

Communicating With Your Horse

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When you get to own your very own horse and irrespective of his age, one of the first things you must do is to really get to know him. And to learn how to teach him to get to know you.

You must be aware of the fact that although horses are beautiful and sensitive creatures, they observe the herd system. Their instinct in their natural environment in the wild is for immediate action. They take this action as, for them, it can mean their actual survival. Given any sign of danger, they immediately take flight.

With this in mind it is important for you to learn how to effectively communicate with your horse. Know that horses actually have a language of their own and that, unfortunately, many owners are not as aware of this fact as they should be.

Your horse's BODY LANGUAGE means something.

Be aware that every swivel of an ear, each hip movement, tail flick and facial expression means something. This is the language horses use to speak to other horses - and to us - so if we are to get to know our horse, we must listen.

Your horse will come to love you if, first and foremost, you treat him fairly, and secondly, if you teach yourself to develop a relationship with him in the same way you would a human partner. It's unfortunate that there are too many owners who will look after their horse's material needs but put nothing back into developing the partnership itself. Given the right treatment a horse born in captivity will identify with an alternative provider and companion, resulting in a healthy relationship from the beginning. Such a relationship with your horse requires, amongst other things, trust coupled with respect, fondness with compliance, and a desire to please.

YOUR body language is equally as important as your horse's.

Before you can really understand your horse you need to know what your body language say to him. For example, flapping your arms while trying to fit his halter will cause concern. Running up to him in a paddock rather than walking up to him calmly can make him think - is this a predator chasing me?

We've all heard about 'bombproof horses'. Sorry to say, this is just fiction! Something, some time, WILL spook your horse... any horse. So keep your body language quiet, slow, easy and calm. If you are calm, this will also help to keep your horse calm.

Horses speak to us with all body parts and that includes both their front and back ends. So beware, both ends can cause us untold bodily harm if we don't pay attention to what our horse is saying to us. For instance, most of us know that when a horse has both ears pinned back flat something is really wrong. Chances are that your horse is either frightened or angry. You'll find that in most cases it is anger. So watch your horse's front and rear very carefully. Caution is best even if you think your horse may be listening to something behind him or that he's just bored. Once you really get to know your horse well, you will know what his ears are saying.

If your horse has his ears perked up and forward this means that he's focusing his attention on something and is either up to some mischief or he's on high alert about something he is seeing, hearing or smelling. So remind your horse that you need his attention, especially if you are out riding and his ears suddenly whip forward.

You communicate with your horse when you brush and groom him.

Brushing and caring for your horse is a major bonding experience between humans and horses. Don't ever under-estimate how powerfully you're communicating with your horse when you brush and groom him.

It's vitally important that you keep your horse clean at all times. Be sure his entire coat is free from dirt, mud, sand and sweat. If you have the time, brush your horse every day. Pick out his feet before and after every outing. Wash out any sweat residue from the saddle pad and girth after each work-out or ride. Apart from communication, a clean horse and tack is a major step towards keeping a healthy horse. And it won't do your pride in your horse any harm, either!

Finally, don't overlook the value of verbal communication. Talking to your horse in a quiet, calm fashion is a major step in having him get to know you and to respect and respond to your instructions.

I hope that these suggestions will assist you in communicating with the horse that you've truly come to love.