



A QUICK GUIDE TO  
—HORSE—  
WHISPERING

*(With 31 practical ways to bond faster  
through grooming)*

# A QUICK GUIDE TO —HORSE— WHISPERING

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## CHAPTER ONE



## A Needless Tragedy

Would you prefer your horse to be your eager ally, or your reluctant slave?

Every horse has a ‘willing spirit’. This is a generous, helpful nature you can use to your advantage – or crush.

You just need the patience, understanding and language to coax that willing spirit forth.

Aggression simply doesn’t pay.

Ancient Greek warrior and horse trainer Xenophon observed this in his book “On Horsemanship” written some 2,350 years ago.

Even though preparing his horses for the blood and brutality of warfare, when you would think compulsion essential, he wrote:

*“Riders who force their horses by the whip only increase their fear, for they then associate the pain with the thing that frightens them.”*

**-Xenophon**

We humans forget or ignore ancient wisdom. For example a thousand years before Xenophon, in the first known text on horse training, Hittite author Kikkuli described the concept of interval training so popular today.

If you open a horse-training book from a century ago, it teaches how to compel. How to tie up a horse’s head, bind his legs together, and other techniques that display your dominance.

That’s not to say the horse won’t become submissive. These methods undoubtedly work. They’ve worked for centuries. But aggression and brutality destroy the horse’s willingness.

This is a tragedy. Horses have an excellent long-term memory. A willing spirit that's damaged often cannot be repaired.

Only recently have trainers sought methods that are sympathetic to the horse's instincts as a wild animal.

Only recently have we been blessed by the observations of Monty Roberts, whose wisdom can turn your horse into a "willing partner, instead of your unwilling subject."

The horse has been domesticated for around 6,000 years. It's easy to forget that this glorious creature's 60 million years of evolution weren't for human benefit alone.

So to begin your journey as a horse whisperer, first consider your equine friend in the wild.

## CHAPTER TWO



# Your horse in the wild

Today, around 30,000 Mustangs roam the American Plains.

They are not "wild" as people call them. They are feral - descendants of horses brought over to the Americas by the Spanish conquistadors.

The most important thing to remember about these horses - and all others - is that they are prey animals. Though domesticated, your horse's instincts are exactly the same as their ancestors were.

Your horse has an ingrained fight-or-flight system, ready to engage at reflex speed. In most cases, he'll choose to flee. Strangers are often marked as

predators on a first meeting. Any trainer, regardless of ability will be judged in the same way.

This explains the ‘incorrect’ behaviour traits so many horse owners wrestle with. It also destroys the argument that terror and brutality are viable horse training techniques.

Any trainer who beats, humiliates or disables an equine student only reinforces their position as a predator – an animal to be feared. Besides being cruel, creating this position in the horse’s mind is needless. And it leads to frustrating and difficult work. Because any horse, regardless of his temperament, needn’t be forced to do anything.

With patience, understanding and the right body language, **any horse can look to you as a dominant herd member**. Any horse can become your partner, instead of your fearful slave.

Native Americans originally acquired wild horses by the hundreds, using the ‘chase and retreat’ method. This involved galloping at herds, forcing them to run for hours. Eventually the Native Americans would turn around and watch the wild herd follow. Sure enough, the herd would join-up, subdued. How did they know this would happen?

This strategy was built from watching wild horses. In the herd, any insubordinate or aggressive horse will be chased away by the lead mare. It’s a simple form of punishment. The fear of being left alone for dead soon forces the head-strong youngster to subdue. When he does, he’ll most likely be allowed back into the herd.

As a teenager, the famous Monty Roberts watched this behaviour more closely.

He noticed changes in the lead mare’s eyes, ears and shoulders after driving the offender away.

He noticed a distinct mouthing action from the offender as he asked to be allowed back into the herd. The horse would lick and chew, dropping his nose to the ground.

He noticed the mare's behaviour change as she began to forgive his actions.

Roberts took notes, and was the first to suggest that horses have a very definite method of communication. He called this language 'Equus'.

With a patient attitude, those who are fluent in Equus can master control of a difficult horse in a matter of days. These 'horse whisperers' appear to have a special gift or sixth sense, allowing them to communicate with horses. This is not so.

While they're undoubtedly great horsemen, their gift is the result of study.

Nobody is born knowing the correct reaction to the flick of a horse's ear. As Monty Roberts says, "I might have been the first to happen upon the language of Equus, but if a person is determined and has the confidence and sufficient ability to recognize what to do and when, then he or she can achieve join-up."

So use the following chapters of this book to guide you through the beginning. Discover what your horse is trying to tell you, and find the connection that can only exist between two herd members.

But first, a bit more on licking...

There are a great many misinterpretations regarding the licking and chewing reflex in horses, during training or stressful encounters. There is the old saying that the horse is said to be "digesting a thought", however that concept as nice as it may sound to us humans, does not tell us the true story.

The licking and chewing reflex is usually an indicator that the horse has been relieved of stress or tension. In most instances it occurs when the horse has survived a stressful situation and has then managed to release the tension.



*The horse would lick and chew, dropping his nose to the ground.*

In some cases the horse may have been concentrating on a problem and then thinks he has found a solution and the licking and chewing reflex indicates the release of his concentration tension.

Most often it merely indicates that some stressful pressure has stopped.

The reason we present this issue is that all too often people schooling or training horses are very misguided and think that every time the horse licks and chews they have managed to teach the horse something. Yet many times the horse could be merely thinking, thank heavens that the human has quit putting me under pressure or in a stressful situation.

From another completely different angle and adding weight to the misinterpreted saying about the licking chewing “digesting a thought” response, is that the pony in the above photo is licking and chewing because this is the first time in his life that he has been fed a polo mint, now he may be licking and chewing just because he likes something too.

