

# Goats Prove Therapeutic to an Anxious Racehorse

by Jessica Shifflett

photos by Mary Lou Coady

Prairie Meadows

Horses aren't the only ones at home under the stable roofs at Prairie Meadows.

Just ask veteran Thoroughbred trainers Lynn Chleborad and Gene Jacquot, who've taken a liking to working at an address with a "whinny-whinny" here, a "bleat-bleat" there, and even a few "meows" coming from the barns for good measure.

To insure that the combined total of 50 horses trained between the two of them were content, Chleborad and Jacquot rolled out the welcome mat to a couple of wether [castrated male] goats. They soon witnessed what seems to some an unlikely alliance, an alliance between racehorse and goat.

"We had a really [nervous natured] horse that would run around in the stall," Chleborad recalls. She and Jacquot knew just the tactic to help the anxious horse relax—company.

Enter Barbeque, a one-and-a-half year-old Boar goat, and his six-month-old sidekick, Riblet.

"You have to have a sense of humor when you're naming goats," Jacquot laughs.

He and Chleborad observably appreciate the humorous personality of the goats in addition to the valuable purpose they serve in the barn.

"The horse is a herd animal, and so is the goat," Jacquot explains, "so they bond."

The symbiotic value of horses and goats was not unfamiliar to Jacquot, who had experience with a goat nursing an orphan foal.

"The foal grew up to be healthy," said Jacquot. "He didn't bleat like a goat or anything!"

In fact, the presence of goats with horses at racetracks is quite ordinary. In the Chleborad and Jacquot racing stables, the horse and goat odd couples share spots at the feed tub, eat from the same hay bag, and the goats even sleep right in front of the horses' stalls.

This side-by-side camaraderie delivers therapeutic benefits. When the goat is in sight, a fidgety horse is reassured, much like a human baby in the presence of the parent. When the bustle of daily activities separate the two and, for example, the horse has returned to the stable while the goats are grazing outside, the horse keeps a watchful eye for the return of his or her pal.

"The mare nickers for Barbeque, and the goat bleats in response," says Chleborad. "The horse looks around and vigilantly waits for Barbeque to return."

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Barbeque, the elderstatesman of the two goats owned by trainer Lynn Chleborad, peers out from saddle towels drying on the line during the mid-morning after the trainer's horses work out at Prairie Meadows. - Photo: Mary Lou Coady -

Many use the expression, "living a dog's life," in envy, but a goat's?

Says Chleborad, "I wish I had a day like theirs! Feed me, pet me!" she mocks. "They just hang out. Spoiled. They're pretty much like couch potatoes."

Watching this docile duo eat out of the palm of Chleborad's hand and bleat when called by name, it's difficult to envision them as ever being wild. While the trust shared between the racehorses and goats initiated



Riblet gets a nuzzle from one of the racing Thoroughbreds in the barn of Prairie Meadows trainer Lynn Chleborad. Goats make good companions for a horse with a fidgety behavior.

- photo by Mary Lou Coady -

almost the instant they were put together, it took much longer for Chleborad and Jacquot to earn the trust of the goats.

"It was a long time before they'd look you in the eye," says Chleborad. "Now they'll look you right in the eye like a person does."

It's apparent the horses aren't the only ones who've grown fond of the goats.

"They're just like part of the family," Chleborad admits. "When we move from racetrack to racetrack, we just throw them in with the horses and they travel right along."

In addition to companionship, Barbeque and Riblet have contributed their share of anecdotes to a growing collection since their first day on the scene.

"Oh, he was so cute," Chleborad smiles as she recalls the day Jacquot surprised her with Riblet's impromptu arrival at her barn, "but he was wild. I mean *wild!*"

When she reached into the cage to pet Riblet, he bolted loose, knocked her over, and jetted down the aisle of the barn. He spooked horses, humans, and cats, which launched the barn into a wild chase.

"All the [stable hands] tried to capture him. It was like catching a greased pig!" Chleborad laughs.

The elder Barbeque was not to be outdone by his younger cohort.

One morning Jacquot was watching the horses during their morning training on the track when he received word that Barbeque had curiously ventured to another barn.

Already aboard the pony horse he rides when leading the racehorses to and from the track, Jacquot rode to the goat's rescue, where he was handed the end of the leash.

Unaware of the hassle he'd caused, Barbeque trotted home proudly in-tow behind the horse and Jacquot just as he'd seen the horses led home from the track so many times before.

This unconventional sight delighted giggling neighbors in the Prairie Meadows stables who still retell the story with just as much amusement as the day it occurred.

"The goats are the hit of the barn, really and truly," Chleborad says.

"Goats are good companions for an anxious horse," she says, and adds with a confident chuckle, "Well, really good companions for people, too."

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