



Horses at the garbage-strewn "Big M" stable in West Philadelphia stand upon a small mountain of manure. Such unsanitary conditions at the unventilated stable at right shut down. Meanwhile, well-intentioned "hack" stable owners like Harry Beck (shown top right)

Could the Glue Fac

*Some folks think it's charm
Other people think it ou*



Harry T. Beck is a proud Philadelphia cowboy. He wears intricately designed cowboy boots and denim cowboy body shirts. His belt sports one of those fancy silver buckles depicting cowboy scenes. He even speaks with a bit of a southern drawl which belies his Philadelphia birth 39 years ago.

Eight hours a day, Beck is employed at Catelli's, a Bucks County meat packing house. There he kills and sections calves and lambs, and counts the minutes until he can get home to his real love: horses. Beck is a self-admitted horse nut who recently fulfilled a dream by acquiring a dilapidated horse stable at 6971 Laurel St.

The "Little M" stable is, essentially, little more than a conglomeration of ramshackle huts, rusted-out truck bodies, and fenced enclosures where some 24 horses are kept in a devastated section of North Philadelphia. In one concrete building, which was formerly a garage, a number of animals are crammed into "stalls" which are actually little more than glorified wooden slots. The remainder of the horses are

housed outside, in a line of rusted truck bodies. The enclosures are a bit lacking in insulation: summer finds them functioning as effective ovens; winter as refrigerators.

Harry Beck apologizes for the shortcomings of his place, which he admits is "a bit messy." He likes to point out that he has big plans for the future.

Beck is typical of the numerous "hack" stable owners throughout the city whose "big plans" have never quite materialized—much to the detriment of the horses they have continued to house for years in conditions that range from miserable to outright murderous.

"What you have to understand about these people," explained John Jefferson, as he wheeled his car out of the "Little M" parking lot, "is that many of them have the best of intentions. The problem is, they frequently haven't the faintest idea about what they are doing with these animals."

Jefferson is a humane officer, attached to the Women's S.P.C.A. at 30th and Clearfield Sts. He is one of the six officers in the city who have spent the last few years trying

tions have brought action by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which had the at his North Philadelphia "Little M" stable) continue to keep animals in hot, rusted truck bodies.

Story Be Worse?

g to keep a horse in the middle of Philadelphia.
t to be a crime. **Text and photos by HOAG LEVINS**



HORSES *continued*

to get on top of the "horse problem" in Philadelphia.

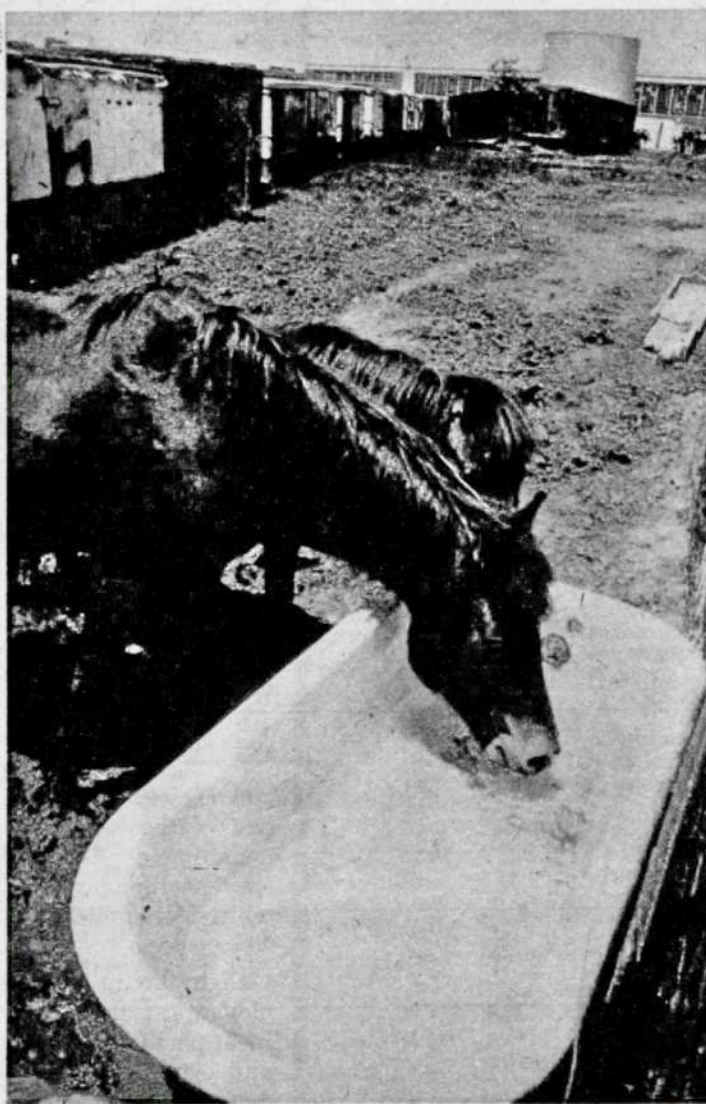
During the last decade, the horse population has swollen tremendously. Partly due to affluent residents who can afford horses, the equine population explosion is also due to the ready availability of cheap "hack" horses at horse auctions in the region. Although there are no exact figures available, it is estimated that there are three to four thousand horses now living within the city limits.