This is what makes horses so complex and taking each experience you have with them as a very valuable lesson and to look at what you are learning from them as they invariably teach us so much.

**Remember - Horses are our Teachers and we as Humble Humans are their Students.**

### CHAPTER THREE



## Your horse's body language

Your horse uses body language to deliver most messages. Understanding this language is far easier once you know how your horse sees the world.

Your horse has strong peripheral vision. He can see around the majority of his body while staring straight ahead. He can't see objects far into the distance, but in the wild this trade-off suits him well.



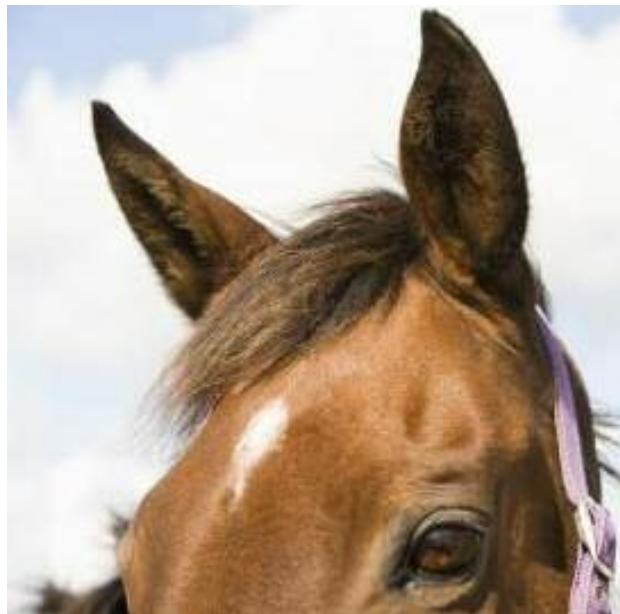
Your horse could spot a predator from almost any angle.

Meanwhile, his keen sense of hearing will instantly catch even the slightest rustle.

For this reason your horse's ears shout louder than any other part of his body. Note their position before anything else.

**Some positive signs:**

It's generally a good sign if your horse's ears are pointed in your direction. He's relaxed, focused and ready to interact with you. You'll most likely see this whilst feeding your horse a treat.



*He's relaxed, focused and ready to interact with you.*

Encourage him. Talk to your horse softly. See if his ears continue to flick in your direction. Do you have his undivided attention?

If his ears point further forwards, your horse is curious. His neck extends outwards, towards you. His eyes are focused. You may hear sniffing and blowing from the nostrils, and his tail is held up.

If your horse is merely content, his head is steady and level. His eyes are open, but unfocussed. His tail is relaxed, moving very little. This is your horse telling you he's satisfied. However, you need to win his attention before attempting any training exercises.

### **Some negative signs:**

As a prey animal, your horse will also point his ears towards sources of fear. Look closely at his eyes. If the whites are showing, he's afraid. The tail is fixed, completely still. His nostrils are flared.

Should your horse become angry, his ears pin back. Something is invading his space. The further back they lie, the more likely it is he'll become aggressive. If you notice pulled back ears during a trail ride, your horse could be asking for more space from other riders.

The neck on an angry horse stretches outwards. His tail swishes frantically. His legs become more active. Stomping, striking and kicking are all common behaviour traits with an angry horse.

### **Some challenging signs:**

When your horse swivels his ears, he's distracted. He's scanning nearby sounds in the area, alert for any danger.

You may even notice just one ear pointed at you, while another is pinned elsewhere. Pay close attention to the direction of your horse's ears. You'll discover where the distraction lies.

Next, look at the rest of his body. Where is his head positioned? If your horse's head points upwards, he's feeling confident. His eyes are focused. His nostrils are flared, and his tail swishes high.

This horse will most likely pose a challenge. He won't submit to your

commands easily.

On the other hand, a horse with moving ears and a shaking head is excited. He's expectant of something, and can't wait for it to arrive. It's likely you'll also notice attentive eyes, lip smacking, and a restless pawing at the ground.

Your challenge here is to control his excitement. Horses can transfer their energy to others. This is dangerous if you're leading your horse from the ground. Take regular pauses to show him you're in control.

### **Some worrying signs:**

Should your horse's ears droop downwards during exercise, he's tired, deflated or bored. Check to see if his tail and head are lowered as well. In most cases, this will be your horse telling you he's tired. It's time for a break. Stop what you're doing, and give him a chance to rest.

If you're following a repetitive routine, your horse may have grown bored. Spend some time working on another exercise.

Flat (airplane) ears suggest your horse is unhappy. This could be a case of boredom, but also illness.

If you spot these signs without any obvious explanation, call a vet. Diligent owners noticing such changes in their horses' ears have caught chronic illnesses early.

### **Horse language chart:**

Look at the chart on the next page. Use it to translate your horse's body language faster.

The ears are your best starting point, wherever you are in relation to your horse. They're visible, both from the ground and the saddle.

From there, you can analyse your horse's head position, eyes, nostrils, tail and muzzle.

Work through each translation. You'll soon understand your horse's mood, and discover what he's trying to say.

## HORSE LANGUAGE CHART

Ears	Pinned back	Drooped downwards	Swiveling	Forward facing/neutral	Pricked forwards	Swiveling
Head	Stretched outwards	Lowered	Raised	Steady and level	Extended outwards	Shaking
Eyes	Wide open/ Whites showing	Half open	Focused	Unfocused	Focused	Attentive
Nostrils			Flared		Sniffing	Blowing
Tail	Swishing	Low, still	High, swishing	Relaxed/ some movement	High	
Mouth	Teeth showing	Slack		Curled upper lip	Tight	
Legs	Square/ Stomping	Still	Active/ prancing		Square	Pawing
Emotion	Anger	Tired/Bored /Relaxed	Confident Challenging	Content	Curious	Excited/ Anxious

### CHAPTER FOUR



## Your horse's vocal language

You might think it unusual to read your horse's body language first, and his vocal language second. The neighs and snorts are far more obvious to you than the position of his ears.

