

Is your horse a 'goody two-shoes' whenever you're around, but a misbehaving monster with other people? This issue, our HW Helpline's Pony Princess Michelle O'Neill from Cherry Tree Equine has some great advice on why manners matter, as well as how to change your pony's feed without giving him a belly ache.

Dear Michelle,

My name is Jaime and my 22-year-old Arab used to be the fastest horse in his town. When Topy came to me he was head shy and head strong; throwing his head up and I was hardly able to control him. Then one day he bolted and I couldn't control him. My Gran has been riding him since then and there has been a slight improvement. A friend told us to get a spanish snaffle bit. Is there any tips or help you can give us to train him so he is a completely quiet horse? Jaime

Hi Jaime,

You are very lucky to have your Gran to help you out with your horses! And I am glad she has been able to work with Topy for you.

As with any behavioral issue, I always like to make sure that horses are not in pain before I do anything else. This will involve you talking to a qualified horse health professional to ensure that his behaviour is not due to body pain, lameness, teeth problems or some underlying health issue that is causing him discomfort.

Once you've had Topy's health checked and he's been given a clean bill of health, then my first step would be to make sure you and Topy are confident performing a one rein stop. We have covered this in the Autumn 2011 issue and you can also now read this article on-line at www.horsewyse.com.au/articles. A 'one rein stop' will ensure that you are able to control Topy no matter what the situation. As with all horse training exercises, practice this exercise regularly at home when he is being well behaved, so that both you and he are in a comfortable and safe environment.

Something you also need to remember when you are working with training Topy, is that he is an older horse and may be set in his ways a little. Older horses are like older people; they take longer to learn new skills. With patience and persistence they can generally be re-trained, but it will take longer to get a result. You will have to be consistent with your cues and look for gradual improvements and reward those accordingly.

The big thing to remember as you work through all of this Jaime is that the lessons you are learning now, will help you with every horse you have in the future! So don't get frustrated... just have fun!



Dear Michelle,

I have been reading lots about buying horses, but I was just wondering how to change a horse's feed so that it won't get colic. The experts always say 'slowly' but how slow is that? Tia

(HW Note: The term colic in horses can refer to a whole range of gastric conditions that cause abdominal pain or problems in the gastrointestinal tract. Common symptoms of colic in horses include sudden changes to a horse's manure, repeated rolling, tail swishing, constant turning of the head to the stomach, excessive sweating not related to exercise, increased restlessness OR signs of depression or lethargy. Colic should always be treated as a potential emergency and if you believe your horse is suffering from colic, you need to seek immediate veterinary advice.)

Hi Tia,

Your question is a very good one, as sudden changes in feed can be disastrous to a horse. Generally changes to a horse's ration should be done over 10 to 14 days, as this gives their digestive system time to adapt to the new feed.

Essentially, if you are changing a horse's diet, it should be done slowly by increasing or decreasing the desired feed a little bit at a time. By gradually adding a new feed or changing the quality of an existing one, you are reducing the chances of your



michelle o'neill

Photo by Andrew Hennell

horse developing colic. So if you were to start adding a new feed, you need to start on day one with a small amount and then increase the amount each day...until by day ten or day fourteen you should have reached the amount you want to feed.

Dear Michelle,

After seven years of pestering my dad (!) he finally gave in and bought me a 13.2hh pony called Dynamite. When we brought him home, anyone could do anything with him, but I used to do all the chores like washing him, rugging and riding him.

But during the last school holidays, I spent two days in hospital, so dad was left with the chores. When it came to putting on Dynamite's rug, he would not have anything to do with him and he would gallop off! Even at feed time, which is his favorite time of the day, he would keep his distance until dad walked away. When I got back home he went back to his normal self and I had no trouble catching, rugging or feeding him.

