



Article compliments of

Canadian  
Horse Journal

# Happy Donkeys in Delhi

By Margaret Evans

It is morning. The people of Gadaipuri, an impoverished community in Delhi, India, are busily going about their day, buying, selling, and trading goods at the market and offering their services to anyone needing a donkey and cart. This is “donkey town,” a very poor and deprived donkey-dependent community where school is not a priority and children help their elders earn money. They grow up following in their parents’ footsteps. But for 30 children between the ages of eight and fourteen this is a very special day.

Each child stands quietly, attentively, holding his clean and smart donkey. Some have more than one. They try to hold their anticipation in check. After all, it’s not every day that a clever little idea yields such exciting results...

Helping working donkeys in the Gadaipuri community of Delhi, India, has always been beset by challenges. The Brooke Hospital for Animals, a U.K.-based charitable organization dedicated to helping working equines in developing nations, has been working in the region for many years trying to help the people care for their donkeys and horses, and educate them in simple and effective ways to give their animals better lives.

There are around 350 donkeys working in the community, most of them suffering from wounds and exhaustion. They also suffer from colic because

they feed on garbage. But the Brooke workers knew that just treating equines for diseases and injuries wasn’t enough. They needed to help animal owners in Gadaipuri actually change their behaviour and attitude toward animal care.

“When we started our animal welfare project in Gadaipuri we found the donkeys were weak, injured, and suffering from diseases mainly caused by malnutrition, overloading, and overwork,” recalled Abbas, a Brooke Community Animal Health Worker. The people relied heavily on their animals for work yet they seemed to need special motivation to keep the donkeys healthy. In 2006, during a series of community meetings with Brooke workers and donkey owners, an idea began to emerge. It was simple. It was appealing. And if they made it happen, it would be the first of its kind in the country.

One particular discussion focused on what a happy, healthy donkey should look like. They all agreed that animals should not have any wounds or lameness and they should be well fed and well groomed. At that point, the Brooke team asked the group if they thought their own animals were happy and healthy.

They didn’t have to think long about that one. They all knew there was room for improvement, and more importantly they all wanted to apply

Photo courtesy of The Brooke

The winners of the Happy Donkey competition. L-R: Salmon (1st), Salim (3rd), and Salmon (2nd).

what they had discussed to make those improvements happen. But they realized, too, that it was their children who played an important role in caring for the family donkey and helping to earn money. Then someone made the suggestion that they hold a children's competition to find the happiest donkey. The child with the best cared-for donkey would win a prize of rupees. This was motivation on the hoof.

"I used to go door to door to teach the animal owners how to groom and care for their donkey but they didn't follow my instructions on a regular basis. Since we announced the Happy Donkey competition, children come to me for advice as they want their donkey to look healthy and happy so that they can win," said Abbas.

On the day of the competition, 30 children and 70 donkeys gathered together. "It looked like a fair, a bright donkey fair," said Brooke vet, Dr. Mini, clearly impressed. The animals were judged on criteria that had been decided with the children during community meetings leading up to the competition. The rules stipulated that the donkey must be well groomed, have clean hooves, no wounds, and no pain in the back or withers; the skin tent must be normal, they must move with normal gait, be alert, and show good behaviour (to demonstrate no fear of humans).

The judges included one vet and two paravets. In addition a local community member was also in attendance to encourage the children to trust the Brooke workers. First prize of 500 rupees (approximately \$13) was won by

## The competition not only created a good impact on the donkey's health but it benefitted the children — the future owners.

eight-year-old Salmon, who lost his father a few years ago. With eight children in the family, Salmon not only goes to school but works with one of his brothers to earn money for the family. "My donkey won the first prize!" he exclaimed in a Brooke interview, his excitement helping him overcome his normally intense shyness. "I keep my donkey clean and healthy. My donkey makes sure we have money always and I am very happy with the Brooke doctors. They come to my home and check on my donkey and show my family how to keep him happy. That's why I won this competition."

Second prize of 200 rupees (approximately \$5) went to a ten-year-old also called Salmon, and the third prize winner of 100 rupees (approximately \$2.60) went to 11-year-old Salim. Other children in the competition included Raja, from a family with ten children. He attends school but helps his two older brothers with their four donkeys. Rijwan was from a family of nine children. His parents have six donkeys and his job is to take them all for grazing.

