

Thoughts on Responsible Ownership of Horses

Our topics for this week are:

- **Approaching strange dogs**
- **Capture of a dog in an enclosure**
- **Recovering an escaped dog**

Costs

Watching a western television series like Yellowstone can awaken a desire to have a horse. So can the purchase price of many horses, but the care and training of the horses on Yellowstone and their purchase prices is not known to most viewers. Many of those horses are elite reining or cutting horses with years of training. They bring hundreds of thousands of dollars to over a million if sold. An average well-bred horse with just basic western performance horse training costs more than \$10,000. A cutting horse sells at \$20,000 and up. A relatively safe trail horse costs \$5,000 to \$10,000. A well-constructed new western saddle and other basic tack costs between \$3,000 to \$6,000.

The average cost of a new bumper-pull 2-horse trailer is \$25,000 to \$45,000. A half-ton truck with a towing package is needed to safely pull a loaded small horse trailer which weighs between 5,000 and 6,000 lb.

Responsible horse ownership carries the responsibility of providing food, water, shelter, and health care, including routine preventive care of hoof trimming, deworming, dental care, and vaccinations. Horses also need companionship, preferably with other horses, pasture grazing time, and maintenance of safe enclosures such as fencing, gates, stalls, walk-in sheds, and trailers. The annual costs of caring for a horse in the U.S. is between \$6,000 to \$36,000 per year.

Required Care

One of the most time-consuming daily activities is moving feed, hay, and manure. An adult horse produces 35 to 50 pounds of manure each day. Daily grooming should be performed to handle a horse, strengthen the bond with it, and examine it for injuries and other health problems.

Owning a horse that will be used for more than being a “pasture ornament” requires adopting a new lifestyle. It is not the same as having a motorcycle, playing golf, or going to the gym as a hobby. All of these can be skipped and taken up again at will. However, caring for a horse is not just a hobby. It is not an optional activity once you own a horse. Horses require care and handling twice per day everyday throughout the year despite your other commitments and interests.

To be a reliable useful horse for riding or driving, a horse should be handled, preferably ridden or driven 4 times per week by not just a trainer but by who plans to ride or drive the horse for recreation or for show. Horses under 5 years old should be handled more often. Being handled or driven should become a major part of their life for them to become willingly compliant and trustworthy. Less frequent

attention can allow the horse to think being compliant and trustworthy is optional. Working them hard just on weekends or special occasions can make them resentful of being ridden or driven. Short periods of work on a frequent basis such as 30 minutes 4 times, or more, per week is more effective in getting a horse to accept work as a normal, pleasant part of their life. Not riding or driving a horse on a regular basis will reduce the chance it can be rehomed, if needed.

It is not advisable for owners of horses to train their own horse if the owner has not had extensive training and experience in training horses. However, all owners who plan to ride or drive their horse after training should be directly involved with various stages of training by the horse trainer, daily involvement if possible. Remember the adage “no horse stays better than the rider on its back for very long”. In other words, owners need to be trained to handle the horse as it’s trainer handles it, otherwise, they are wasting much of their investment in training and will be looking for “tune up” training sessions for their horse in the near future.

Rehoming

Horses live 25 to 30 years. Responsible horse owners think of the future for their horses. Horses that have had good care and training will be valuable to potential buyer, if an owner can no longer be responsible for it. Owners that allow rough use of spurs, twitch a horse’s ears for restraint, or otherwise commit or permit abuse of their horse is threatening its life by making it undesirable to a new owner. Owners who feed their horse treats from their hand which often teaches the horse to be nippy or bite are putting the horse’ life in danger if it is not sellable. Owners who use barbed wire containment of horse pastures put horses at risk of very serious injury and therefore putting their life at risk because the injury can make the horse undesirable to others.

Is all this expense and effort worth it? It can be. Owning horses is a big responsibility, but those who love seeing horses, being near them, how they smell, how they act, and the relaxing thrill of riding or driving them,, all the effort and expense is definitely worth it.

Benefits

Properly caring for horses can be your physical trainer, your psychologist, and life coach. Managing a 1000 lb. animal well requires a good work ethic, maintenance of your physical condition, consistency of message, metered responses, fairness, and control of your emotions. In other words, working with horses can mold good character. An icon of good character in a man, Winston Churchill said “no hour of life spent in the saddle is ever lost”. He also said “don’t give your children money, give them a horses.”

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let’s recap the key points to remember from today’s episode:

- 1. Regardless of the purchase price, the annual maintenance costs for a horse in the U.S. are between \$6,000 to \$36,000 per year.**
- 2. Horses should be handled and inspected twice per day.**

- 3. Care for a horse should include providing it sufficient care and training to promote its potential value to others so that if the need to rehome it occurs, it is safe and attractive to possible new owners.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 300 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.