

## **Horse Honesty**

(Or Why I prefer the company of horses rather than humans sometimes)

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Never have I had a horse lie to me. Nor have they hid the truth from me, or pretended that something that mattered didn't matter or something that didn't matter did. Horses are honest, brutally honest. And that's one thing I really like about them.

Horse honesty can be confronting. Once when my horse was not interested in me I used to feel the rejection deeply. Showing almost complete lack of horse understanding, I'd use human catching tricks or food to get a halter on her head. Even once that was achieved (and it could take some time and energy if she was in a large paddock) the disdain the horse would sometimes show me was horrible. Fear of rejection is a debilitating emotion. A human emotion. I doubt however that many horses experience fear of rejection by a human. Back then, did I ever ask the horse or listen to the horse about why? Why she was not interested in me? Nope. I do now though. Because horses never lie. They always deal in the truth.

Compare the above 'catching' scenario to the ones we regularly read about in testimonials to Natural Horsemanship. Some of these stories make your eyes misty with joy. They touch your heart, just as the writers touch the horse's heart and vice versa. "I'm happy because my little mare greeted me happily when I went to visit her this afternoon" or "It mightn't seem like a big event, but to me that moment was magic. I felt honoured and happy beyond words, that he chose me over his paddock mates" or the one I really, really like is Jodie Heald's story in the Sept 2006 Neva Say Neva. Have a look and you'll see what I mean.

Every now and then a horse turns vicious. Honestly! People who have been attacked by a horse certainly have a story to tell. But the horse, normally a peace-loving animal, would have to feel pretty threatened or seriously irritated to get angry enough to resort to attack. After the event the injured human will relate that the attack came out of the blue. Yeah, right! (One of the few double positives that mean a negative). Of course there may be exceptions here but I would guess that often when a horse resorts to such extreme action, they have given plenty of warning - 'don't mess with me that way'.

In a story told to me recently, a well known all rounder horsewoman was double barreled as she scrambled out of a round yard to escape from an angry horse she was 'working' with. A broken ankle was the result. I witnessed this person dealing with another horse she was riding on a navigation ride last spring. When the horse played up she biffed it in the mouth with the reins and bit. Not once but continually. Not gently but with force, frustration and freneticism. Did this person listen to the horse? I don't think so. Did the horse try to convey any message to the human? Yes, lots and often. Did the human take any responsibility for the alleged misdemeanors? Naaah.

For a human to be honest, they must take responsibility. In the above-mentioned case I really think the horse has copped all the blame and unfairly too. And I don't think the human took a shred of responsibility for the situation. Some people think this is a 'normal' condition and I couldn't agree more. But here I am using the word 'normal' in a not too flattering way. If you don't know what I mean, ask your Mum! If she is 'natural' that is.

Compare the above scenario with competent natural horse people who ride (walk, trot, canter, turn, stop, back, jump, spin and so on) with just a halter on their horse, used with softness and feel. Or even better than that, how about those who forget to put the halter on at all and wave both hands at you as they sail past. This act of daring is usually accompanied with a HUGE grin on the riders face. And the horse seems happy too. I surmise that in these displays of 'free' riding, part, and that is a *big* part, of honesty is trust. Two way trust in these instances. Come to think of it, is there any other type?

And for your entertainment take the following example I received by email. It's a true account. True!

*"My Dad was the first to saddle him, as I was heavily pregnant at the time, he jumped the fence!  
The fellow where I got him from was the first to ride him, he head butted the corral fence and bucked around but I rode him that day in the big yard.  
We have not much more than pokey sheep yards here at home, and he bucked me off in them a couple of times so I let another horse breaker ride him for awhile, he had no trouble, and got him going.  
When I started using him again he wouldn't settle, he was always on the verge of bucking, I got on him in the horse breakers corral and asked him to canter, he bucked the saddle off the front? With me on it, changed saddles and got him cantering in this corral till he 'got the message' !!!  
I have been riding him successfully since, my 8yo was led on him. He is great leading with 2-8yo's on his back and quiet around the house with the children.  
As I mentioned, to ride he needs 15 min to settle in before he relaxes and then he is fine. Does start to work the bit a little on home run but no trouble.  
He is very dominant when it is feeding time, he will fight off other horses".*

Wow! If this horse hasn't given plenty of absolutely clear messages about the way he has been treated then I'll eat my jocks. Was anyone listening? And now he is for sale. The advert reads "4yo brumby. 1½ years riding exp, hardy, great all rounder, not for beginner \$1250". Ph XXXX XXXX. Anyone interested? Would you buy a used horse from this person? Is she being honest? I believe the horse is. The strange thing is this lady seems like a caring mother - but she puts her kids on this little bucking time bomb. So now I'm wondering.

Again, another horse cops all the blame and the human, or humans in this case, take no responsibility at all. Blame the horse and then dump him on some poor chump. Another 'normal' way of dealing with a difficulty. Notice I didn't say difficult horse? The difficulty is the human condition here. But they probably had plenty of good excuses why he was like he was and why they were looking for a new home for him

Another thing horses don't resort to is excuses. They have no need for excuses as they deal with the truth all the time. They also have no need for excuses as they don't make mistakes, as we know them. See, the truth begins when excuses end. Remember that. The Truth Begins When The Excuses End. Have you experienced this? By doing the Natural Horsemanship thing, have you had to confront and overcome some pretty daunting personal issues? I'll bet you have. If not, then take a leaf out of your horse's book.

If horses do make a horse mistake, they take full responsibility for their woops. If you or I are on their backs at the time, and balance is lost, how much responsibility do we take? Or in a herd situation if one horse doesn't take notice of another's warning and cops one, whom do they blame? The other horse?

Naaah. I doubt that 'blame' enters the equine mind. They are just too damn honest.

As I wrote earlier in this piece, horse honesty can be confronting. But it is less confronting if we can learn to become responsible, to listen to the horse, to not blame the horse and to learn to speak to our horse in a language he understands. Even the mares might listen to us if we do this (my token sexist comment for the day).

Horse honesty. I love it! Honestly.

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