

Introducing A New Horse

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When introducing a new horse to your existing horse or horses, you need to be aware of the potential for problems that can occur. When a new horse is put in a group of others the horses will by nature sort themselves out by rank, not a great deal different to us humans! So you will probably find that your existing horses will sniff your new horse and may even start making challenges towards him or her possibly tossing their heads, snorting and pawing and stamping their feet.

Given this the new horse could react in one of two ways:

- avoid confrontation and run away
- stand up and confront the others

If the new horse's reaction is to stand and confront the existing horse(s) this could result in a duel with rearing, boxing and striking of front hooves, maybe even slashing out with their bared teeth. Sometimes the duel will result in them spinning their bucking hindquarters at each other. Generally this will not result in physical contact but if it does they are at risk of sustaining serious injury to each other.

If you are able to, you should quarantine the new horse for a period before introducing her to your others, just to protect them from potential diseases the new horse may have. It is often not practical to do this, but worth doing if you are able. You should start off by feeding your new horse on its own away from your other horses.

When your new horse is familiar with you and the new surroundings you should start to introduce it to the other horses. Don't turn them out together but let the new horse out in an adjacent pasture to the others for two or three days ensuring they are either side of an adjacent boundary . This means they can smell each other and move away if they wish to, allowing them the

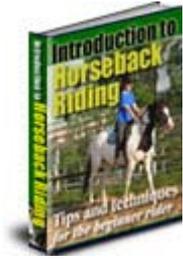
opportunity to familiarise themselves with each other, without any direct conflict.

Then move on with passive contact, such as me walking your new horse past your other two allowing them to touch noses and so on. If that works out fine then turn out the new horse with just one of your others, and then with the another one. Choose these liaisons with horses that are not the dominant ones. The rank and friendships established by your new horse during this period of one-on-one introductions will provide him or her with the security needed to fit in comfortably with them. Only after this consider turning them all out together in as big a pasture as possible, one that doesn't allow for the new horse to get cornered anywhere but don't do this at or near meal times. Make sure you have looked for any dead-end spaces and sheds in which horses might be trapped and/or terrorized, and plan an escape route for the new horse if you do need to remove her from a ruckus.

When you do let them out together make sure this is done during the day when you can clearly observe what is going on and be around for a couple of hours to observe and step in if things get out of hand. Let the new horse into the group at least 15 to 20 minutes after feeding so there will be no food fights and the established horses are then most likely to be grazing or resting.

For a couple of weeks after you have introduced the new horse to your others, be on the look out for bites, bruises, lamenesses, sniffles, dull coats, lethargy and so forth, indicating illness or inappropriate behaviour.

There will undoubtedly be some issues to deal with while the group settle down and sort out their respective rankings. Don't get overly concerned unless things turn nasty as horses are by their very nature used to dealing with establishing themselves in groups in the wild, so should be able to do even better with your help!



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