

The Value of

a Horse.

It amazes me that people will pay \$10,000 and double and triple that amount for a horse. These horses usually

had or could have potential as a dressage, eventing, showjumping, or showing horse. And I suspect that there is somehow 'prestige' in a big price ticket, as these disciplines listed above are about winning, about being the best and part of winning and being the best could perhaps be achieved by paying a lot of money for a horse. (He or she who has the most expensive toy wins.) However, there are many people, who with an underlying sense of social justice, buck this trend and support the \$300 thoroughbred, saved from the slaughterhouse, and subsequently with the love, care, and dedication of its owner, goes on to win at high levels of competition.

Paying ten to twenty grand is duck feed when it comes to racehorses and pacers and some buyers in those fields add and keep adding zeros to the price ticket without outwardly flinching an eyelid. Brave or...?

Maybe these stellar prices do not represent the real value of the horse but are in fact an investment on which a healthy return down the track, so to speak, is hoped for. High stakes for a high-risk game that really has nothing to do about horses' well being. If racing is the sport of kings, how come we don't see any kings running around a track with a small human in their back? Yes I know, I'm digressing again – can't help it sometimes.

Closer to home, in fact in a paddock out the back, I look at the herd and consider what I paid for my horses to have no connection whatsoever to their value. Horse number one cost \$350 plus several hundred kilometres travel. Number two cost \$200 plus slightly less float towing. Number three was \$380 (I had bidding competition at the auction and the 'dogging value' of this guy was passed by a couple of quick \$15 bids). The fourth was again that industry standard \$350. This time the distance travelled was only 10km. Number five was free but involved a three hour journey, some float training and a three hour trip home.

Katie. Standardbred mare. Cost \$350.

Value: She allowed me to be brute handed when learning to drive her, and forgave me. She allowed me to learn to ride on her (and she forgave me for that too). She taught me about the vulnerability of horses when they



Katie– Lateral Flexion

are sick and how they can be fantastic patients. She allowed me to practice my injection and bandaging skills. She showed me true instinct as she became a mother and true sacrifice as she gave nourishment to her rapidly growing son. She showed me true earned leadership in the herd. She is the leader when I'm not around. She allowed me to indulge in many fantasies such as riding in the snow, going to Melbourne to be taught to drive, long days in the saddle in the high country, some big days in harness and several all day clinics. And she is so 'with me' when we play. How does one put a value on all of that?

Roly. Standardbred gelding. Cost \$200.

Value: Roly is reliable. He is also calm as a cucumber. You can drive him and ride him. Anyone could! His only concern is getting dinner at the end of the day. As



Roly

I'm writing this, I realise that I probably have not acknowledged just how good

(valuable) this horse really is. Others have told me but I only now understand what the true value reliability and calmness really are. Wow! He is also healthy. He shines even when he's covered in mud. He's not a close horse, more like a cat in nature. And he and Katie make a great leadership team. Value????????? Very hard to quantify.

The zero price ticket also applied to number six and number seven. It's amazing how many free horses there are during a drought. And then there is number eight.

Number eight is a nine month old foal. So far he has cost me nearly the combined total of all the other horses. It's not about the money though. In real dollar terms Mac has cost a 500km round trip to check out the stallion. A 500km round trip to drop his mum off after deciding the stallion was a good potential sire. A 500km round trip to pick up mum after a couple of months running with a real man plus the service fee; a very modest \$350, and many phone calls too, which all adds to the cost as well. Plus last week I had him gelded and tetanus treated. Add another \$300 for that.

I don't know what the anxiety cost for a first time uncle for a maiden mare foaling is but boy; I suffered for about nine months. Firstly, "Is she pregnant?" When we figured that she most probably was, then "Will she keep the foal?" was the worry. At about nine months I thought the foal was coming. So in reality I had two months of mega high anxiety 'til just before she actually dropped (right on time). I was lucky enough to speak to a vet in the last week and he clued me up as to what the 'real' pre birthing symptoms are. It was then a case of sit and watch and wait. Anyway, Mac is on the ground, growing well and costing heaps.

So just what is the true value of a horse? Can it be quantified in dollar terms? I doubt it! If a nine month old foal has so far cost me thousands of dollars, why then are there so many well bred and trained horses on the market for between one and two thousand dollars? That's between one and two weeks work for many of us and maybe only a day's work for some of us (I wish).