But much of the vocal language that follows can only be understood if you're watching closely as well. Check your horse's body language first. Then listen for these calls to make sure you're reading him correctly.

### **Nickers:**

Your horse's lips are closed as he nickers. This soft, low-pitched noise comes from deep within his throat. If you hear a nicker, immediately watch your horse's body language.

Often you'll find his ears are pricked up and his head is raised. This is a

positive, confident message. Horses encourage young foals the same way. Your horse is excited as he anticipates your arrival. You might hear a nicker as you bring your horse his food.

However, a nicker can also mean nervousness. Check for the signs. Pinned back ears are a sign that your horse feels threatened.

Gently lead your horse somewhere new. Or if there's nothing to fear, spend time reassuring him.

### **Neighs and Whinnies:**

Are we desensitised to a horse's 'neighs'? You should actually take extra care around a horse making this sound. A horse that neighs feels either anxious, or confident. Both can lead to a loss of control.

A louder call is usually a greeting between two horses. Look for the pricked up ears and a raised tail. Your horse feels confident as he does this. His call is demanding.

The 'neigh' can also be an alert to other horses. He may have spotted an unusual animal or object ahead. Remember, your horse has poor binocular vision. Often, he needn't be afraid. He's simply on guard as a prey animal and needs careful handling.

### **Blows and snorts:**

Listen out for snorting when leading your horse, or when he's at play. This is generally a positive communication, although it can be a sign of fear. Your horse is anticipating something.

On trails your horse may snort, asking you to go faster.

Pay attention to this sound when riding in a group. Excitement can spread through horses this way, making them difficult to control. This is particularly dangerous if you're leading from the ground.

Show him you're in control. Stop for a few seconds at regular intervals to calm him down.

**Sighs:**

It's unlikely you'd hear this in the wild. Horses sigh much more around humans than among the herd. You might hear it when grooming, or removing your horse's saddle. It's a sound of relief.

Some horses sigh when they're bored. You might hear this when leading your horse, or riding him in circles. If so, try a new pattern or exercise to keep his attention.

**Groans:**

Note the specific moments your horse groans. It can be a simple case of exertion. A show jumper's horse may habitually grunt over fences, as a tennis player does upon striking the ball.

However, random grunts suggest the horse is in pain. If you hear a grunt as you mount or gently ride, check his body language. Do you see rolled eyes and a tail tucked inwards? Are his ears pinned back? If so, dismount immediately.

Continuing will hurt your horse and create behaviour problems. Look to the obvious areas where pain may occur. Check the hooves for rocks, under the saddle for debris, and make sure it's properly fitted.

**Squeals:**

This can be a salutation before your horse approaches a new acquaintance. You may also hear this before two horses strike out at one another.

A horse that squeals in this manner isn't nervous or afraid. He's angry and could easily become aggressive. Keep your distance until he calms down

## CHAPTER FIVE



## Your horse's personality type

The more you know about your horse, the better equipped you are to deal with any behaviour problems. Use these horse-whispering techniques to understand his mannerisms on a deeper level.

Start by observing your horse from a distance. Take notes on his ears, eyes, nostrils, mouth, tail, stature. And note all of the changes that occur.

Does he approach you without being called?

How does he react around different objects and animals?

Ask someone who hasn't handled your horse to interact with him. What do you notice now?

Your horse's personality should always direct your approach towards him. For this reason, trainers are obsessed with finding a straightforward set of personality traits, which any horse can fit into.

Horses usually fall into one, or more of these four personality traits.

### **The Insecure:**

Expect this horse to bolt at a pin drop. This horse is fearful. His flight instincts are always on edge, and he needs constant reassurance.

Become his source of relaxation. Keep your meetings and training sessions as simple as possible.

Once you've bonded with a fearful horse, you have a valuable partnership. He'll most likely possess a long attention span, and a willingness to please.

### **The Playful:**

This is the horse that greets you as you pass his paddock. He is friendly, energetic and curious of everything in his surroundings.

A playful horse tends to be less fearful, and more responsive to humans. This

makes your initial interactions far easier. However, you'll need to be creative in your routines. This horse is easily distracted. He needs variety if you're to maintain his attention.

**The Shy:**

Have patience with this timid creature. Drawing him out of his shell will take time.

Begin your training sessions slowly. Wait for him to trust you, as he would a herd member.

Once trained you can possess a powerful bond with this horse. Reluctant to offer attention elsewhere, he will become a highly focused partner.

**The Stubborn:**

Don't expect any free help from the stubborn horse. He appears to be lazy. He's not. In fact, his interest in you (and sometimes other herd members) is minimal.

If you want this horse's attention, you'll have to earn it. Make sure there's something in it for him. If they're used properly, treats can draw him out of his shell.

In time, this horse can become tolerant of humans, and develop a powerful bond with you. Stubborn horses are among the easiest to train once you've achieved this.

You probably already know your horse well. How would you describe him? Bossy? Confident? Friendly?

Consider your horse's personality on a broad level. Which of these four types best describes him? This alone will help guide your first conversation with him.

A playful or insecure horse may crave human contact. He'll enjoy being softly spoken to, petted and reassured.

Meanwhile, a shy or stubborn horse might prefer some time to himself.

Reward your horse based on his personality. You'll continually refine this as you learn more about him.



## CHAPTER SIX



## Talking back

There is another personality type often mentioned. The ‘challenging horse’ is completely uncontrollable, aggressive and possesses a deep hatred for humans.

