

Do you have a pony that is hard to catch, or a horse that doesn't stand still when you try to mount? At HW, we receive HUNDREDS of e-mails each month from readers who are having problems teaching their ponies new skills, or are having a hard time dealing with their horse's occasional bad manners or naughty habits! In this new HW Helpline regular column, equine educator Michelle O'Neill – along with other regular HW guest trainers – will help you tackle your pony problems...Just e-mail your HW Helpline questions to mail@horsewyse.com.au - But first, let's meet Michelle!

Hi HW Fans!

My name is Michelle O'Neill. I live in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales (not too far from Sophie) and I grew up with horses. My Mum and Dad bred and trained racehorses when I was little and we have always used horses on our farm for mustering.

Growing up, I went to Pony Club, did show jumping, hacking and dressage and even took my horse away to boarding school with me for a while!

My first horse was a brown pony called Laddie. Since then I have owned every type of horse you could imagine; from paints to appaloosas, thoroughbreds to quarter horses.

They have taught me a lot of important lessons along the way.

These days I compete mostly in rodeo events; barrel racing and steer undecorating being my favourites! When I am not competing or training my horses, I teach Horse Industry at the Cooma Campus of Tafe NSW and I own a business called Cherry Tree Equine. I train and sell horses for other people and give lessons and clinics, as well as having a Quarter Horse Stud.

This issue, we have two really common pony problems to deal with, so let's see if HW can help...

Michelle



Michelle and Sam demonstrate....

Photos by Jenny Solomon—www.jensol.net

can't catch me!

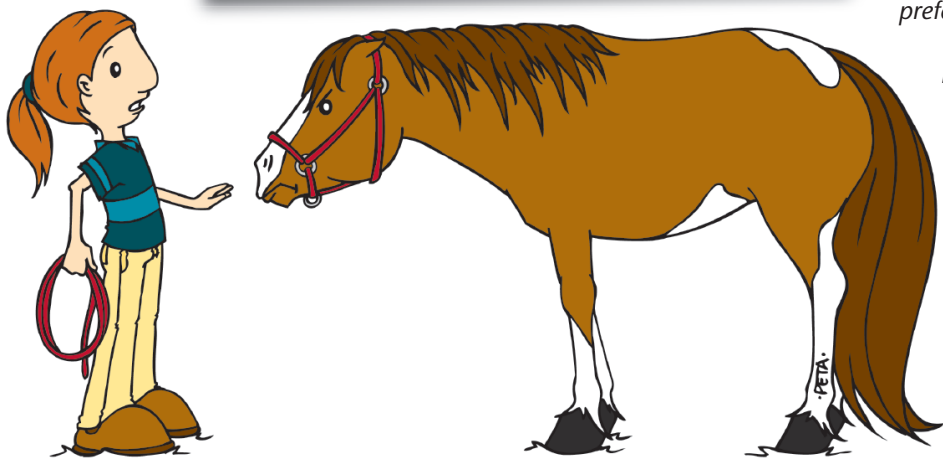
I have a new pony that is going well under saddle for me, but every time I go to catch him in the paddock, he pins his ears back, points his 'behind' at me or runs away from me. Help me! From 'Hard to Handle' Hello Hard to Handle!

Being difficult to catch is a serious and frustrating pony problem but one that you can fix if you are prepared to do some 'horsey homework'! You will need to deal with this situation with the guidance of an adult, preferably one with horse experience. If you feel at any time that your safety is being threatened, I recommend that you call a professional trainer and ask them to help you with your pony.

Put simply, when you approach a horse, you want them to face up to you and show you both trust and respect. The best place to teach them this respect and trust is in a safe, small yard; preferably round, but that's not essential.

Approach your horse as you normally would if you were going to catch him, and if he pins his ears and turns away from you, I want you to hunt or shoo him away from you! This is best done with a long, good quality lead rope and you should always make sure you are wearing an approved safety helmet and under adult supervision, so you don't get hurt.

Make your horse trot around the yard by swinging the rope to chase him on,



until he shows signs of relaxing. Your horse will start to focus his attention on you eventually because you are showing him that you are the boss, but some horses might take longer to pay attention than others! When you think your horse is starting to listen to you, stop all your movements and allow him to stop.

Once he has halted, approach him again. If your horse stands still and lets you touch and catch him this time around, praise him with a pat and let him know he's been good. You can also carry a treat with you in your pocket (carrot, bread etc) and when he faces you and stands still,

give him the treat as a reward.

If your pony still turns away from you or swings around and presents his 'behind', repeat the exercise as many times as it takes for you to get near him without him showing you any nasty behavior.

Once he is easy to handle and catch in the small yard, you can repeat the exercise in a bigger yard and then, when you are really confident, you can try to catch your pony in the paddock. Remember, if at any time he goes back to his old behavior, go back to a smaller yard and make him do his homework again! Good luck!

walkwoahs

I have a lovely, athletic young mare who is really good at pony club and sporting events but I also want to try and do some mounted games on her this year. My problem is, that every time I try and get up into the saddle, she moves away or tries to walk off before I have mounted or even found my stirrups.

Regards from 'Restless'

Well 'Restless', the first step to get your mare to stand is to teach her to back up on the ground. To do this, stand at her near side shoulder and face her back end.

Then ask her to take a couple of steps backwards by gently pulling on the reins and repeating the word "back". If she resists or tries to walk forward, reinforce the request by applying gentle hand pressure or lightly bumping her with a rope on the middle of her chest.

You must remember that as soon as she gives to you and backs up (even if it is just one step to start with), reward her by releasing all pressure. Make sure you give as soon as she responds; this will enable you to use less pressure the more you practice. Practice this over several days until she steps backwards as soon as you ask her to and with very little pressure.

Then, after you have backed her several times, ask her to give her nose towards you (keeping the near side rein tighter than off side one) so that if she does go to walk off, she will only walk around you. Then put your foot in the stirrup. If she walks forward at this point, take your foot out and ask her to back again.

What you are trying to do is re-enforce in your mare that standing still is the most comfortable thing she can



do, as everything else involves work! You may need to repeat the practice of making her back, before she is willing to stand whilst you get on.

If, once you have swung into the saddle, she goes to walk off, back her up whilst you are mounted, then stop and reward her with praise if she stand still for you. This will again reinforce the lesson. Remember at all times to stay calm and take as much time as you need; it will work out quicker for you in the long run! **hw**



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