There were 12 runner-up prizes of 50 rupees each (approximately

*continued on page 64*

The Brooke Hospital team scoring Yasin's donkey.



Photo courtesy of The Brooke

Abbas with Rasheed II bringing his donkey for assessment.



Photo courtesy of The Brooke

## A program you can trust – language you can understand!



### Seminars

Upbeat, informative talks covering training and showing for your club or stable.

### Lessons and Clinics

At your facility. Training you to train your horse. Classic riding, simplified and fun!

### Visit the web site

For free training and showing tips  
[www.Lgrice.com](http://www.Lgrice.com)



# Lindsay Grice

**"Practical training  
for horses and riders."**

Orangeville, Ontario

**519-938-8815**



Photo courtesy of The Brooke

A group of children and their donkeys after the Happy Donkey competition.

### continued from page 63

\$1.30) to motivate the children to keep up their good work.

"It's amazing," said Dr. Manilal, Brooke vet and judge. "I have never seen a donkey free from wounds in this community. Since the Happy Donkey competition, many of the animal participants are well groomed, clean-hoofed, and only have old scars. In the past the Brooke has tried so many different methods to encourage this but it didn't work so well. Now the competition has given the community an incentive to care for their working animals."

The competition was so successful that a second one was held later last year and almost one hundred donkeys were entered. For those children who did not win, the Brooke team held a session to motivate them to continue their efforts and get ready for future competitions. Apparently, the competitive focus is working. As one worker stated in an email interview, "(From) our experience and observation, the competition has brought lots of changes in the attitude of children towards their donkeys. (We can see) the healed scar marks, the well groomed bodies of the donkeys, the children's interest to learn welfare practices and the increased number of participants.

"The children have peer pressure and they want to do the best for their donkeys. They developed a competitive feeling to win. The feeling of losing in the competition was momentary and the Brooke team helped the children to recover (and) start preparing for the next one. The involvement of influential community people is also helpful to motivate the children. The competition not only created a good impact on the donkey's health but it benefitted the children — the future owners. The children got a chance to have some fun as the competition entertained them too."

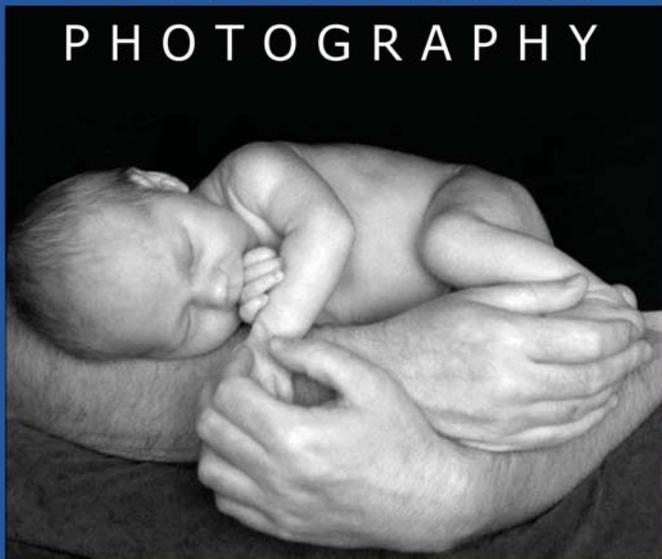
The Happy Donkey competition has already expanded to other areas. The Bulandshahr district held one for donkey owners and other areas are expressing interest.

Today, some of the children living in Gadaipuri are not only much better informed about animal welfare but are applying their knowledge in practical ways that benefit the animals. Healthy donkeys are dependable, work longer, and can contribute to the family's financial needs for many years.

Among the children, knowledge gained is knowledge shared with others. While the focus and the fun of preparing for the Happy Donkey competition is a chance to win a prize of rupees, what they really achieve is a set of skills and invaluable knowledge that will help them be successful workers and animal owners all their lives.

If you would like to know more about The Brooke Hospital and the vital work they do for equines, visit their website at [www.thebrooke.org](http://www.thebrooke.org). ●

## ROBIN DUNCAN PHOTOGRAPHY



Capturing all of life's important memories.

1070 MINA AVE., VICTORIA, BC V8Z 2N8  
250-479-8970 • [robinduncan@telus.net](mailto:robinduncan@telus.net)  
[www.RobinDuncanPhotography.ca](http://www.RobinDuncanPhotography.ca)