

WHY DOES MY HORSE?

Often when people come to clinics their first words are “My horse does.....” But very seldom does anyone say “I do.....and it causes.....”

Why?

I sometimes wonder if people think their horses spend all night dreaming up ways to ruin their human's day. As if people believe that they are so faultless that nothing they do has any repercussions to how their horse reacts.

The reality of it is, that many of our horse's behaviours and reactions, dare I say most, are caused by us.

It is true that many people, do not have the knowledge to realise how their behaviour/attitude/actions/thoughts are affecting their horses and it is true that many actions are not meant to hurt/harm/scare our equine partners. But this does not give anyone the right to blame their horse for something, without first asking “Why does my horse.....?”

Here are a few examples of things that humans can cause horses to do!

WALK OFF WHEN MOUNTING

So often people put a foot in the stirrup and then their horse walks off.

The first thing the human did was to not make sure they had their horse's full attention. If you go to get on and your horse is distracted by things going on around him, you can be sure that he is not paying attention to you.

If your groundwork is solid, you can gain his attention again by making him move his feet. Get his focus back on you before you attempt to mount.

Horse will also become uncomfortable if people have trouble raising themselves over the saddle and many dislike (and it is not good for their backs) when people drag on the saddle as they mount.

If you have trouble with this, there is no shame in using a mounting block to make both your horse and your life easier.



Here Hugh is focused on me as I mount.

BEING DISTRACTED

You get off at the end of a training session and you feel terrible; you are deflated as your horses did not pay an ounce of attention to you and it seems as if you have just gone backwards in your program instead of forwards.

But who was the one who started out distracted?

Was it your horse, or was it you?

Yes horses can have bad days. But if you turned up to the arena having left your brain at the office or if you are riding around thinking about what you have to do next or what you need to cook the family for dinner, then chances are it was you who was not present at the start of the training session and it was you who caused your horse not be focused on the job at hand.



If you want your horse to work with you; make sure you are focused on the job at hand.

BEING SCARED OF STUFF

When things pop up on your ride that you don't expect, it is often the way you react that will influence what your horses does next.

I can give you an example where I did just that recently.

I was sitting on a young mare at a clinic. In the distance I could hear a rather loud, motor bike approaching at speed. The first thought that went through my head was “This mare isn't going to like that” and sure enough, within seconds, she had launched herself across the arena in what she thought was a desperate attempt to save her life.

What she felt, and why she reacted, was me tense up at the sound of the bike. Yes she could hear the bike too, but it was my sudden death grip through my seat and my hands that made her scared. She figured that if there was something

strange coming and I was tensing up, she had good reason to try to be somewhere else.

Had I relaxed, spoken to her and calmed her, she possibly would never have moved.

WANDERING ALL OVER THE ARENA

You just can't nail that perfect circle, no matter how hard you try. Straight lines are a dream. You seem to be good at wandering in any direction, except the one you want to go in.

Where are you looking?

When you walk on foot, you have to keep your eyes focused in front of you or you will trip over or run into something (ever walked into something whilst typing on your mobile phone?).

It is the same when you ride; where you look will affect how you sit, where your weight is distributed and where you want your horse to go.

Your eyes should always be looking in the direction you want your horse to go.

Sometimes all it takes to be a better horseperson is the change your view. Perhaps there is more that you can control than you realise.

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Article: Michelle O'Neill

Photos: Judy Goggin



Where you are looking will change the way you sit in the saddle and will tell your horse where you want to go.



Michelle O'Neill of Cherry Tree Equine

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