An increasing number of these animals have begun to come to the attention of the S.P.C.A., the agency charged with preventing and prosecuting cruel and inhumane treatment of animals in the city.

The horse problem has become so great in the city that in 1970, the S.P.C.A. was forced to build a stable at 30th and Clearfield to house horses which have been abandoned or were confiscated from stables or private owners who had starved, beaten or otherwise abused them. Since its construction, the S.P.C.A. stable has had to deal with as many as 30 horses at one time.

For example, during 1972, more than 100 horses were taken into custody at the S.P.C.A. Those cases, which involved dozens of abandoned animals, also included:

- A pony which was being "stabled" in a 16-inch wide space between a truck and a brick wall.
- More than a dozen horses which had been kept in a "hack" stable in an abandoned house in North Philadelphia. The dilapidated



Abandoned tubs serve as a "watering hole" for the horses at Ed's Riding Stable in Northeast Philadelphia. In the background are "stables" made out of old truck hulks. Windowless and with the summer sun beating down on them, they become oven-like.

building was neither lighted nor ventilated and, in some places, the animals' manure had accumulated four feet deep.

• Seven ponies which were found quartered in make-shift pens on a vacant lot in South Philadelphia. Nearly dead from starvation, the animals' pens had no food, water or bedding.

• A palomino pony which was found abused and sickened by the heavy-duty motor oil in which its owners had bathed it. The owners said they had resorted to the motor-oil treatment in hopes of "curing" a severe case of lice.

• An aging, former race horse, which was found to have been severely beaten and starved by the owner of a horse-drawn junk van in South Philadelphia.

"What we find ourselves dealing with most of the time with these horses is not vicious cruelty, but rather cruelty caused by simple ignorance," said Robert G. Hudson. A soft-spoken, bespectacled man, Hudson is director of the Women's S.P.C.A. and has, with increasing frequency, been in court to prosecute cases of cruelty to horses.

"In the past few years, the number of privately owned horses has mushroomed. There are more and more 'backyard' horses, and more 'hack stables' are springing up. We have horses living in absolute squalor and filth. The people—parents or young adults—who buy these animals are sincere, but they have no concept of what the animals require.

"Buying a horse is part of a fad now in the city. It's an impulse thing. People buy a horse . . . for example you can get a horse

So You Have 50 Bucks and Want to be a Cowboy . . .

