

Dangerous Horses

Our topics for this week are horses that:

- **Rear**
- **Buck**
- **Jump Sideways**
- **Bolt**
- **Repeatedly Trip and Stumble**
- **Move While Being Mounted**

Most common bad manners in horses can be avoided by careful breeding, early socialization, and tactful training followed by consistent reinforcement by handlers for the rest of the horse's life.

For various reasons, not all horses are not lucky enough to have the ideal handling. Without proper handling in the past or bad genetics, some horses become dangerous. Some of the problems in horses can be rehabilitated by experienced trainers and continued by knowledgeable handlers. Some horses cannot be salvaged by trainers and/or the horse's non-professional handlers. An excellent example of the latter situation is in the documentary movie about Buck Brannaman called "Buck."

Rearing

I have known several people who have lost family members or friends because of a horse rearing, falling over backwards and crushing the rider or gouging the rider's chest with the saddle horn. Despite the old western movie and TV stars that would have their horse rear on command for dramatic effect, no one should ever encourage rearing. Some horses will rear and learn they can control the handler or rider, escaping doing something the horse does not want to do. Then, it becomes a habit. Leading a horse that rears and paws at the level of your head or if you, on its back, topple over backward with ½ ton of force from a height of 5 to 7 feet, is not a situation to be in. Young horses that are properly handled when they are experimenting with rearing may be able to learn that rearing will not gain them anything but work. Horses over 2 years old that repeatedly rear should not be kept. They are too dangerous.

Bucking

Trying to buck something scary off their backs is a natural reaction of horses. A little bucking is to be expected after the first saddling of a young horse. The saddle should not be removed until the horse stands quietly. Bucking after the first saddling should not occur. Only after the horse is always tolerant of the saddle should anyone begin familiarizing the horse to a rider on its back.

If done in quiet, calm brief segments, the horse should not ever buck with the trainer or subsequent riders.

What people call bucking ranges widely. Hopping on the front legs without any vocalization is called crow-hopping and it is not true bucking. Working a horse on a longe line before mounting it can often eliminate crow-hopping. Horses usually stop crow-hopping with more exercise and gaining more maturity. Young horses that are not warmed up before riding will often kick both legs up, especially when at a canter/lope, but this is also not bucking. Crow-hopping or kicking is usually done briefly and the risk of an intermediate or experienced rider being thrown is very low.

With true bucking, the horse rears, pushing forcefully with its hind legs. When both front legs are in the air, the horse will kick high into the air and all 4 feet are off the ground. At the same time the horse will often make loud grunting noises. Horses that use true bucking as their go-to escape from situations they don't like are dangerous, usually unsalvageable and should not be kept or ever used for riding again.

Jumping Sideways

Jumping sideways is the typical response to being startled, also called being spooked. Quarter horses are particularly good at it. This is so ingrained in horse instinct that all horses will do it all their lives. However, some horses will do it often and others will do it rarely. Anyone who rides horses must learn to anticipate situations that may provoke a sideways jump or spin. For example when I anticipate a spooking situation, I ride with my dominant hand on, but not gripping the saddle horn. Spooking situations can be reduced by not overreacting when it occurs. It is important to not make a noise or grip the horse with your legs. Immediately after the spook, I zig-zag the horse at a trot back and forth to see what scared them. The horse should always be turned toward the scary object and not directly approach it. After the horse is turning in a relaxed manner, I allow him to walk away at an angle to the object so he can see it with his peripheral vision. I do not ride directly away with the scary object in his blind space. Riding with a companion who has a calmer horse and rides in front of you and your horse is the best way to prevent spooks.

Bolting

Horses that bolt run mindlessly and uncontrollably. They are likely to run into objects or run wildly enough to throw themselves off their feet and onto the rider. Horses that bolt should not be kept or ever ridden again.

Stumbling

Horses may repeatedly stumble from a failure to pay attention to where they step or from health problems. Riders bear some responsibility for keeping their horse from dozing on the job by occasionally backing up or trotting in circles or otherwise breaking the monotony of walking in a straight line. Assuming you do not attribute stumbling to boredom and a trip or stumble is not due to slick footing, untrimmed hoofs or poor shoeing, and your veterinarian says it is in good

health, stumbling is highly dangerous. A healthy, dead-headed horse that repeatedly stumbles should not be kept or ever ridden again.

Moving While Being Mounted

An important part of any saddle horse's basic training is to learn not to move while being mounted. Nearly all horses learn this easily from experienced trainers. The most common reason it occurs later is due to riders who do not prepare or who are not willing to correct the horse if it ever moves while being mounted. This requires mounting correctly with the left hand on the reins and the horse's neck with the right hand gripping the saddle. If the horse tries to move, the rider must be prepared to immediately correct the horse with the left hand and reins. Once mounted, the rider should always expect the horse to stand still for several seconds until he lifts the reins or squeezes the horse with his legs to signal to move forward. The mounting technique needs to be consistent every time the horse is mounted by anyone.

Dangerous Ground Manners

Anything that a horse does that demands the handler to move his feet is dangerous and unacceptable. Horses should not pull or drag a handler when being led. They should willingly enter a stall or a horse trailer and not attempt to come out until given permission by the handler. They should patiently stand still when tied. Proper training and consistent reinforcement by a handler can usually correct these problems.

Horses must never nip or bite, kick, or strike handlers. Nipping is generally a result of being fed treats by hand and/or a control attempt. This can be averted by never feeding a horse out of someone's hand and by immediate correction to an attempted nip. However, horses that have controlled people by nipping will revert to attempted control of new people. On the other hand, biting is a highly dominant aggressive action. Horses that have lost enough respect of humans to attempt biting someone should not be kept, The same is true of those that attempt kicking or striking someone without provocation..

People generally ride horses because they love and trust them, but love and trust has to be earned. Some horses are inherently not trustworthy. Due to their size and strength, a rider must be realistic in separating the manners that might be corrected and those that will not. To gamble otherwise, is a poor gamble with your health and life.

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

- 1. Rearing, bucking, stumbling, bolting, and biting can be unsalvageable problems in horses.**
- 2. All horses spook sometimes. It is a big part of horses' self-preservation instinct. All riders need to learn to anticipate possible spooky situations for horses and how to desensitize them to identified spooky situations.**

If you're interested in particular subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

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.