Sadly, in almost every case that hatred is justified. Harsh methods and poor handling have been used to deal with the horse’s natural aversions.

This treatment is the result of ignorance. We humans have lost our natural awareness, once essential to our survival.

We often believe our position should be one of dominance. And in turn we forget to communicate with our horses in a way that’s sympathetic to their natural behaviour.

Our horses are speaking to us. They’re telling us what they’re thinking. We just need to listen and respond appropriately.

So here are eight ways to work with your horse, following his natural behaviour in the herd.

### **Horses are creatures of habit:**

Horses find security in their routines.

The famous show jumping horse, Big Ben, would enter a fowl mood if he missed his morning ride. He knew when to expect it. 10am on the dot. And if his groom took a day off, he’d give her the cold shoulder for days.

Big Ben is a reminder that you must work with your horse to a daily schedule that you can manage.

### **Horses perform mutual grooming:**

Grooming is an essential part of your horse’s routine, and it’s an easy way to connect. Do this regularly, working in the same order from start to finish. Repetition leads to familiarity, which leads to comfort.

The Native Americans knew this. They'd gently rub their hands over the horse's body. While doing this, they'd make deep sighing noises. The message was that no harm would come to the horse.

Grooming does more than tidy your horse. It's a training exercise. Mutual grooming is common practice among wild herds and their new arrivals.

**Horses smell first and trust second:**

Actually, this isn't unique to the horse. It's a wild animal instinct. The Native Americans knew this as well. Indian trainers would blow lightly into the horse's nostrils while calming him.

Try doing the same during grooming sessions. Your horse catalogues familiar smells that he can trust. Meanwhile, he rejects the unfamiliar and remains on guard.

Sounds can also comfort your horse. Whenever you're at work around the stable, try whistling or humming. Watch his body language. See how he reacts.

These exercises work particularly well with playful, social types. It can also put a shy horse at ease before you approach him.

**Horses desensitise rapidly:**

This is particularly useful to know when dealing with an insecure horse. Why shield your horse from his irrational fears? You can safely introduce him to these fears.

For instance, let the paddock gate bump your horse gently as he passes through.

Does your horse spook when he sees plastic bags? This is a common problem on trails. So why not bring his treats in a plastic bag?

Should your horse spook, gently pull his head lower. When a horse's head lowers his whole body relaxes.

The wild horse has a choice. 'Learn fast or die?'

Your horse won't be afraid if he knows there's nothing to be afraid of. It follows that those who beat a frightened horse only increase the animal's fear.

### Horses find comfort moving in circles:

This is useful to know on the trail. If your horse spooks, pull him into a turn. Continue moving in a circle slowly. Eventually he'll calm down.

You can encourage your horse to do the same from the ground.

### Spookiness and Horse Vision

Horses have unique eyes and see things very differently to us.

Horses can see something different in each eye.

Their eyes work independently therefore they could be seeing something on their left that is perfectly normal and something different on their right which is spooking them.

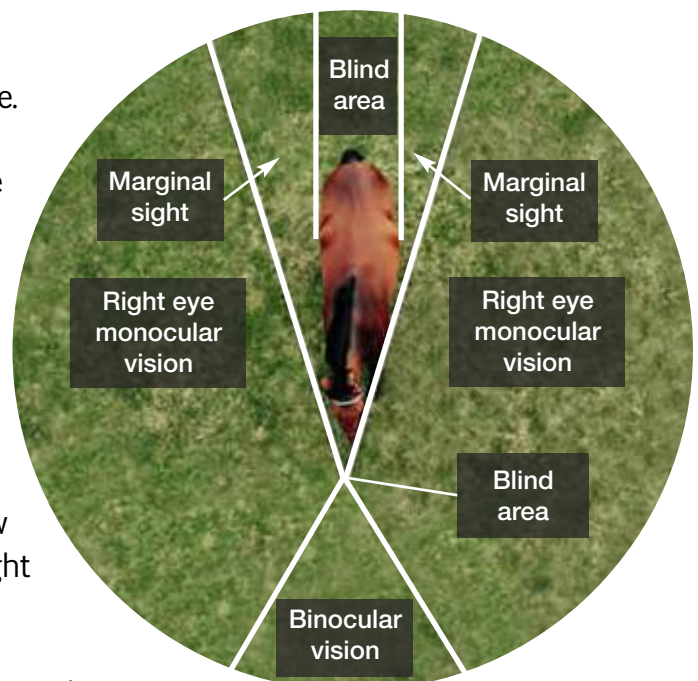
Horses vision is Monocular, which means they can see nearly all the way round their bodies, letting them know about any danger or predators that might be waiting to eat them.

We don't see this way, but if we imagine how it would feel to see like this, we have a better understanding of why horses spook.

When we as humans have a better understanding of the horses world and the way they see things, it can go a long way to us humans having a better relationship with horses.

### A very simple training exercise: *Yielding To Pressure and Circles...*

On the next page is a simple training technique asking your horse to yield to pressure.





*Yielding To Pressure and Circles...*

This will help soften your horse to the rein and lead aids in preparation for all the ground work, lunging and future riding, it will also help improve your horses response if you are already lunging.

Circles are also good for asking a horse to come back to you or to calm them if they have spooked.

#### **Horses read eyes and posture:**

In wild herds, the lead mare will keep a troublesome youngster away with a fixed stare and square shoulders. If you're not careful, your posture will have the same effect.

To put your horse at ease, stand with a slight bend at the waist. Avoid eye contact for prolonged periods of time.

Some trainers can control a horse from the ground, using only their eyes. Your eyes are powerful among the herd. Be careful where you focus.

#### **Horses have an excellent memory:**

This can work with you, or against you.