Also consider the horse with which the human is having problems. What sort of problems? All sorts of problems including behavioural, medical, soundness, fi-



Willoughby. Another standardbred. Cost \$380. High stakes! I purchased Will from the horse auction because I had Katie sick and thought if I had another replacement horse for her, she would rise to the occasion and get better. No gelding is going to replace her position as Number One. Will's value lies in his quietness and clear communication to me about softness. He operates not on phase 1 but on phase .01. He is teaching me about trust and about sensitivity (I can use some lessons in both!) He is also very reliable and strong (the strong silent type) and surprisingly light on his (bare) feet. Go anywhere, try



anything. And his canter! After he showed me his canter, I had to re-evaluate my preconceptions of this gait. A deep, comfortable rocking chair is how I would describe his canter. I also had my first exhilarating gallop on Will. That alone has to be worth heaps. Put together with all his other attributes, I would have a hard time trying to value Willoughby.

Today Will showed me something new. He showed me that he is thinking what I am thinking at the very same moment. I do not have to have a thought in my mind and send it to him. As I have a thought, so does he. He knows what I know and vice versa. Part of him teaching me softness and lightness is the lesson of 'listen to the whisper' and seeing the absolute subtlety in this communication. However the subtlety and whisper are fairly loud and clear when one listens. So our time in the round yard today was much more than circles, sends, and bring backs. Some of you may know what I am trying to explain here. If you don't understand, all I can say is 'allow magic to happen – and it will'.

Ricky Tic. (He came with the name). Paid dogging money for this beautiful quarterhorse/thoroughbred gelding. He was run down and broken. I thought if I couldn't fix him up then I would not lose any money on the deal. But I also figured I could fix him up, so the money was not going to be an issue. Ricky Tic's real value lies in his sense of fun. This horse loves to play. He is also a very clear communicator. Loud and clear. All I have to do is listen. When he's happy, he tells me. When he's not happy or he's sore, he tells me too. As you may have guessed, I did fix him up and he has become a valued part of the herd and of my bevy of teachers. Great trot but challenging canter for my less than competent riding skill level. His value? Hmmmmmmmmm.

nancial, emotional, and productivity. With some humans, if any of these problems are experienced (no blame laid here but you can see where this is heading) the horse is sold, often for a bargain price. 'Get rid of the damn thing'. Although often the problem reappears in the next horse acquired by this sort of person. They are just unlucky I guess.

Market forces play a big part with the ticket price of a horse. Supply and demand as the economists say. Too many horses means cheap



Will in his winter coat.

horses. After the oil crash and when horses become the preferred transport option, I imagine we may see a soaring of the price of horses. They will be valued as a means of transport and labour again.

That, of course, will be intermingled with a

collapsed economy, worldwide depression, rampant inflation and all the other trappings of a worldwide economic and social upheaval. Yes in not too many years, you, as a horse owner or breeder, may just have a paddock full of highly sought after equines. Where are the 'values' then? Another digression, but one we should all look at seriously.

So perhaps there are more values here to consider other than dollars. Some time ago when I was talking to a pony club get together about horses and bushfires, I was surprised to learn (I should have known) that many of the young female pony clubbers would risk their lives to save their horse if a bushfire threatened. They loved their horses that much! And at what stage does one pull out when a horse is injured or ill and is receiving veterinary treatment? That, I suspect, depends on the horse, the human and the relationship they both share. But it does get hard when the bill has passed X thousand dollars, the vet's prognosis is not good and you know in your heart they are probably correct. Perhaps that is the key. Listen to your heart/inner voice/angel/God or whatever name you give it. Your inner voice will tell you loud and clear what is 'right' and what is possible. When I listened to my inner voice in a similar situation, I knew she (the mare) would pull through. So we went onto the expensive and last resort antibiotics. And it worked. So all of a sudden I had invested many multiples of her original purchase price to overcome a serious infection. It's not about the dollars though, or have I already said that.



Mac with a long back.

