

Horse Names

Despite having the name of Roly, Roly is neither fat, round or size XXXL in the girth. His favourite activity is, well, rolling. Favourite surfaces include mud, dust, mulch, and green grass. Favourite times are 24/7, especially after a brush or wash down when he looks particularly smart. Someone once told me of a horse called 'Gutsy' and this was not because of meritorious bravery. Seems this boy liked his tucker. Horse names are as weird as they are creative and appropriate (sometimes).

According to some experts though, horses don't really care what they are called, just as long as they are called for dinner.

On the other hoof, to we humans, names are very important. Apparently hearing one's name is one of the best sounds we can experience (depending, of course, on the tone that is used by the caller).

When it comes to naming horses, a clear pattern emerges. There are three main camps. Horse namers use either lack of imagination, use too much imagination or leave the naming to the Gods; trusting the universe to provide an appropriate and 'WOW' name for their horse.

Deliberately I have excluded the naming of racehorses in this piece because that is something I just know zip about (and don't care much for either) and have no interest in learning the system and logic of naming gallopers.

But getting back to real horses, the ones who are part of the family, I know of several Banjos', several Brandys, a few Katies, a couple of Missys and more than a couple of Cheyannes. The human name equivalents are John, Sue, Jill and Bill (good horse names actually). Comanche seems to be popular too especially with short furry Shetland ponies.

Naming can be partly a popular vs. boring issue, although often the proud new owner of a horse has little say in what the horse is named as often they arrive already named. In other words, pre loved and pre named horses. In my case I acquired a mare called Katie, much to the chagrin of my partner at the time who was called Kate. My confusion was heightened by trying to come to terms with the title of 'nag'. As horses really don't care what they are called, I had the opportunity to change her name there and then but instead chose to respect the previous owner's choice.

Have you noticed that horses don't have surnames either? Apart from horses from the poncey, purebred, star-studded lines that is. None of mine have surnames and I like it that way. It's easier to fill out forms for them, as they themselves are literarily challenged.

A great way to come up with a really original and often very appropriate name for a horse is to introduce the horse to a human who knows nothing about horses. And when they say, as they inevitably do, "What's his/her name?" (And they usually get that wrong because they are too afraid to look) you can say, "Dunno, what do you think a good name would be?" More often than not they will come up with a ripper, a truly original and very appropriate name for your steed. It may take a while for the inspiration to appear, but just be patient. This is how my mother named a gelding I bought at the saleyards. She told me she dreamed of a really good name for him but Mum, being in her 80's, forgot what the name was in the morning. Well I just had to have faith in her remembering the name

in a later dreaming state. It worked and she rang me with the result a couple of days later.

Keeping the number of syllables to a minimum is also important when it comes to horse names. One is good; two is normal and any more than that becomes cumbersome. Or if your horse has a multi syllabled moniker you have probably partaken in that great Aussie tradition of trimming the handle down to one, perhaps two at the most, syllables. Anderson becomes Andy and then And. This peculiarity is of course countered by simple single syllabled names being upgraded to multi syllabled ones. Don't ask me why. Doc becomes Doctor and Rick becomes Ricky-Ticky or worse still, Tricky Dicky.

Hyphenated horse names are only really appropriate for the Range Rover (what a great horse name) set because more often than not, the humans themselves have hyphenated names, both first names and surnames too. Marie-Clare Hamilton-Jones accompanied by her horse Jasmine-Enterprise. Have you seen this pair? A sight to be held and a mouthful as well.

For the horse collector, the collection of names can be fascinating. I learned from our esteemed editor Lee that she oversees a group that include Tiny, Casper, Mate, Laddie, Harmony, Spirit, Red, Sharnie, Lace, Mouse, Melody and Phantom. Try saying all that quickly after a few ales. Or what about the 'set' set. A friend of mine had horses that included Brampton, Hinchinbrook and Magnetic, Skye and Majorca. All islands. 'No horse is an island' I say.

Have you ever changed a horse's name? I had to once. The name she came with was Sierra Montana. What? A harness horse too. Sierra Montana - 'Walk on'. It just wouldn't have worked. She was rechristened Sissy. Two syllables, easy to remember and distinct.

Australia being a true multi cultural country with imported horses and riders is now fertile ground for new creativity when it comes to naming horses. Popanova was a Russian's show jumper, Pasta, an Italian owned racing quarter horse. Really! But one of the most appropriate names I have heard of belonged to another of the Italian's stable and that was a horse named 'Fiasco'. Go figure that one out.

And in case you are still wondering about my gelding's name, it's Willoughby. Applying the syllable rule his name neatly becomes Will. Different huh? Good on you Mum! And she also had the honour of naming the 'newie'. Macgregor, or Mac for short. Long live the creative, appropriate, easy to say and remember Horse Name!

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