

Improving Your Horsemanship Improves Your Confidence

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One of the best ways to overcome fear of horses or indeed to build your riding confidence is to build your riding skills. Do you remember when you started to ride a bike for the first time? You felt so unsure of being on two wheels, you wobbled, maybe even fell off and you felt just a little scared, but after some time you rode with confidence and never looked back. Well you need to do the same with horseback riding – keep at it until it becomes second nature to you.

Horses are prey animals and much more adept at recognising fear than we are. They will pick up on subtle signs, such as tense muscles, quick jerky movements, shallow breathing and tentative actions. So approach your horse positively.

Improve your knowledge of horses behavior. You need to recognise that horses have a pecking order, so understand where your horse fits into this. The dominant or alpha horse can be a great challenge to any rider, and remember even if you only have one horse, as its rider, you are in a herd of two! If you are not sure which is the dominant horse, then watch at feeding time, the alpha horse always eats first!

As I mentioned in my article about how to introduce a new horse, when a new horse is introduced to a herd, there is always some time before the new horse establishes itself in the ranking within the herd.

So, you need to be the master with your horse and you need to learn to control him or her.

Controlling your fear is critical to being able to take over the dominant role. If fear is a problem, you need to practice controlled breathing to reduce your heart beat, learn to keep your eyes focussed and adopt a positive attitude

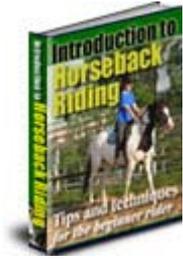
which needs to reflect in your body language. Only you can overcome your fears and you need to practice your positive thoughts and actions so you can demonstrate the alpha role.

You need to practice your ground work, so you are taking control of the whole body of your horse, through the use of hand gestures and body language. Use of lead-lines and training ropes teach the horse to respect our space and to obey our commands. Teaching the horse to stand and not move a foot until asked is a critical lesson. Then get him or her to keep their nose in front of their chest and remain focussed on you. Work on the leading process and work in circles and then figures of eight changing both speed and direction. Simple lessons, but critical in the training process and in putting you in control.

Working on your riding skills is vital as I said at the outset, if you are going to build your confidence. One of the most important skills to master is balance, but to be in control you also need to master your natural riding aids, your seat, legs, hands and voice. To manage these effectively will not only make you a better rider but give you the confidence you need to get the greatest pleasure from riding.

You need to find a suitably qualified instructor, someone with whom you have empathy and take a course of lessons. But also read books and watch videos. If you have a passion for horses and riding, there are numerous books and the market, well written and on a whole variety of topics. Videos too will prove invaluable, particularly those on training a horse, for most people will only have limited or no experience on how to handle problem horses.

Finally ALWAYS adopt safe practices around your horse, however much you know and trust him or her. Keep your helmet on at all times and look out for the danger signs and be prepared for every eventuality.



Roger Bourdon is the author of “Introduction to Horseback Riding” and owner of the site www.anyhorsebackriding.com. If you are interested in horse riding, then sign up for Roger’s free mini course and news letters at www.anyhorsebackriding.com