

## **Aleta McCormick**

By Mary Kaufman

I saw the advertisement concerning the seminar to be presented by Aleta McCormick. The advertisement included information about a website ([www.omni-equus.org](http://www.omni-equus.org)). I checked out the website; it concerned itself with treatment and rehabilitation for equine athletes. Sounded interesting so I made up my mind to go see what I could learn.

Aleta provided us with some of her background. She started out as a physical therapy technician in 1978 where she was able to work on a daily basis with world-class athletes. The athletes' enthusiasm for their sports and competition was catching.

Aleta decided that she wanted to run a marathon. She not only wanted to participate in the sport, but she thought it would help her better understand the injuries she was treating. Within a 4-month time frame she went to couch potato to marathon runner. She learned a lot about injuries!!

She progressed with classes and studies and eventually developed a private practice in deep tissue bodywork. She was in demand! She adopted the chiropractic principles early on and combined it with her technique of deep tissue/muscle massage. In addition she has also taught at the Massage School in Santa Monica.

She began to get bored with the work she was doing with people and turned to horses. (She had always loved horses, so they were nothing new to her!) It began as an idea to transfer the extensive information and knowledge developed around human athletics and injuries to the equine athlete.

She changed her technique somewhat, and now equine athletes have the benefit of her training and expertise. She believes that most soft tissue injuries are able to be rehabilitated.

Before you stop reading here, saying you don't have an equine athlete, that you *just* ride trail, or *just* ride in the ring, every horse is an athlete of some sort. They all get sore muscles from time to time and they can all benefit for Aleta's "handiwork."

There was a demonstration horse. She was led out to Aleta walking with short strides and you could tell that she was in some pain. Bonnie was ridden on trail and used to compete in ETI Trail Trails! Just your average horse, no fancy jumper or dressage horse, A TRAIL HORSE!!!

Aleta didn't want to know what was wrong with the mare; she would tell us at the end of the massage.

Aleta used two tools, a plastic curry comb and a soft rubber curry comb. She alternated the use of each, depending upon the mare's response. Aleta used a lot of pressure doing the massage. She started off gently, so both she and the horse could get to know each other and she LISTENED to what Bonnie was telling her. (Aleta watches their body movement –the turning of the ear, leaning into the massage, however the horse moved. Horses don't talk with words (our language). They have a language of their own. Just watch them.)

At first the mare was hesitant, and not too trusting. Aleta showed us by the way the mare was holding her head and neck that there was a lot of tension there and Aleta proceeded to ease the tension away. Within a very short time, the mare was leaning into Aleta and asking for more. Aleta changed sides and started with the neck again. On this side, she progressed a little further down the mare's side. Aleta picked up the cues from Bonnie, and changed sides again and worked on Bonnie's mid-section, progressing to the right rear. At this point, Bonnie tried to walk away from Aleta. Bonnie's owner (Christine Baumgartner) told Aleta that when she does ride Bonnie in the ring, Bonnie has a difficult time picking up her left lead. Turns out, Bonnie had an old muscle injury on the right rear. Aleta thought that it might have been a torn muscle that had healed itself. There was a slight bump there, and Christine said that Bonnie had had that "bump" when she bought her approximately 3 ½ years ago.

Whenever Bonnie would get upset or nervous about where Aleta was massaging, Aleta would change the location of where she was massaging. Aleta eventually massaged both sides of Bonnie three times. By the end of the massage, Bonnie was allowing Aleta to massage the area of the old injury!

Bonnie was weak when the massage was over, but she was walking out with long strides! Her eyes had softened considerably and she was licking her lips. A very happy horse indeed!