So just what is a fair price for a horse? A difficult and complex subject

Murphy. He came with his name as well. Cost: zero dollars. And he was born of standardbred parents but his neck is unmarked. Bay, gangly, loving, curious, oral, respectful, young, fun, trusting, soft, and coming up to two years of age (in October). More like a puppy than a horse but his ground skills and manners are impeccable. He is a really nice horse and, I think, will become a quiet, reliable and sensitive riding buddy for someone down the track. He could also be a nice driving horse too. No rush for Murphy as he's a great baby sitter for my young foal. His market value is probably about \$500. Although his true value has no relation to his market value.

Toby. The smallest horse on the place and he is living proof that size doesn't matter. A while ago I saw Toby (not many HH) and Katie, 15.2HH having a back-to-back double barrel kicking match. It was more than half serious. For some reason unknown to humans, Katie does not like Toby.



Toby

Anyway, after several wild blows by both, Toby ended up, still back to back, under Katie, between her back legs. She's still letting fly and so was he! Now that is attitude! Aside from that Toby's value lies in his braveness despite overwhelming fear. I have never seen a horse try so hard to be brave as Toby. And he's a sook. Loves to be real close when he has no choice. And we are very slowly re-establishing our relationship as I blew his trust early on in our time together. It is taking a long time but I guess that is the lesson he's teaching me. Take the time it takes and do not rush it! Value? Great things come in small packages. Having said that, I can't relate to diamond rings as being valuable. Probably 'cos I'm a bloke.

but we could be guided by lady I know. When she realised her daughter had outgrown her original pony and a nice Arab moved in, the decision to sell the pony was made. Actually, a decision to find a new home for the pony was made, which is different in many ways from selling the pony, although the two things happened concurrently. Tracey advertised the pony for about what she paid for him. She knew she could have asked and received much more for him, but she thought that her decision was fair. So she was inundated with calls and she screened the callers carefully about how they would care for the pony if she sold him to them. Things like 'will you keep him barefoot and trimmed regularly, will he live in a large paddock with other horses, how experienced are you with horses, will you get his teeth done every year? And so on.

It wasn't about the money; although she could have used three grand better than the twelve hundred she got for him. Her value of the pony was more about saying thankyou for the great time he had given her daughter. I felt really proud of her when she told me that story.

How much are your children worth? If you have any. See, it is very hard to put a price on them and please do not consider the days you would gladly give them away (or pop them in the recycle bin) as being a true representation of their value. Your parents probably felt the same about you sometimes, so it is karma coming back to haunt you. A horse is not a car or motorbike (although plenty are treated like a motorbike). A horse is a living creature with personality, needs, feelings, and aches and pains just like us (and our children). Once you let a horse into your heart and make a soul connection with him or her, how do you then sell him/her? But sometimes they have to move on. It gets really tricky then doesn't it? No simple answer here either.

Perhaps the true value of your horse/s is not a number but an experience.

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.Then there's **Ben**. I love this guy! He just helped himself into my life. No fuss, no bother, quiet most of the time, compliant, most of the time. Easy, all of the time. Appreciative of care and affection? All of the time. Pretty? No, not on the outside. Beautiful? Absolutely yes! Invaluable! He's like the wise old grandfather, sitting in the background quietly observing life and all the goings on. His survival and quality of life rest on his sensibility of keeping a low profile, (there is no challenge in or



by Ben at all) and going about his business. He is more of a content horse than a happy horse. Maybe he is happy too. Well, his hooves are much more comfortable than they were when he came here. So comfort, contentment, and happiness may all be rolled up in one with this proud senior citizen. I reckon his value to me is the lesson about growing old gracefully and with minimum of resistance and maximum of acceptance. And if you put it out there for a good life, the universe will provide.

Last but not least is **Macgregor Wilson**. Mac to his friends. As a money soak, Mac has been very good. As an experience for me, Mac has been exceptional. One that money can't buy. One of my big buzzes lately is to



have three of my horses compete over who gets my attention. (My ego loves it!) Mac is right in there. Al-

though I didn't see his arrival, I was on the scene not too long after. All my study into imprinting was put into practice. And now I am reaping the benefit. Two days ago this nearly ten month young horse stood, with his lead rope on the ground, as I gave him his ninth maintenance trim on his hooves. He knows a few foot moves on the ground and helps himself into the float (to see what is in there). What a hoot! He also likes to dance. And he is nearly as good as his mum at trotting and stopping when being led. I really don't know what his value is but as the years go by, I'm sure I'll figure something out.