

## Sad, but True Horse Boo Boos

Many of the following mistakes made with horses were ones I made over the last 40 years, but luckily for me, some of them were tales I've heard from other people. Hopefully, readers can learn and avoid some of these problems themselves if they haven't already made the same mistakes!

Not paying attention to a horse's body language can be painful. Standing behind an alpha mare brushing her tail was no problem until another horse walked into her space. She gave warning to the other horse by laying her ears back and shaking her head, but the warning was ignored by the groomer as well as the other horse, and the next action was a kick. Unfortunately, it didn't land on the transgressor but on the groomer's leg and taught her to pay attention to what was going on in the immediate area and to pay attention to her horse.

Not giving a new horse time to settle in and get used to new people and new facilities can start a new relationship off poorly. A young horse was hauled about 600 miles to a new owner who took it off the trailer, saddled it, and proceeded to try to go for a ride. The next several months were spent trying to sell the horse that bucked the rider off. It pays to be considerate of a new horse and let it get adjusted.

Horses need to learn to move away from pressure instead of leaning into it which they tend to do naturally. If you slip up and let the horse into your space uninvited, a foot underneath a hoof may occur and it sure helps to have a horse that will move away from a touch on its side instead of leaning even harder on your foot!

A scared horse is not going to go willingly up to or by something it's afraid of. Forcing the issue can lead to a spin and bolt, squirting by the object as fast as possible, or even lead to rearing and other evasion tactics. Spending time letting the horse face the object and doing advance and retreat, moving its feet and letting it gradually drift near the object but not forcing it to get closer will get better results.

A horse that is touchy about its feet and legs can really get upset if it gets tangled up in vines, ropes, or a fence. Many serious injuries to legs could be avoided if the horse had been gently and slowly desensitized to a rope

touching and retreating around its legs. Leg injuries take a long time to heal and require a lot of intensive doctoring which means time and money.

Cinches loosen after being tightened initially. Getting on a horse without checking the cinch can land one in a pile on the ground, or if they loosen after getting on, can cause a wreck while riding. Saddles under a horse's belly are not something most horses have been desensitized to, and that can lead to a real rodeo kind of action.

Horses that don't readily give to pressure can step on leadlines and jerk their heads up so hard that snaps and hardware might break. Or they might get a leg over the leadline and take off. Holding on to a horse's lead at that point is fruitless. They can drag you and you have no leverage to turn them. You might as well let go at that point. Teach the horse to give to pressure laterally, and down.

Another problem with horses that don't know how to give to pressure is that they may learn to set back when tied and fight the lead until they break loose or hurt themselves. Teaching them to give to pressure is crucial and also it helps to "tie" them so that if they do have another pulling back moment, they line will feed out gradually instead of breaking or injuring the horse. This works well on a panel fence with a long line looped around a couple of the panel rails. Loop it enough times that it doesn't come loose too fast but few enough times that it won't be completely stationery. A twelve foot or longer line will probably be enough to give the horse the space it feels it needs without it coming completely untied.

Girths can break. They often do so at the most inopportune time, such as when your horse is running away with you after being scared by something. Perhaps it is the extra energy they put into the effort to escape that causes the failure of the tack, but it pays to check your equipment and repair or replace any that is worn. It also pays to have taught your horse that the word WHOA means "Stop, Now!"

Once you've had some of these things happen to you, it becomes obvious that you should have done something different and you will take steps to see that they don't happen again. If you haven't experienced any of these problems yet, you've either had great mentors to teach you or you haven't had a horse for more than a few days and can learn from others' mistakes.