Your horse must have fond memories of the halter, the trailer and any other quirk you want him to accept.

Horse gentler, Ray Hunt said, "Make the wrong things difficult and the right things easy."

If you fight your horse, you'll most likely lose. And he'll believe he fought you to his goal. This must be avoided, particularly with stubborn personalities.

Lead your horse on a slack rope. Give him time to do the right thing. He should comfortably follow without the urge to fight.

If he takes one step in the right direction, reward him. Should he ignore you, try walking alongside him, holding his opposite cheek.

A horse that dashes at the sight of the halter can be taught some positives to accepting it. Use the halter when treating or grooming your horse. Not just

when you want him to work.

If your halter only means 'work time!' you might struggle to catch your horse.

**Physical dominance doesn't lead the herd:**

Stallions protect the herd and watch over their harem. It's the lead mare that's in control.

As a herd member, you must work to lead, not to exert your dominance.

A good exercise for this is to blindfold your horse, and lead him from the ground. If your horse can trust you, he'll find safety with you. If he feels safe with you, he'll follow you.

This also helps prepare your horse for a fire. Horses can literally freeze in a blazing barn, through fear and confusion. It's important that your horse can quietly accept your lead at any time.

## CHAPTER SEVEN



# Speaking from the saddle

There are times you must ask your horse to put aside his instincts as a wild animal.

You must introduce him to something man made. You must ask him to behave where his mind tells him to bolt.

Never is this truer than during your rides together. Under the saddle, your horse is behaving in a way that is completely foreign to his wild cousin. So many riders forget this as their horse bucks, bolts or restrains.

It takes a thousand rides to gain a fully broken horse. Riding every day, this will still take you 3 years. No wonder, it really is rare to find a fully broken horse less than 6 years of age.

Remind yourself of this, every time you begin your ride. Have patience. And follow these exercises. They'll help you command your horse as naturally as possible from the saddle.

**Ride regularly:**

This seems obvious, but so few have the discipline to ride often.

Stick to a routine. Leave at a set time and be strict with yourself. As a creature of habit, your horse prefers this.

The greatest benefit to regular riding is that your mileage varies. It doesn't matter if you go for a short hack. All that matters is you've saddled up your horse and taken him out.

Owners notice behaviour problems when their saddle shouts "a hard day of riding." Suppose you just went twice around the paddock today? Tomorrow your horse won't see the saddle as the beginning of a hard day.

Your riding will improve as well. 15 minutes every day is better than 2 hours every Sunday.

**Follow the same pattern when saddling up:**

You have your routine before riding. Do this slowly, carefully and in the same order every time.

Your horse will know what to expect next. You won't shock or surprise him.

You'll notice any injuries as you pick his feet and brush him down.

You'll notice any resistance as you fit the saddle, tighten the cinch and stretch his front legs.

You won't notice these problems half way through your ride, when you're at risk of harming your horse further.

**Mounting:**

Mounting from the left is mere etiquette. It has no practical use.

What about the times you can't mount your horse from the same side and the same height? The moment you're forced to try, your horse may spook.

Try mounting your horse from different levels – a fence beam, or a step perhaps. Also, practice this from different sides.

While riding, try dismounting halfway, before bringing your leg back into place. It won't be long before your horse grows accustomed to it all.

Achieving this is important. On a hill for instance, it's dangerous to mount your horse from the lower side. You're pulling his weight over on top of you.



### Basic control exercises before riding:

It's easy to forget you're mounting a living, breathing creature, with his own fears. Every day delivers new distractions and emotions.

Always give yourself a quick introduction to the horse before taking off on your ride. After mounting, keep him still. Move his head from side to side. You should get a feel for any resistance in the reins, and understand how focussed he is on your commands.

Next follow this 3-step control test...

1. Walk your horse over to the paddock fence.  
Face his head towards the pole.
2. Move only his hips to the right, a quarter turn.  
Meanwhile, keep the front legs in line with the pole.
3. Starting again from the original position, move the front legs right. Keep his back legs level with the pole.



This test shows how much control you have over your horse's front and hind quarters.

Practice this for 5 minutes before every ride. You'll improve each time.

**Prepare for a spooked horse:**

Remember, anything can set your horse off - a plastic bag blowing in the wind, a passing bicycle, a rustle in the hedges.

It doesn't matter how well you know your horse, you'll never know what will make him bolt next. You have to be in complete control, always.

If you need to make any adjustments, don't let confidence lead you astray. Dismount, and work from the ground.

Some riders attempt bit adjustments from the saddle. If their horse bolts they have no control.

**Fight resistance with equal resistance:**

Soft pressure is nearly always enough when controlling your horse. Your goal is to correct him with as little force as possible.

Aggression is a reaction, not a teaching mechanism. It moves your horse away from learning, towards shock.

Don't use a sledgehammer to swat a fly. Meet your horse's resistance with an equal amount of pressure.

**Allow your horse to relieve himself:**

If your horse needs to urinate, let him stop. There are many who think this shows a lack of discipline. They drive their horse onwards to prove some point of control.

Your horse is hygienic. He wants to stand still, spreading his legs to avoid getting splashed. Let him do this. Stay centered, balanced and lean forwards. This shifts your weight away from your horse's kidneys, making him more comfortable.

**Allow your horse to eat:**

Your horse is a forager. His stomach is designed for small amounts of roughage, to be eaten throughout the day.

It's natural for him to try and eat during a ride. Allow him to do this occasionally.

Of course it's impractical to ride a horse whose head is constantly to the ground. But allowing some time for nibbling will improve your relationship from the saddle.

**Maintaining attention:**

Pay attention to your horse. He can sense if you're not focused. It's his instinct as a prey animal.

And if you're chatting or daydreaming, he'll become nervous. This can lead to a loss of control.

