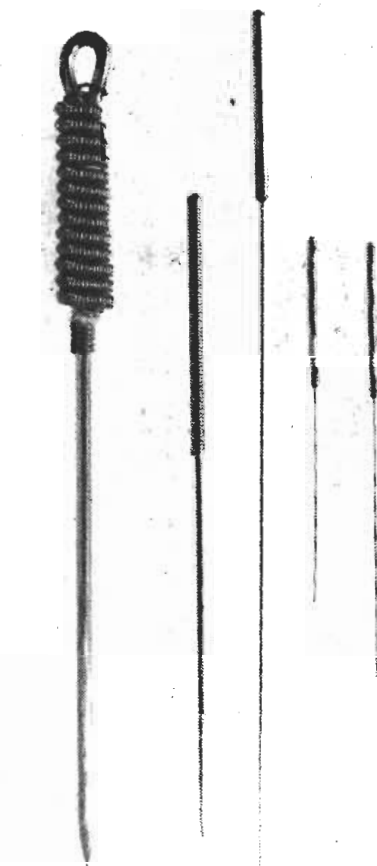
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Right, actual size acupuncture needles. The three on the left are for use on horses; the two smaller-gauge ones are for humans.

with official support in Tokyo alone, many of them catering to veterinary acupuncture as well.

Some broad-visioned Europeans seized acupuncture's central concepts as early as the seventeenth century. The first work in French was published in 1671 by the Jesuit P.P. Harvieu, beginning a long and fruitful French endorsement of acupuncture. Not until the twentieth century did other European countries follow suit. In 1965, the Netherlands established the International College of Oriental Medicine, which opened its British branch in 1969. Austria then established its Ludwig Boltzmann Acupuncture Institute in Vienna and one of its members, veterinarian Dr. Oswald Kothbauer, has published extensive scientific articles about animal acupuncture. He was the first westerner to successfully produce acupuncture analgesia on a cow. The film he made of that breakthrough was shown in the United States in 1974, sparking some interest, but not bringing about actual application.

IT'S OFTEN PUZZLING WHY there is so much distrust of new medical methods in this country. This is especially true of imported ones that have already been successfully tested.



There are less than half a dozen equine acupuncturists in the United States and, compounding the problem, there is no national organization that could popularize their practice.

Banever doesn't advertise. Most of the owners who bring their horses to him do so through word of mouth. They have heard that he often takes on ani-

mals that have not responded to traditional veterinary therapy. For some, he is their last resort, the final step before "humane destruction."

Two notable cases, Loejin and Little Griff, although still competing, did poorly on the track. Loejin, a five-year-old, suffered from a severe back problem involving his sciatic nerve, and navicular disease (a form of arthritis) in his foot, causing the coffin bone to rotate slightly. Any one of these conditions is, or could become, disabling enough to prevent the horse from running. Banever, in a burst of confidence, bought Loejin.

Traditional veterinary medicine often treats sciatic nerve disorders with cortisone injections; bone spurs are often filed down through surgery but can then sometimes reoccur. Navicular disease and bowed tendons have no effective standard treatments. In Loejin's case, only the cortisone injections were used on the back, with limited success.

