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Article

RIDING EMOTIONAL HORSES!

By Me, Tracy Porter

Endurance riding can be very hard on a horse's emotions. There are ways to avoid this happening but if it does read on and this will hopefully help you deal with it.

First we need to understand why it is hard on the horse. The horse is a herd animal, designed by God to flee when frightened. Safety and security are found in the herd atmosphere. In an endurance ride the horse may find himself seeking comfort in the herd (his competitors). However, we his rider is his partner, but we may find our horse preferring the pack and following what the group is doing, not doing what we his rider are asking.

Before we get ourselves belly deep in emotions let's see what's happening and deal with it before it becomes a doggone, dirty rein wrenching problem.

The horse finds security in his buddies. Then we begin to notice when the lead horse speeds up, our horse is happy to follow. Soon this progresses into our horse anticipating a change in pace. Then when we can no longer tolerate our horse racing along, ignoring our requests to slow down we may find that he is adamant about going along with his friends. Refusing to walk, he has developed the jig and depending on the energy in the group we may soon be dealing with a full blown tantrum.

Many people will tolerate this behavior or finally at their wit's end will in desperation sell the horse and buy a new one. However, unless they get a handle on their problem, the new horse will develop the same or a similar pattern of behavior.

Many of us are masters at teaching our horses what we don't want, then blaming the horse instead of taking the credit ourselves for our own shortcomings.

What are some warning signs that we are headed down this one-way path to destruction and what can we do about it?

If your horse starts off before your cue, whether it's walking off or speeding up in a gait it is time to do some preventative work.

Make sure your riding time is divided equally riding by yourself and with other horses. Vary the position you ride at in the group. Don't always lead or plant your self in the rear. I like to ride my horse out in front of the group, but also ask him to slow down and ride behind the group and other positions within the group.

Vary your speed. In each gait, you should have a range of paces within each gait this includes GAITED horses. I cringe when I hear I can't ride with gaited horses they go too fast. Well, let me tell you, they might go to fast but there are a lot of horses that have the reverse problem, especially at a flat walk. Just think how pleasant the trail world would be if all horses had a wide range within their gaits!

Riding in reverse or leaving the bunch. Better to practice before it gets to be a challenge. There is nothing wrong with taking another path or going home by yourself. If your horse is already an emotional disaster, try riding a little further

away from the group then coming right back. Your horse may not be ready to go cold turkey! Take every opportunity to ride off, even if only a few feet or around a bush or two!

Horses that jig. No, this is not a gait, your horse is not walking, nor is it trotting! Your horse simply has a case of ants in his pants. Stopping the horse is not the answer, and might even cause the horse to rear. Alternative circling will solve this problem, but only if you use one rein at a time, keeping your free hand on the buckle. Be sure to release the horse as you circle him back so he has the opportunity to walk on a loose rein! As soon as the horse takes one non-walk step it is imperative that you don't think twice but start immediately. Note he may walk at some point, it might only be a step or it might be a power walk. Be aware of this and don't miss this important opportunity to reward him!

On an endurance ride, try riding with different people as well as by yourself. I rode with 8 different horses on my horse's first competitive ride. I went by myself at one point when I felt he was thinking to become a groupie. Endurance riding is no different than any other equine sport, yet some people go thru horses like toilet paper. Hopefully, like me, you're one who wants your horse sane and sound for the long haul! For more information contact Tracy @ 608-868-5432 or visit www.tracy-porter.net Thanks to Casi at Creative Equine Photography www.CreativeEquinePhotography.com for the wonderful Photos from the June ApDRA Endurance ride at Horseman' Park, Palmyra Wisconsin! Also, Genie Stewart Speers took Caz's photo at New Prospect, Wisconsin.



I vary my gaits and the speed with in each gait while I ride Thomas. I also frequently check his hips and shoulders for softness with lateral work as well as lead changes in his canter.



Thomas is just as comfortable riding alone as he is in a large group. I make a point to do both... When I do ride with other horses...my horse still needs my undivided attention...if I expect his. If you can't ride by yourself...focus on your horse and not the company you are with...of course it is easier if you are riding with someone that makes your stomach sour!



When you ride with a group, make a point of changing positions as June Scheunemann and Mike Bernsdorf are doing here. Nothing is worse for your horses mental training than locking him into a position of leading or following!

Caz confidently crosses a bridge along the trail on the third LD ride of his career. He had just been passed up by 3 riders, but remains quiet and relaxed. It is very important to establish mental confidence in your horse in each and every ride. It will pay off in lower pulse readings in the future!

I am always asked: Sir Thomas & Casadero (aka Tom & Caz) are Paso Finos. Tom is a 12 year old gelding that had severe emotional & training issues when I got him. Caz is a 8 year old stallion. (yes, pasos can be pinto AND be endurance horses!) Both Tom & Caz are my demo horses and travel to horse fairs, grade schools and training clinics with me! I love them very much!

[[BACK UP TO ARTICLES](#)]