Don't allow yourself to become easily distracted. Focus on your horse's body language and the path ahead.

**Stick together when riding in groups:**

Remember that horses are herd animals. They hate it when one breaks away.

This is often forgotten amongst groups when trail riding. Stick together, a reasonable distance apart.

If someone gallops ahead in your group, call them back. In the wild, this would suggest there's a predator nearby. It makes horses nervous.

**Brush down your horse after each ride:**

Watch a horse that has been left sweaty. You'll probably find him rolling on the ground desperately. Dried sweat irritates him. It prevents cool air from reaching his skin.

After each ride, spend time walking your horse until he's dry. Then brush him down. This removes the uncomfortable dry sweat.

## CHAPTER EIGHT



## How your tack talks

You may whisper from the ground. In the saddle you shout.

All your tack works together, helping you deliver very direct orders. You communicate with your horse in ways he'd never experience in the wild.

And a seemingly subtle problem from your end can be an exhausting experience for your horse.

Indeed, your tack talks as well. It's your job to ensure it speaks softly.

Get this wrong and one hack could undo all your hard work.

### **The Bridle:**

Your horse doesn't scream or cry when he's in pain. He simply changes his behaviour.

When riding, your greatest challenge isn't the plastic bag, or passing car. It's the bitted bridle. This applies concentrated, sharp pressure, directly upon sensitive tissues within the mouth.

The damage is proven. A study of domestic horse skulls found only 12% were free of bit related tooth damage.

There are times your horse may react by bucking, bolting or simply restraining. Somehow this Bronze Age technology (in use since approximately 3000BC) has only recently been seriously questioned.

Only recently can you ride using Dr. Cook's Crossunder bitless bridle. The bitless bridle makes sense. As Dr. Cook says, "it's the only bridle that is painless, compatible with the physiology of the exercising horse and universally suited to all disciplines."



The crossunder bitless bridle stops your horse with a hug to the head, not a jolt to the teeth. Tests consistently prove it to be a more effective method of control.



Dr W R Cook, is a UK-trained equine vet and first marketed the bitless bridle in in 1999.

(It is the only bitless bridle design that has been developed and physiologically validated by a respected veterinary surgeon).

On bitted bridles, Dr. Cook says, “it is common for a horse to exhibit 50 side effects, and for 90% of these to be resolved within two weeks of using the Crossunder bitless bridle.”

At the London 2012 Olympic Games, Dutch rider, Gerco Schroeder rode to a silver medal at the show jumping contest. His horse (appropriately named London) was controlled bitless.

“For some reason it just works really well on some horses,” the commentator said.

Actually, it works well on any horse. You just need the patience to introduce your horse to the bitless bridle. You might not even need that.

A dressage test was conducted with four horses. None of them had ridden bitless before.

Bitless, their score average was 37%. Using Dr. Cook’s bridle they scored 64%.

Riding bitless improves your horsemanship. However, if you must use the bit, you can make your horse more comfortable by...

- **Warming the bit:** Metal is cold, painfully so in the winter. Especially to the sensitive tissues on the inside of your horse’s mouth. Warm the bit in your hands before fitting it.
- **Making sure the bit fits properly:** This seems obvious, but it’s difficult to judge. The old rule of thumb is the ‘one wrinkle rule’. There should be only one wrinkle at the top of the horse’s mouth where the bit sits.
- **Making sure the bit fits evenly:** Read your horse closely. He’ll tell you if he feels uncomfortable. Look for changes in his body language.
- **Don’t pull harshly on the bit.** Your abilities here will depend on your understanding of the reins.

### The Reins:

Any pain from the bit is magnified if you ride with short reins. Even bitless, your horse will develop behaviour problems.

Short reins make you feel more secure and in control, but this is an illusion. You're actually applying constant pressure while you ride. You're controlling the horse with exaggerated, unnecessary force.

This annoys your horse. Over time he'll learn to ignore cues.

Your touch and finesse with the reins will improve greatly if you challenge yourself in the saddle.

Try controlling your horse slowly, no handed. Have a target in mind. See if you can guide your horse there without the reins.

You're forced to rely on your body, legs and voice to control your horse.

Don't push yourself too hard on this. Hold the reins lightly if you prefer. And always practice in an open area where you've room to make mistakes.

You could even practice the same exercise using one rein and the halter. Again, you're forced to work with your horse to get what you want.

Nobody should use short reins, unnecessary force, or even a jointed snaffle to substitute experience.

Riders who control their horse harshly have obviously never mastered these early steps.

### **The Saddle:**

Master saddler, Ken Lyndon-Dykes says, "every horse deserves a well-fitting saddle, no matter how much he costs, or what work he's doing."

Poor saddle fit has resulted in muscle wastage, back pain, even lameness. Obviously there are also behaviour problems to follow years of discomfort, from a saddle that pinches, bounces or slides around.

If your saddle is a poor fit, you may notice the changes in your horse's body and vocal language. However take extra care. Work through this checklist to make sure your horse is comfortable...

- Check there are no sores or rub burns on your horse.
- Make sure your horse's movement isn't restricted. The shoulders shouldn't be obstructed at any position. Raise your horse's front leg to move the shoulder back as far as it will go.
- Feel for the 18th rib at the back of your horse. This marks the beginning of the back's weakest point. A saddle mustn't be allowed to invade past this area.
- Check there's no hair loss on the contact points.
- After riding, check for a complete sweat line where your saddle should make contact.
- Look under the saddle from behind your horse. You should see light at the other end.
- Slide your fingers under the pommel. They should fit comfortably between your horse and the saddle.



The saddle is forward over the horses withers and just above his shoulder. This is to ensure that the horse is comfortable and when the saddle is slipped into place it is following the hair growth of the horse.