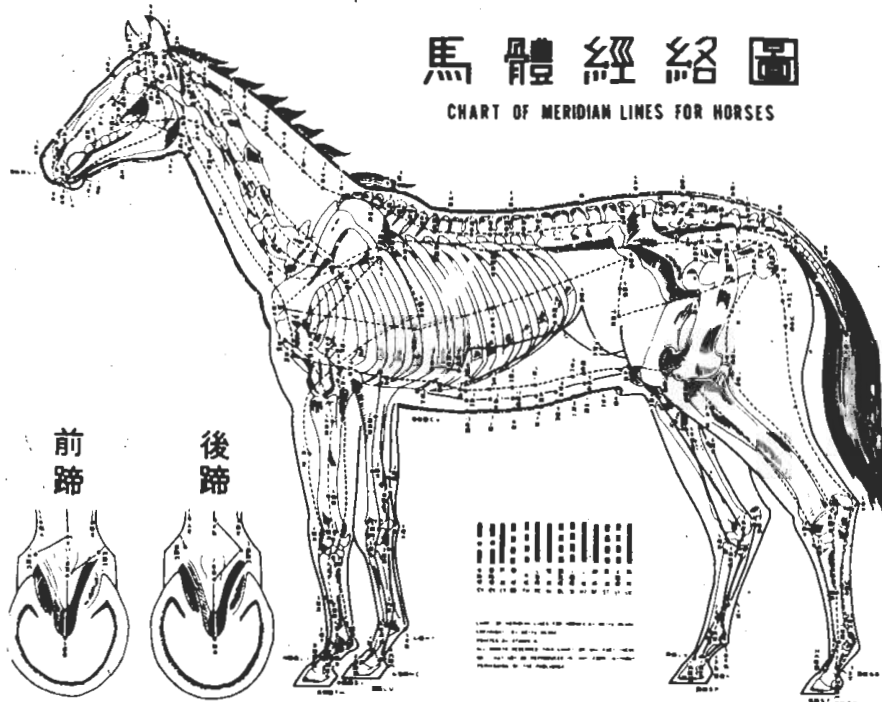
Banever tended to the sciatic nerve problem with seven acupuncture points, using 20-gauge needles three times a week over a three month period. The navicular disease was also treated this way, enhancing the blood supply to the foot, in Banever's estimation. He used laser therapy on the bowed tendon and electro-magnetic therapy on the bone spur. Within three months the spur had dissolved and the navicular disease, sciatica, and bowed tendon had subsided. The horse not only ran better, but won seven times in the remaining three months Banever owned him.

There is a catch. "He hasn't shown up on the board (the winning roster) since I sold him," said Banever. Acupuncture didn't actually heal all of Loejin's conditions. "A lot of equine acupuncture is a symptomatic, ongoing type of treatment. You control a condition and hope it doesn't get any worse." Anyone who buys a winning horse from Banever would do well to talk to him, find out about acupuncture, and continue the treatment. Unfortunately, few do.

Little Griff had arthrosis in the stifle joint cartilage, a form of arthritis. Veterinarians—and sometimes trainers—treat this condition with cortisone and/or "blistering"—the infusion of the cavity with an iodine solution. Sometimes it is successful; more often it is temporary, a palliative. The treatment also necessitates the horse be "turned out" (temporarily retired) for three to five months. If that fails, it could be destroyed.

馬體經絡圖

CHART OF MERIDIAN LINES FOR HORSES



Banever treated Little Griff with acupuncture eight times over a three-week period, without interrupting the animal's training. Shortly afterwards, he won two races. Bowed tendons, according to Banever, take up to a year to heal in casts, changed every two days; acupuncture can often fix them in three months. Normal racing produces such muscle strain on the horse that ordinarily it can run competitively only once every two weeks. Through acupuncture applied to the musculo-skeletal system, however, the strain is reduced so quickly that the animal can often perform optimally after a week to ten days. The results have been so tangible and lucrative that satisfied owners often come to Banever for personal treatments.

BANEVER'S SUCCESSES WERE noticed by an old friend, William Kaufman, manager of Moneywatch Financial Consultants of Medfield, Massachusetts. The two knew each other ten years ago when they lived at Kaufman's macrobiotic study house in Boston. About two years ago, Kaufman asked him how the horses were performing after acupuncture. "He told me 'Not bad.' So I said 'How good's that?' He said, 'I don't know, I don't check the records.' So last summer I started comparing the treated horses' win records with the dates they started acupuncture. Sure enough, I saw a definite correlation between their treatment and their improved performance."

Kaufman did research on all the horses Banever treated and found that even if a particular horse didn't win races, its time was invariably better after treatment. Elated with the results, the two men told friends and relatives, eventually persuading them to invest in a group of horses that Banever and a trainer had picked out from claiming races. Six months ago they formed Rainbow Stables, a consortium of twenty owners and seven horses managed and treated by Banever and Kaufman. Since that formation about six months ago, they have had a 40 percent win record, the highest in the country.

"We believe there are horses out there," continued Kaufman, "that have been undervalued because of injuries that haven't been perceived yet, even by trainers and vets. What I'm talking about is muscular aches, minor injuries, stuff X-rays can't diagnose. Sometimes a mystery ailment will prompt an owner to film a horse running in slow motion to find out what side he pulls on or veers

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Banever uses electro-stimulation to treat an ankle problem.

towards. That might tell them what's wrong, but not how to treat it. Most of them give up and treat the horse with butazoladine [a legal analgesic]."

