

If you are lucky enough to have your very own pony, you'll know how much fun it can be to play, ride and even just hang out with your four legged 'horsey' mate. But HW regularly receives letters and e-mails from readers who have come face to face with the heartbreaking decision to retire their beloved, older pony. In this issue, HW's resident 'pony princess' Michelle O'Neill offers us some advice on ageing ponies, as well as showing us some important safety tips on handling those horses with bad 'hoof manners'!

howoldistooold?

Hi Michelle,

My name is Meg and I own a horse along with my mum. My mum's horse is a grey mare about 13.3hh, he has only owned her for about 4 months and this year she will be 9.

I own an Australian Pony who is grey mare and about 14hh. I have owned her since I was ten and this year she will be 25! My query is... HOW MUCH LONGER SHOULD I RIDE HER FOR??? I don't want to get another horse and not ride my dear Miranda anymore if she can still handle it. She can still keep up with my mum's horse Muffet and also ABSOLUTELY loves mustering. She gets so excited, but alas, she is also very fat!!!! I don't know what to do.

Dear Meg

How lovely that you have an old pony that you look after so well and is so fit and happy to work! You obviously take very good care of her.

Never too old

From your description, Miranda still seems very happy to be ridden and to be an important part of your life. While ever this is the case, then you should keep enjoying each other's company while ever you can!

It is often better for an older horse to be steadily active, rather than to stand around in a paddock all day doing nothing. But you must remember that your pony is getting older and is probably not up to really big days of hard work. So always watch out for signs that she is getting tired.

You mention Miranda is very fat. If she is overweight, then keeping her weight in a healthy range will certainly help her to enjoy her riding sessions more. If you are not sure if she is overweight, or just getting that 'chubby pony look', ask a vet or an experienced horseperson to have a look at her for you.

So how will you know?

Eventually when Miranda is ready to slow down, she will let you know. She may have "off" days when she doesn't want to work, she may start to stumble when you ride her or sway when you mount and she will definitely show a lack of enthusiasm. Once again, it is always a good idea to seek the opinion of a qualified vet if you are unsure of Miranda's health or if she develops any type of discomfort or signs of illness. You also need to decide whether to retire her completely or just ride her lightly every now and then; remember light exercise for old horses helps to keep the aches and pains of age away!

A new horse?

As Miranda is getting older, and as she becomes less willing to go for big rides, it may be a good time to look for another pony. That way, you can still enjoy your rides with Miranda while you are getting to know your new horse. It also means you will have plenty of time to look for a new horse and you won't have to rush when Miranda is finally ready to retire.

I hope you and Miranda have many more years of enjoyment together!

badhoofmanners

Dear Michelle,

We have a lovely gelding named Kenny. We have had him for a year now and he is great to do anything with - except for his hooves! If we pick up the front ones he will rear and with the back ones, he's sure to kick. Even the farrier has lots of trouble with him. He used to be so well behaved with his hooves, but a few months ago he got a cut on his coronet/pastern. We treated it with purple spray and salt water (which obviously made it sting) and he's been very badly behaved with his hooves ever since.

Dear Alisha and Charity

Well what a coincidence; I have just had a horse come to me with exactly the same problem! She has had a nasty accident in the past and it has made her very difficult with picking up her hooves; just like Kenny.

Is he sore?

The first thing I did with my horse was to check to see if she was sore anywhere. You may know a good horse chiropractor or massage therapist that you can get to look at Kenny or ask your vet to give Kenny a full health exam to pick up any underlying health conditions that may be causing him pain.

By finding out if Kenny is sore anywhere, this will give you a starting point. Maybe when he cut himself he



Photo by Jenny Solomon

michelle o'neill

actually did something more serious; maybe he fell over in the paddock and it now makes it hard for him to pick up his hooves. I am sure he is not trying to kick you out of hate; he is trying to tell you there is something wrong.

Baby Step One - Groundwork

With my mare, I also checked to see how responsive and obedient she was on the ground. This means teaching Kenny some groundwork exercises; backing up, yielding his hindquarters, flexing etc. By doing groundwork, you will learn to understand Kenny's reactions better and he will learn to remember how much you love him and want to help him.

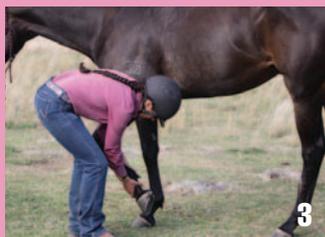
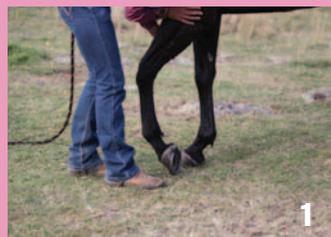
less chance of you getting kicked or trodden on. Having someone else hold Kenny quietly is also a good safety measure. One area you will need to handle is where the cut was; you know need to let him know that it is okay and won't hurt him.

Baby Step Three - Picking up the hoof

It would be better to have an adult actually pick his feet up for you the first time you are picking out his hoof. The other really important thing is to be sure you are not in a rush; take all the time you need to get him to relax, and go back to the baby steps if Kenny starts to get anxious.

hoofhandlingtips - safetyfirst!

All photos by Jenny Solomon - www.jensol.net



1. Gradually handle his legs and start by just running your hands down them
2. As long as he is happy to lift his foot, any effort is good
3. If he only lifts his hooves a couple of centimeters at first, that's okay
4. Cradle the hoof in your hands
5. When handling back feet always hold the hoof; there is less chance of getting kicked
6. Use your legs to cradle the back legs. The closer you are to the horse, the less chance of getting kicked

Baby Step Two - Handling

My mare was very scared of me even running my hands down her legs; she would even squat like she was going to sit down. So the next step for her was to just gradually and gently handle her legs. I didn't try to pick them up, but I just run my hands all over them until she was happy for me to do so.

REMEMBER to be sure to handle his legs under the supervision of an adult, or even better get an experienced adult to do it for you. You will need to be careful at all times, wear a hard hat to keep you safe and stand where there is

All you want to do is get him to be happy to have his feet picked up. This means if he only lifts his hooves a couple of centimetres off the ground, that's okay. As long as he is happy for you to do it. Then, over many days, you can get his feet higher and higher, to where he is back lifting them up normally again.

With my mare, it took me weeks to get her happy to have her feet picked up and now she is happily wearing her first ever pair of horse shoes!

Good luck!



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