The saddle is now in place and as you can see if you look at the outline of the saddle it is not restricting the horse's shoulder movement in any way and it is set back slightly from the withers. This horse will also be comfortable as he has had his saddle placed forward and then slipped into place following his hair growth, all the hairs under his saddle will be smooth and flat.

Meanwhile, do these favours for your horse, regardless of how well his saddle fits...

- **Follow the hairline when placing the saddle pad:**  
You wouldn't stroke your horse against the hairline. Don't let your saddle pad get away with it. Start by placing your saddle pad too far forwards. Then slide it back to the correct position. Underneath, your horse's hair will fall flat, facing the right direction. It's an enormous comfort to him for virtually no effort.
- **Don't let the cinch pinch:** After you've tightened the cinch, raise each of your horse's front legs. This stretches his joints and skin, ironing out any hidden pinches. It takes 30 seconds.
- **Check the front cinch isn't too tight:** Nobody wants a saddle that slides off the horse. But no horse wants the discomfort of a cinch that's too tight (especially if it's to make up for rider imbalance). Riding with a slightly



looser cinch encourages good balance and alertness in the saddle. Try it. And adjust the cinch during rides to suit the terrain and gradient.

- **When you dismount, loosen the cinch:** A tight saddle constricts your horse's blood flow. It becomes hot, sweaty and itchy. Loosening the cinch lets cool air flow under your horse, and helps the blood flow freely again. Think how good it feels, taking your shoes and socks off on a hot summer's day. It's the same relief for your horse.
- **Wash the cinch.** Do this regularly. It removes the dirt and dried sweat that aggravates your horse when riding. Your cinch will also last longer.

## CHAPTER NINE

# 31 practical ways to bond faster through grooming

You and your horse are a herd of 2. The most effective way to reinforce this in your horse's mind is through grooming.

Horses groom to welcome a new arrival into the herd. It helps them clean areas they can't reach alone. And when you groom your horse, you simulate herd behaviour, building a closer bond with him.

Grooming mistakes prevent you from capitalising on an enormous opportunity.



So what follows are 31 thoughts to keep in mind while grooming.

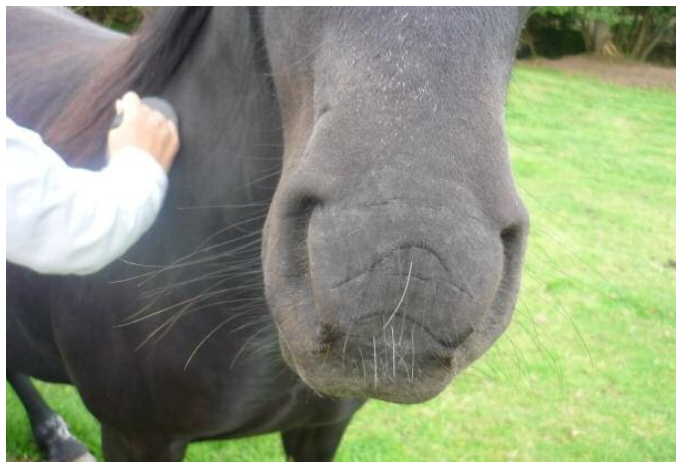
Some of them you may already know.

Others will seem completely unnatural and may surprise you.

But follow them all, and you'll become a herd member much faster in your horse's mind.

1. Don't reach straight for the face. This is a common mistake, and it startles your horse. Often your hand will appear from his blind spot. Wild horses approach each other slowly, and with respect.
2. Begin with soothing strokes, scratches and rubs. Horses hate being patted. This is a predatory communication that's completely foreign to them in the wild.
3. Run your hands over your horse's body, checking for injuries or sensitive areas. Make a note of these areas before grabbing the brush.
4. Pick your horse's feet in fresh mud. This cleans out any rocks and manure, before replacing it with clean mud. Do this every time your horse moves somewhere new, and always before riding.
5. Spraying a little vegetable oil on your horse's forage will improve the quality of his coat. Consult your vet first.
6. If your horse isn't used to being groomed, brush him down next to his hay net. This should keep him still.
7. Let your horse sniff the sponge or brush before you use it. Your horse remembers smells. Doing this prepares him.
8. Mix a solution of 1/3 bleach to 2/3 water. Spray this on your horse's feet once a week. This disinfects the frog, protecting it against thrush.

9. Sticky plants are removed easily from your horse's coat with WD40. Spray a little on the area and let it soak for 2 minutes. Then brush down your horse.
10. Your horse isn't used to water at hose pressure. When spraying him down, work in a set order from start to finish. Begin with the feet. Then gradually work your way up to his body. With time, he'll understand the direction of the hose and prepare himself.
11. Avoid braiding your horse's tail. Your horse uses his tail to bat away flies, cool down, and of course, to communicate. Let it function as it should. Brush down the tail using a wide toothed comb. Then leave it be.
12. Avoid trimming your horse's whiskers. Your horse has a blind spot under his chin. He uses his whiskers to detect water or approaching dangers. Trimming them partially blinds your horse in that area. Horses have injured themselves this way. Muzzle whiskers are very important to the horse. Horses use their whiskers to estimate the distance between their muzzle and an object, such as a food, water source or the ground when grazing. Trimming the whiskers will cause your horse to bump his muzzle on things, especially at night and this may cause your horse to become worried and insecure (in Germany it is illegal to trim your horses whiskers).