ACUPUNCTURE INVOLVES not only knowing where to place the needles for such problems, but also when not to use them at all. Often Banever opts for a portable helium neon laser unit that penetrates the acupuncture point like a needle. "It's relatively painless," said Banever. "I use it in areas where there's not a lot of fleshy tissues, like on legs." The thin beam not only penetrates the half-inch necessary to activate the acupuncture point, but also gives a readout, showing the electrical charge of the inflamed area in microamps. This is perhaps the closest any device gets to measuring the ch'i, or energy level at the inflamed site.

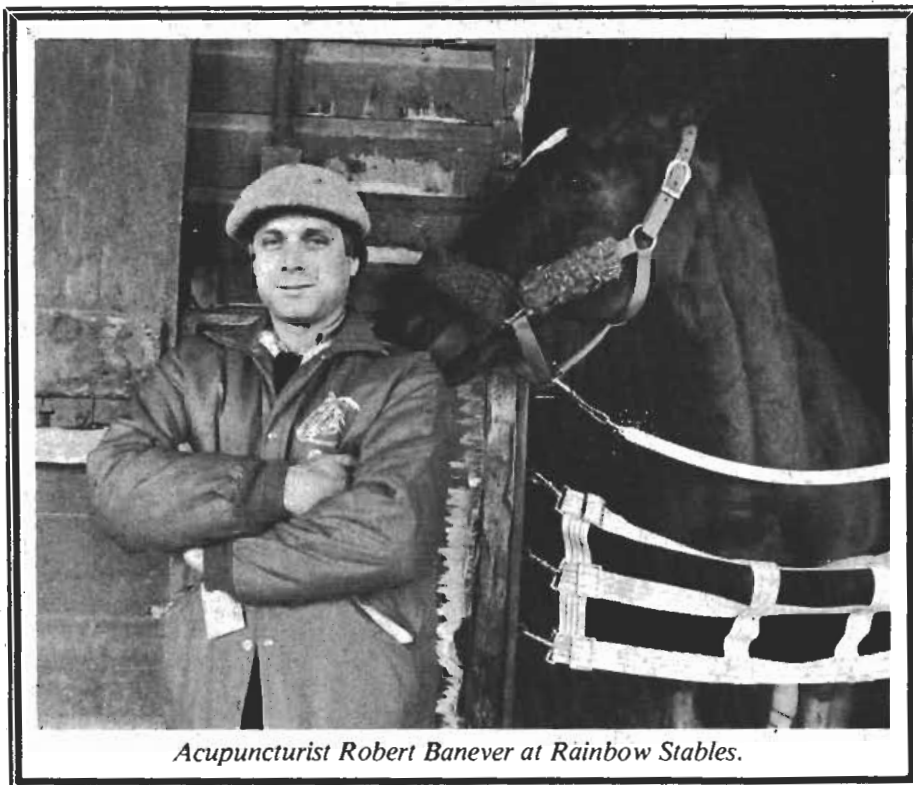
For the ten seconds Banever positions the laser, the horse may feel a slight burning sensation causing it to jerk or pull away. Very often it needs to be restrained with a twitch, a ropelike device looped around its lip. While the laser beam fixates on the point, the extracellular fluid around, say, a sprain is being stimulated, eventually absorbed into the body, and reduced. This causes a dila-

tion of the blood vessels in the affected area, which brings more blood into the tissues, needed for healing. The laser may also inspire the production of cortisone and endorphin in the horse's system, the latter a natural pain reliever claimed to be 200 times more effective than morphine.

When Banever does use his 20-gauge needles (compared to the smaller 38-gauge for humans) on the horses, it is exclusively on soft tissue areas and usually with electro-stimulation, which provides an added boost for these large animals. He uses a 27-volt "acupuncture anesthesia apparatus" from mainland China. He clips its wires to needles inserted into specific meridians, or pathways through which ch'i flows in specific directions. Electro-stimulation, using a high frequency alternating current, "cools down" an area and disperses the hyperactive ch'i throughout the body, relaxing an affected area.