Well there, Mr. Citydweller, so your kid has been bugging you for a horse lately and you've actually begun to think seriously about the possibility, huh? After all, you've seen more and more horses around the parks, on vacant lots and even trotting down main city streets . . . and you talked to a guy who said horses really aren't expensive to pick up. Really now, when you think of it, a horse is just a great big pet, kind of like a cat or a dog, just larger, right? How much trouble can a horse really be?

There are several hundred city residents who have asked themselves the same question and, without bothering to really get any answers, have charged straight ahead into the purchase of a horse. It usually took them a couple of months to realize that horses were probably never meant to be urban pets, and, even if they were, they are pets which are far more costly and time-consuming than cats or dogs.

Before you gallop off into the quick purchase of a horse, here are a few things you ought to think about:

First, although horses may be relatively cheap to buy, they can become quite a financial burden with their monthly requirements for food and board.

If you decide to have your new horse

put up in a commercial stable, first you have to remember that half the stables in the city are judged by the S. P. C. A. to be offering less than adequate care for horses. The better stables, at the same time, must charge rates in keeping with the high quality of their operation. Board for an average horse can run anywhere from \$40 to \$100 a month.

If you decide to keep your horse on your own property, you have to provide a stable for it. To build one from scratch will cost you as much as \$2000. Converting a suitable existing building into a stable can cost as much as \$700 to \$1000.

If you *do* keep your own horse—an option that is increasing in popularity—you have to consider that:

• Horses are large animals and eat amounts of food proportional to their size. They put away bales of hay and sacks of grain at an amazing speed.

• Horses have strange feet which require constant care: daily cleaning and frequent change or re-set of the shoes by a professional farrier. Farriers don't work cheap.

• Horses need regular veterinary care to protect them from a number of ailments and diseases, as well as to treat them for normal problems. And veterinarians aren't

cheap either.

• Horses need to be exercised twice a day. That means an hour or so every day walking or riding your horse.

• Horses have large surface areas which, in the interest of their health and well being, must be rubbed down and brushed frequently. Add another 45 minutes to your daily horse care schedule.

• Horses need accessories such as blankets, saddles, bridles, etc.

• What goes in must come out. Horses produce an amazing volume of excrement as compared to dogs, cats or other pets. The disposal of this manure may be one of the major problems you have with your horse . . . buckets and buckets of manure each week. You can't let it lie around, obviously. You can't put it in the garbage can. You have only a few limited alternatives; you can contract with a company to make special calls at your house to haul away the stuff; you can fertilize your garden and every other garden in the neighborhood; or you can come to the point where you simply have to admit that you're tired of all this manure and go find yourself some nice country farmer who is interested in buying a slightly used urban horse.

Seven ponies on one vacant lot were all but starved to death.

for as little as \$25 or \$40 at the New Holland horse auction every Monday. There's another smaller auction on Fridays near Doylestown. People buy these cheap animals, and then in a month or so they begin to realize how expensive it is to have a horse. What do they do? They take the horse a few blocks away and just let him go. Finally, we get a call about an abandoned horse which has been running up and down the street somewhere. Abandoned horses have become quite common in the city.

"Then we continually find people who have just taken the horse and tied it in the back yard, with no shelter, or are keeping it in an abandoned house or an old garage or chickenwire shack. Then, on top of this, we have an increasing number of these 'hack' stable operators who open up in abandoned houses, or old, decrepit industrial buildings which are in violation of every fire, safety, and health regulation on the books."

Currently, in Philadelphia, there are no regulations to govern the opening or operation of a stable, or even the owning and keeping of an individual horse. Anyone with access to an empty garage, abandoned house or a junk truck can open a "stable." The fact that the stable owner has never even seen a horse before, let alone taken care of one, makes no difference. Any low-budget operator who can trundle a bale of hay onto a garage floor and hand-paint a "stable" sign can begin charging the public for "tending" its horses.

