

This month, Michelle gives HW readers a 'PONY PEP TALK' to help us tackle the ups and downs of horse training and she explains how the attitude you take towards riding and training your horse, truly can be the key to your success. Plus, Michelle helps an HW reader with the whole issue of equine separation anxiety and how to help our horsey mates to deal with some 'alone time'!



Photo by Andrew Hennell

michelle o'neill



Squiggles as a foal

*Just like us, it takes horses years to develop into their potential. If you breed your own (as we do) you start by picking the best stallion for your mare and then caring for the mare and foal and then training the foal as it grows.*

*Here is a series of photos of Squiggles (Kiandra Morn). Now a five year old, it has taken us six years to get to where we are now; with an exciting young horse that we love dearly. But it has not all been an easy road; he was a very difficult young horse that has taken a lot of time and patience to develop. He once tried to jump out of our big round yard and bent the top rail!*

#### IT REALLY IS UP TO YOU!

"If it is to be, it is up to me" has been one of my favourite sayings for as long as I can remember.

#### BUT WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

To me, it means a lot of things; that hard work reaps rewards, that how we think and act can change our lives, and that there is no challenge so great that we cannot overcome.

It also means that if we want our horses to be good horses, then we have put in the work to make it happen. We have to be consistent in our training and we have to be willing to push through the difficult times.

#### HARD WORK REAPS REWARDS

Every successful trainer/rider/teacher/competitor you meet will tell you that it is hard work that helped them get to where they are today.

We all have days when we just don't want to go out



Squiggles as a two year old

there and work our horses...or clean the yards, or have that lesson! But if we can get things done EVEN on those days, we really can make all the difference to our horses training and performance in the long run.

My friend Ian Francis always says that 'if you took one extra day each week to train your horse, by the end of the year you would be 52 days ahead of your competition'. Whether you compete or not, the thought of your horse achieving 52 days of better training is a pretty exciting one!

#### HOW WE THINK AND HOW WE ACT CAN CHANGE OUR LIVES

There is a huge amount of research out there about how the way we think affects our actions, our behaviour and our success. And it is always good to remember that everyone has bad days (see the Autumn 2015 of HorseWyse for more on this topic). But even on those days, if you can keep your head held high and remember all the positives in your life, then that will help you through.

A great example I learnt many years ago, was how to control my thoughts when I was worried about a horse doing something (for example shying). Instead of focusing on what I thought the horse was going to do, I instead imagine the horse walking forward calmly and correctly. By thinking this way, I control my body and let my horse know there is nothing to be scared of. As a result, my horses often forget about the scary thing in front of them.

#### EVERY CHALLENGE CAN BE OVERCOME

Everyone comes to points in their lives where they hit a roadblock and don't know where to go to next. But this can actually be a great thing to happen...as it gives you a really good chance to sit back and evaluate what you are doing and why it is (or isn't) working.

If you keep doing what you are doing, you will keep getting what you are getting. So how about changing what you are doing? A new method, a new way of thinking or a new idea might just be all you need to get moving again.

#### CONSISTENCY IS THE KEY

I truly believe in the core belief behind Cherry Tree Equine; Control, Confidence and Consistency. These three



As a four year old, enjoying some R & R after being started

elements of horse training go hand in hand. To achieve one without the other is to create an unbalanced foundation to build all horsemanship on.

To achieve any level of training with our horses, we need to be consistent in what we do with them every day. This means things like; don't let your horse rub all over you one day and then scold him the next for wanting to scratch his ear on you! When you ask your horse to change pace, use the SAME AIDS every single time. When you change direction, make sure you change your inside leg pressure to adjust to the new direction.



Now a lovely horse under saddle

Horses learn via repetition and release. The more consistent you are with your timing and the better timed your release, the faster your horse will learn.



Squiggles at Cooma ABHA doing what he loves.

## ASK MICHELLE

Hi Michelle,

*I have two gorgeous equines, Rusty, an OTT Thoroughbred gelding and Honey, my Shetland pony mare. At times I have to keep Rusty and Honey in separate paddocks, as Honey can get over weight very quickly if not managed. So often she has to go into a 'diet' paddock. BUT...Rusty will chuck an absolute fit when she is put into a separate paddock and flip out if he can't see her - by galloping up and down and neighing so much that once he almost ran through the fence. As you can see he has quite a bad case of separation anxiety, so my question is; 'Is there anything I can do to help him cope with this?' Thank you in advance! Charmaine Winchcombe*

Hi Charmaine,

I understand how hard it can be when you have a horse that has separation anxiety. I purchased a broodmare several years ago, who had been left in a paddock with no other horses for a very long time. When she first came to us she would injure herself if you changed the horses she was living with. It has taken a lot to get her over the experience.

It sounds as though your two horses are very attached to each other. I am assuming that there are no other horses living around them? And hence, this is why they have become so inseparable.

What we need to understand is that horses are herd animals. They have evolved over centuries by living in a herd, which has an organised structure where everyone understands their place. As horses have more domesticated, this has changed, as we now keep them in smaller groups and in smaller paddocks. Whilst this enables us to take good care of them, it does mean we have altered how they would once have lived.

As you only have two horses, they have become each other's "herd". Rusty and Honey would know exactly where they stand with each other and would enjoy each other's company, just as you would enjoy the company of your family.

When we change horses living conditions we need to be very careful about how they react to that change. As an example, you might put Rusty and Honey in adjoining paddocks where they can still see each other and then gradually move them further apart.

Another thing you might look at is getting a companion for Rusty when he needs to be separated. And it does not necessarily have to be a horse! A cow, sheep or even a goat may be all the companionship Rusty needs to ensure he is happy. There have been many great racehorses over the years that were kept happy by the company of a goat (for a great story about one such goat google "Fudgie Maker the Goat". He is quite a celebrity who even has a Facebook page!). Good luck Charmaine; with a little time and work, your horses will be fine.



**MITAVITE GIVEAWAY!** Thanks to the team at Mitavite, every HW reader who has their letter featured in HW's Help Line column will receive a gift voucher for a bag of Mitavite Xtra-Cool horse feed; it doesn't get any cooler than this! Check out [www.mitavite.com.au](http://www.mitavite.com.au) to find your nearest Mitavite stockist! You can e-mail your horsey questions to Michelle at [mail@horseywyse.com.au](mailto:mail@horseywyse.com.au) or post your letters to 'Ask Michelle' c/o HorseWyse Magazine, PO Box 260, Pambula, NSW 2549, Australia. And remember, no problem (or pony) is too small to Ask Michelle!



## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**30 Aug.** – Horsemanship Clinic and Trail Ride at Greenhills

**12 Sept.** – Horsemanship Clinic at Cooma

**19 & 20 Sept.** – Clinics and Lessons at Eden

**24 Oct.** – Clinic on the Trail at Greenhills

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