We had him shod a few times and I was around when it was done, but the last time it was done I was at school. After a few gallops all over the place, they managed to corner and catch him. Then the farrier got his tools out and began to shape his hoof, so Dynamite decided to see how strong the halter was. Luckily it was strong enough, after scattering the farrier's tools and breaking his good rasp and few choice words he finally settled down. Do have any suggestions to help our problem pony? Emma

Dear Emma

You and your pony do have a special bond; you are very lucky! In fact, I do not think Dynamite is a problem pony at all!

BUT, as you have now realised, it is not okay if other people can't do things with Dynamite when you are not there. Imagine if he was injured and it was the vet that he wouldn't cooperate for; that could have serious consequences for everyone.

I think that you and your Dad may have to spend some time with Dynamite together. Dynamite needs to learn that your Dad is as important to him as you are. Of course you and he will always have a special bond, but

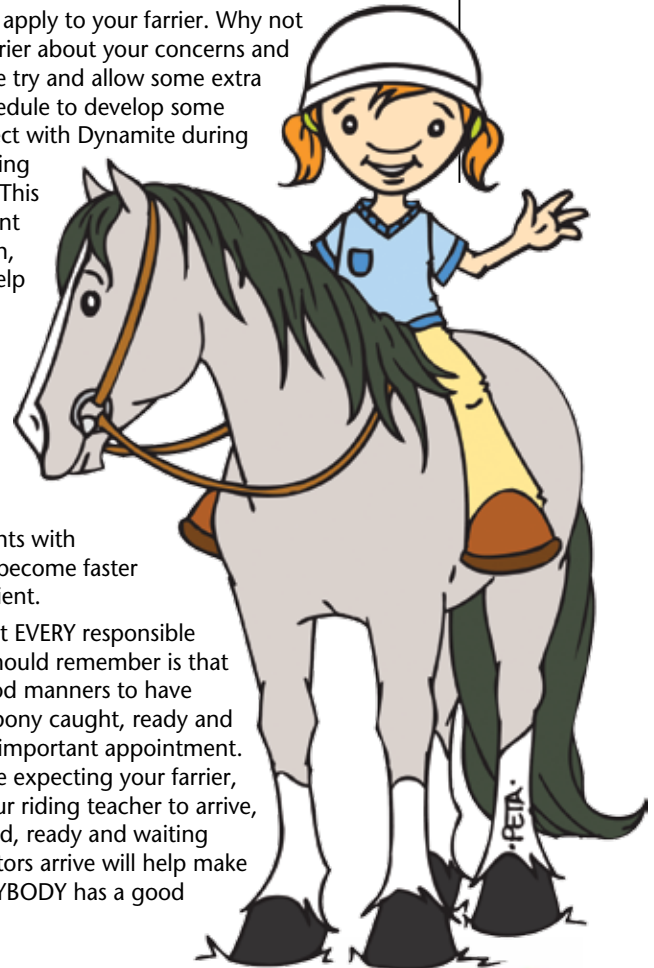
he needs to know that it is okay to trust your Dad (and other people) too.

At our place, because I am away a lot competing or conducting lessons and clinics, it is often my family who has to feed, rug and care for my horses. They are now all so used to my Mum that I am sure they think she owns them! But that is great, because if any of them are hurt or injured, they will trust her as much as they trust me.

You and your Dad may also have to work on his body language and communication around Dynamite. If Dynamite is a sensitive pony, there is a chance that he may read your Dad's body language as being aggressive or as somebody he should fear.

The same may apply to your farrier. Why not chat to you farrier about your concerns and suggest that he try and allow some extra time in his schedule to develop some trust and respect with Dynamite during his next trimming appointment? This small investment in time early on, will not only help Dynamite to behave better, but it will also save your farrier time and energy down the track, because his appointments with Dynamite will become faster and more efficient.

Something that EVERY responsible horse owner should remember is that it is always good manners to have your horse or pony caught, ready and waiting for an important appointment. Whether you're expecting your farrier, vet or even your riding teacher to arrive, being organised, ready and waiting when your visitors arrive will help make sure that EVERYBODY has a good day!



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