Banever treated Land's End for a sore back using this method. "He was muscle-sore," said Banever. "Most race horses are—they're athletes and their overstressed muscles need constant attention. It's easy to detect this by the way he stands, walks, performs. Unfortunately horses can't talk, so we have to

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Acupuncturist Robert Banever at Rainbow Stables.

diagnose these things by palpation, pressing on certain areas to discover hardness or pain."

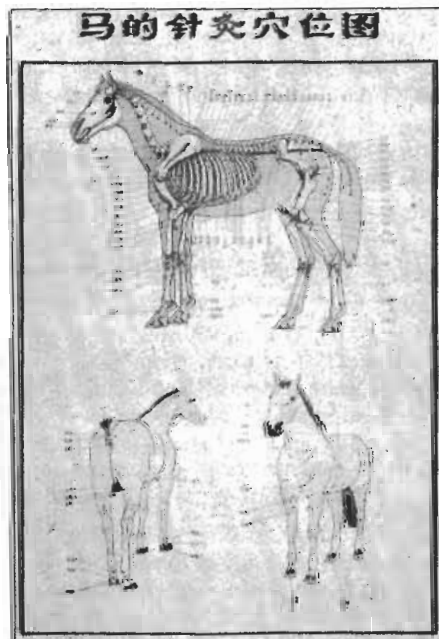
Most of the problems Banever treats at the track are of the musculo-skeletal system and as such are relatively easy to diagnose. Sometimes a horse will develop an internal digestive or respiratory problem, one that will call for more sophisticated Eastern diagnostic methods, such as feeling the pulse.

Some Chinese acupuncture needles, too, are so specialized and arcane that Banever doesn't even own them. The "gas releasing" needle, eighteen inches long with a round, dull end, is designed to release air that has built up in muscle tissue. "I've never seen this condition," said Banever, "and never seen that needle used." Perhaps most odd is the "piercing jaundice needle," a flexible, threaded device pointed at both ends for insertion into two points spaced an inch apart at the thorax, designed for one purpose: liver malfunction.

There are even schools of acupuncture that call for more radical approaches. Some acupuncturists implant gold thread or BBs at a point site to deal with chronic conditions. They are left implanted for periods of time—one week, one month, sometimes perma-

nently. Such a procedure is more effective on humans, since animals rarely cooperate with such constant manipulation. "I don't use it on horses," said Banever. "They would probably think it was an irritant or insect and try to scratch or bite it off."

One thorny problem in treating



A modern Chinese acupuncture chart.

horses is that it is very difficult to thoroughly balance the ch'i, simply because there are far fewer points on a horse (400) than on a human (2,000). For example, if a horse has a full, hot lung condition and the acupuncturist wants to disperse the heat, there would be fewer points to employ. As a result, the ch'i is not completely tonified, and the result, although providing symptomatic relief, can often prove only temporary.

VETERINARY TRUST OF ACUPUNCTURE in this country varies, depending on whom you talk to. Out of three equine vets questioned at Suffolk Downs, only one, Simensen, held a relatively open opinion on the subject. Two others declined to comment, which seems curious. If they felt threatened by what they deemed a non-scientific discipline, why wouldn't they want to sound off? Most likely, professional jealousy is sealing their lips on the subject. Trade societies are not cooperating much either. The American Veterinary Medical Association refused to permit advertisement of acupuncture equipment and instruction in its trade journals (as of 1974) and by 1977 had no policy statement on the training or regulation of acupuncturists. The American Association of Equine Practitioners, in a somewhat more liberal stance, considers acupuncture part of veterinary medicine, to be regulated by each state's practice act.

Whatever direction veterinary acupuncture takes in this country will most likely involve race horses and gambling, which some consider a morally ambiguous venture at best. Both Kaufman and Banever feel they are doing the right thing in keeping the horses off any drugs stronger than butazolidine and also maintaining their health so they can lead longer, more productive lives, free from pain and the danger of being "put down" prematurely. There have been examples of ten-year-olds, senior citizen horses, winning races after treatment, an almost unheard of occurrence on the racetrack. Objections that horse racing is only a productive human activity for the lucky can be countered with this observation: If Rainbow Stables becomes well-known in the racing field, interest may overflow to the larger tracks like Belmont, Saratoga Springs, and Hialeah. It may not be farfetched to assert that if a horse treated with acupuncture wins the Kentucky Derby, Americans may not only bring hundreds of ailing cats and dogs to their local acupuncture center—they may also bring themselves. □