"There are," said Hudson, with a sad shake of his head, "too many of these 'cowboys' in Philadelphia who have put on a Stetson hat and a pair of boots and are passing themselves off as horse experts. We've run into so many of these jokers now, it isn't even funny. They swagger around in their cowboy outfits, while their horses are suffering or dying from starvation, infection, lice, severe saddle sores, and any number of other health problems about which the operators know little or nothing."

There are presently about 40 known stables within the city limits. At least half of these are considered by the S.P.C.A. to be totally inadequate in their treatment of horses. The 40 do not include the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of single-horse backyard stables scattered across the city.

Philadelphia is one of the last major urban areas which has no regulations governing such horse facilities. New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other cities have had horse-control ordinances for at least ten years.

Well over a year ago, Philadelphia took the first step toward such a law. Hudson and his S.P.C.A. colleagues drafted a lengthy and comprehensive piece of legislation which

would, among other things:

- Establish a five-member Animal Control Board, to be appointed by the mayor and be charged with the regulation of all stables, pet shops and kennels within the city.

- Require that all horses kept within the city limits be licensed.

- Require that such a license be issued only after inspectors verified that the horse owner had provided adequate quarters for his animal, including proper lighting, ventilation and the usual fire, safety and sanitation requirements which apply to other similar structures.

- Require that all stables be licensed and that their operators must pass an examination proving he has at least a minimal level of knowledge and understanding about the care and treatment of horses.

- Provide the Animal Control Board with the power to revoke the licenses of any private horse owner or stable operator who fails to meet its basic requirements.

Since last year, when this bill was presented to the city in its final stage, it has been through the office of Licenses and Inspections, the City Solicitor, and the City Managing Director, where it currently lies. All offices have approved the bill, and plans for it to be eventually introduced in City Council. There is little or no known opposition to the bill.

"Everyone at City Hall has been very friendly about this whole thing," Hudson explained. "But the bill hasn't gotten anywhere. I guess it is one of those things we have to live with—that animal legislation gets a very low priority in this town. The bill is there, ready to go, but it gets continually put on the bottom of the pile."

"When it does finally happen, that bill will be a major breakthrough in animal control for this city . . . for both the animals themselves and the people who must live near them. Right now, well, we'll have to limp along like we've been doing and hope for the best," Hudson said.

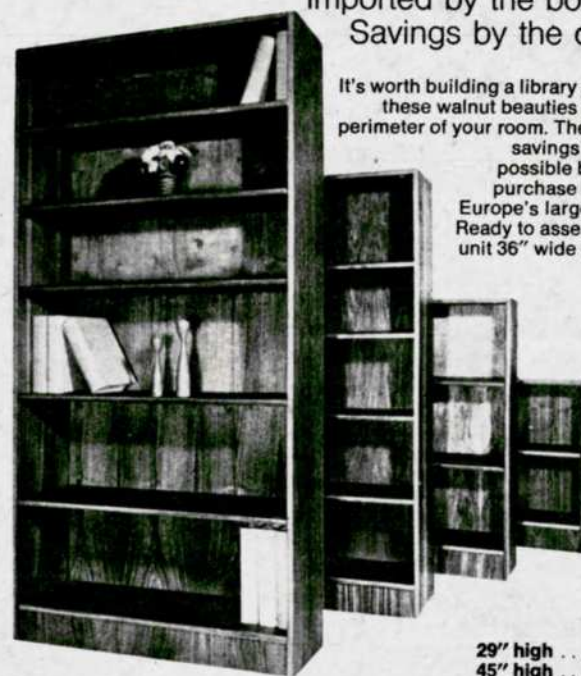
Currently, under antiquated existing legislation, the S.P.C.A.'s attempts to take actions against grossly negligent stable operators are stymied in bureaucratic red tape. Any major move against an offending stable owner has to be co-ordinated through as many as three city agencies at one time. They include the Office of Licenses and Inspections, the Board of Health, and the Police Department.