13. Use grease as a natural fly repellent. Rubbing it on scratches and cuts keeps your horse comfortable as he heals. It can also be used around the edges of your horse's ears.
14. You can give your horse a show quality shine, without paying for the expensive stuff. Mix a 50/50 solution of vinegar and water into a spray bottle. Apply your polish straight after bathing or rinsing. It slides off as he dries.
15. After riding, sponge your horse's face clean. This prevents fungal hair loss.
16. Don't shampoo too often. Over washing dulls your horse's coat.
17. Use a horse squeegee to remove water from your horse's legs. It's more comfortable than a hard sweat scraper.
18. Let your horse's feet get wet occasionally. This prevents cracks and splits in the hoof wall.
19. Pink skin burns easily in the summer. Apply sun cream to your horse's nose on hot days. Make sure you use a non-fragrant sun cream. Your horse's nose is extremely sensitive to perfume smells.
20. Disinfect brushes, combs and sponges regularly. This prevents infections on the skin and within cuts.
21. Brush your horse slowly, following the same pattern each time. Start at the front, from the top. Work your way down and towards your horse's back.
22. Use a rubber curry comb to loosen dried up mud. Rub it lightly in small circles. It will then brush out easily, without damaging your horse's coat.
23. Equine stain removal spray is particularly useful with light coloured horses. This will deal with any manure or grass stains.
24. Working on your horse's mane is easier after exercise.

His pores are open. He's less sensitive to your grabs and pulls.

25. Check your horse's paddock fencing for possible danger areas. This could include broken sections, but also fence corners. No matter how big your pasture is, avoid 90-degree corners in your fence. Horses trap themselves in corners. They become afraid and are likely to injure themselves. 90% of horse injuries at pasture occur in the corners of fencing. Solving this problem isn't difficult. Just slide boards into your fence corners to round them off.
26. Baby oil works. But oil that's specifically designed for your horse's face collects less dust throughout the day.
27. Give your horse a quick brush down when he needs it most. This is before your ride together. Placing a saddle over debris, or a cut irritates your horse during the ride.
28. Leaving your horse wet is uncomfortable for your horse and shows a lack of respect. Wait with him until he cools. Then brush off the dried sweat.
29. You can't always be there to groom your horse. So make sure he's able to do this alone as well. Find him an old tire. Cut this in half, and raise it on poles to his height. Your horse will enjoy moving underneath it and rubbing against it.
30. Let your horse roll, even after grooming. This is natural behaviour and it has a serious function. Your horse rolls on the ground to scratch his skin, spread natural oils and exfoliate his body. Also the layer of dust stops insects from irritating him. Any dirt will brush off easily once dried.
31. During grooming, your horse may try and groom back. Mutual grooming is common in the wild. Your horse isn't being aggressive. He's trying to return the favour. If you feel his head bump you, correct him gently. An aggressive reaction will confuse your horse, and damage a potential breakthrough herd membership.

## CHAPTER TEN



## Conclusion

There's no such thing as a bad horse, only a bad handler. A horse's behaviour can only be a reflection of his previous experiences. You need to be aware of this if you're to communicate with your horse as an equal – a fellow herd member.

Some consider themselves above this method. That's a crying shame. These owners are doing both themselves and their horses a disservice.

Monty Roberts has developed the most successful horse training methods we've seen. Study him. You'll notice he refuses to use the word 'breaking'. Instead, he's in the business of 'starting' horses.

There's an endearing quality to be found in any horse. Aim to work with his personality during training. Don't aim to break it. Behind every challenge, there's a great gift.

You'll soon discover your horse's willing and generous nature, normally reserved for fellow herd members.

## POSTSCRIPT



## Putting it all together

Lara Sportelli talks us through her horse diary - "Making friends with Moonshine"

Making friends with Moonshine certainly wasn't easy. He was very (and quite rightly so being a prey animal) suspicious of me.

But whenever he was near I kept putting my hand out and giving him the option to sniff it - some occasions he did and on some he didn't.

When he did sniff my hand I would move away, just to show him that I wasn't there as foe, but as friend. This game continued for a good couple of months.

***Thursday 13th September:***

The day I could feel us 'connecting'. I just knew it was going to be the day I could stroke his nose and face - which I did, then moved away from him.

***Monday 17th September.***

I decided I would take a couple of steps back and see what happens.

I stroked his nose and face - took the steps back and stopped. He took a few steps forward and stopped - so then I took a few steps forward, stroked his nose and face and once again stepped back.

The same thing happened again: he took a few steps forward and so did I.

I played this game only 3 or 4 times so he didn't lose interest and then I went.

***Tuesday 18th September:***

Today he didn't want to play ball, so I completely walked away and continued down the field. But when I had got to the gate, Moonshine had followed me down the field. I turned and walked towards him holding out my hand and he stood perfectly whilst I stroked his nose, face and onto his neck.

***Wednesday 19th September:***

Went to the boys and both Moonshine and Magical Mose wandered up. I found myself standing in the middle of both of them. Stroking Mose and whistling softly, Moonshine put his nose up to my mouth and twitched his

whiskers. I managed to stroke his neck to his shoulder and brush his mane. Then I walked down the field - Moonshine and Mose following me every now and then. I would stop and so would they. I took a few steps up to both of them and stroked them. This carried on all the way to the gate.

Mose is definitely ready for his natural halter.

Whenever I go into the field I also take a brush, hoof pick and halter and rope and let him play with these things.

It is also advisable when handling or riding any youngster or horse that a hard hat, gloves and the correct footwear is worn at all times. Remember prevention is better than cure...

### The Rope Halter Bridle

The Rope Halter Bridle is a very effective way of 'communicating' with your horse without using a bit. You are also a lot more dependent on the horse reading your body language.







*This is our youngster who is just trained to have the rope halter put on.*

As you can see he is very relaxed about it. First I started by letting him sniff it, then by rubbing it over him so he became used to it and then I have been putting the halter on and off over his nose for a week or so most days and then finally I was able to go quietly over his head and do the halter up the other side.

Hope you find it useful.

I shall keep you posted!

Best

Lara.

