

WHY AM I DOING THIS?!
Have you ever had a day when it just didn't seem fun to spend time with your pony? Did you ever feel like it was too much work to saddle up to ride? Has there ever been a time when there has been so much pressure on you to perform that you were scared about making a mistake?



Those days are the ones we all want to forget. Sometimes we lose our way with horses; the fun and magic seem to disappear. When this happens, it is time to have a look at what we are doing and maybe change our approach...

As I write this article, it is raining at our place. It rained so much here this afternoon while I was riding, that I got soaking wet. Even my jacket couldn't keep out the rain! If I didn't love what I do, I could have ruined my whole afternoon by whinging and whining and feeling really sorry for myself. But I am SOOOO lucky that I get to work with horses everyday as my job, so I really didn't mind getting wet one little bit! Sure I have bad days, but there are too many good ones to let the odd 'bad one' ruin things.

So what do I do to make sure I always enjoy my dream job and the time I spend around horses?

1. Keep it Fun

When was the last time you went out and just did something FUN with your horse? Fun can mean different things to different people, so think about what it is that you really LOVE to do with your horse and GO DO IT!

I really enjoy training my horses and watching them grow and develop under my care. But sometimes, when my horses and I need a break, we also love to go for a trail ride through the beautiful hills that are on our property. We climb hills and meander along through the beautiful trees. Perhaps you might like to go the beach or play games or do a show jumping round. Whatever it is that you really enjoy doing, GO AND DO IT!

2. Hang Out with Positive People

If things aren't going your way, go and spend some time with the people who make your life great. That might be



To change your routine a little maybe do some ground work instead of riding. This will help you improve your relationship with your horse and have some fun.

a friend or family member or even your coach. Tell them what you are feeling and ask them for their help and advice.

And remember, positive people are not necessarily horsey people; perhaps you need to go and hang out with people who know nothing about horses! One of my best friends is completely non-horsey, but because she always makes me feel better about myself if I am having trouble with my riding, I love to go and see her. And I always feel better afterwards!

3. Keep Learning

If you feel like the fire has gone out from your love of horses, maybe it's time to go and learn something new or try something different.

If, for example, you are tired of doing flatwork in the arena, why not go and have a jumping lesson to learn some new skills and develop your confidence. Or go to a working equitation clinic, a group trail ride or even just try visiting a different instructor for a lesson or a clinic.

Perhaps you have a problem with your riding or you feel you can't communicate with your horse the way you want to. That is okay and perfectly normal! You just need to look at things from a different angle and sometimes that is easier done with a little outside help.

Everyone can teach you something, so learn from as many people as you can and look at horse training as a journey.

4. Be Open Minded to New Things

Part of learning is being open-minded to different ideas and to different styles of riding and horsemanship. Just because someone does a different event to you, or rides in a different style, that does not mean that they cannot help you in some way.

If you treat each new thing you encounter on your journey



If you are bored with training in the arena, go for a trail ride. Both you and your horse will enjoy the change

in the horse world with wonder and interest, so many more doors will open to you and you will learn so much more. The more interested you are in the things around you, the more new and exciting things you will get to see and experience and the wiser you will become.

The world is a big place, and the more you get to see, do and experience, the more interesting life will be.

5. Tomorrow is a New Day

It is really important to always remember that we all have bad days; both humans and horses. Perhaps you have just had one of those 'bad' days. So remember that tomorrow is a new day and things will hopefully be better, so look forward to that!

There is no use dwelling on what had already happened; you can't go back in time and change it, so forget about it! Think only about what lies ahead of you.

Even on your worst day, it is important to remember that there are thousands of people out there who would give anything to be able to spend time with a horse or pony. You are lucky, so enjoy it!

The horsemanship journey is not always an easy one, but what you will learn as you progress along the road to being



Surround yourself with positive people who will help you learn. Bruce O'Dell (winner of the Way of the Horse at Equitana 2014) is one of those positive people; he always makes me feel better about my horses and my riding and he teaches me a lot too!

a better horseperson will be worth it all. But while we all do have bad days, if you feel like the bad ones are outnumbering the good ones, it might be time to change your focus and find a way to make horse riding fun again.

As Reining and Western Riding trainer Al Dunning once said, "Riding on the back of a horse, with all his power and energy, is similar to having a dream that you can fly".

So have fun flying!

ASK MICHELLE

Hi Michelle,

I have a pony with no top line or muscle. I'm just wondering if you know any exercises that I could do to get her bending and softer. From Teagan van Gaans

Hello Teagan

When a horse or pony is muscled up and has a lovely top line, they look lovely! But developing top line and muscle requires your pony to be healthy, getting adequate exercise and correct nutrition.

The first thing you need to check is if your pony is sore. If she is carrying an injury or in pain, she may be using the wrong muscles. If she is using the wrong muscles (for example the muscles under her neck and belly) instead of the correct ones (the ones over her back and on the top of her neck) then her top line won't develop.

Once you have gotten an equine medical professional to check out your pony for pain, then you can start to look at

exercise.

It is important that your pony works in a frame that encourages the correct muscles to develop. You need to do gymnastic exercises that allow your pony to work long and low and use the muscles we discussed before. You want your pony to be pushing from behind and using her back with her neck carried low.

Nutrition is the final important consideration. Your pony must be getting optimum nutrition so that she has enough food to turn into muscle. Of course you do not want to feed her too much and make her fizzy or give her laminitis.

A product that I have had a lot of success with is Vitamite Super Amino 66 (made by Mitavite). It is a product that is designed to help build strong bones and lean muscles.

One thing I have not discussed is conformation. It may be worth having a good look at your pony and how she is built. Is her body shape designed to have a lot of top line? No amount of work or feed will put muscle on bone if your horse is just not designed to have it!

Good luck! Michelle



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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Feb 14 - Horsemanship Clinic, Cooma NSW

Feb 21 - Barrel Racing Clinic, Bungendore NSW

March 8 - Michelago Pony Club, NSW

March 15 - Horsemanship Clinic, Tharwa ACT

March 28/29 - Horsemanship Clinic, Eden NSW

April 11 - Groundwork Clinic, Tharwa ACT

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