This procedure can—and quite frequently does—lead to various instances of buck-passing and delays. No one knows this more than Dave Stover, a 55-year-old retired park guardsman who now is a humane officer with the S.P.C.A. He thinks that one of the more infamous instances where something should have been done but wasn't, can be found near K and Sedgley sts. Just a few yards from that intersection, a visitor finds "Ed's Riding Stable." Announced by a hand-lettered sign, the facility is located a short distance from the rear of a large Kraft Corporation food processing plant.

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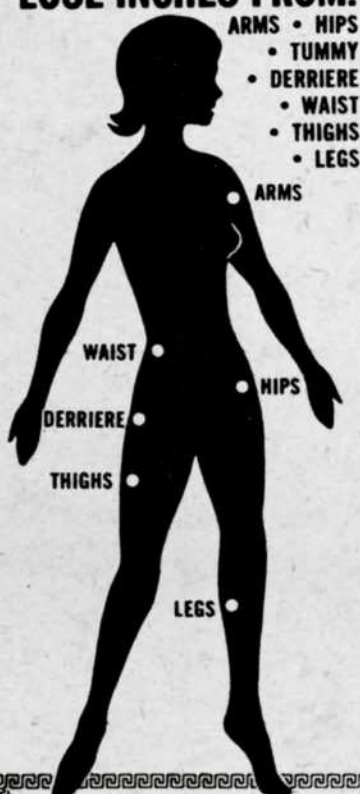
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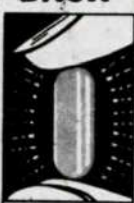
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**The manure piles up,
but the owner just
ignores the fines.**

HORSES continued

ramshackle gatherings of discarded truck bodies, make-shift huts and rickety fences.

Toward the rear of the compound is a virtual mountain of horse manure piled a few yards from the railroad tracks. "Look at this open manure pit," said Stover. "This sort of manure pit is illegal in this city. We've been here a dozen times. We've even had people riding by on passing trains complain. We've had the city's Licenses and Inspection people and the Board of Health people out here. They've cited this guy so many times, I've lost count. Right now, he owes the city almost \$12,000 in fines, and he refuses to pay them. The manure keeps piling up, the complaints keep coming in, and he continues to ignore the fines.

"Now, if there was legislation to give us control over the facilities in which an animal is kept—instead of just the animal itself—we'd be able to get right at a mess like this instead of having to switch off between two or three other city agencies each time," Stover said.

And in West Philadelphia, Stover's fellow humane officer, John Jefferson, was inspecting still another of the city's infamous "hack" stables, "Big M" on N. Felton St.

Inside the Big M, one immediately came upon a mound of junk: broken glass, jagged metal, 50-gallon drums, rotted timbers, bent and rusting fencing. Past there is a small courtyard enclosed by either fence or walls on all sides. There were three horses, standing upon what initially looked like a large mountain of dirt which rose from all sides of the compound and culminated in a high plateau near its far corner.

Closer inspection revealed it to be not dirt, but manure. Tons of it. Accumulated over months, perhaps years, and as much as seven-feet deep at its thickest. In the stables, a converted industrial building suffering from advanced age, 13 horses were confined in small stalls. There was no bedding for most of the animals, and many of them kicked quietly in a six-inch thick layer of slush which covered the bottom of the stalls. The slush was composed of crushed, decomposing manure, stale urine and tepid drain water leaking through holes in the roof. Many of the animals were coated with a dry crust of the same material, in which they had been forced to wallow whenever they lay down.

Jefferson's dilemma — to anyone who understands the true extent of the "horse problem" in Philadelphia today — is, indeed, a maddening one. One which can understandably drive a person to throwing verbal brickbats at the bureaucracy which allows it to continue.

The problem is one that is also quite ironic in Philadelphia . . . the city which has so recently and so fervently embroiled itself in the battle to halt the sale of horse meat. □

HOAG LEVINS is a 26-year-old free-lance writer-photographer from New Jersey. A former Inquirer reporter, he has been a frequent contributor to Today Magazine.

