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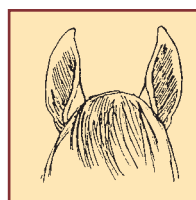
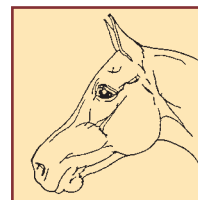
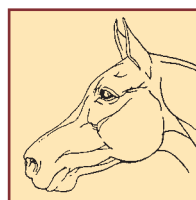
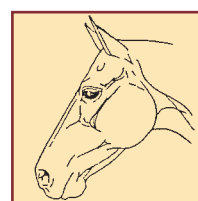
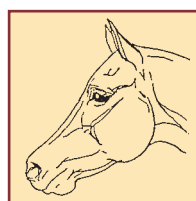
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Swirls

Swirls on horses are the equine equivalent of fingerprints on humans. With no two patterns alike, they are like stamps marking each individual's unique identity. In a number of breeds swirl patterns are used as identification for horses: the Arabian Horse Association requires a record of swirls as identification for racing, and the American Quarter Horse Association uses swirls as a means of identification for solid color horses. When Thoroughbreds are registered, part of the procedure is to record the swirl patterns on the face and on both sides of the neck.

A swirl, or whorl, as it is also called, can be defined as a distinctive pattern in the lay of hair on an animal, often having the design of whirling, flexible spokes rotating about a center. It was my grandfather Will Caywood who first drew my attention to them, teaching me that there is more to these odd "cowlicks" than meets the eye.

As I mentioned earlier in this book, during his stay in Russia as the leading trainer for Czar Nicholas II, Grandfather's Gypsy translator taught him how to read equine character by analyzing swirls, a skill that had been passed down among Gypsy horsemen for centuries. Later I learned that the fabled Bedouin horsemen of the desert also placed much significance on the interpretation of swirls, using them as a way of determining the value and price of a horse.

In 1965, my husband and I conducted a statistical survey to define the correlation between facial swirl patterns and locations and certain temperamental and personality characteristics. We sent forms to the international membership of our Pacific Coast Equestrian Research Farm seeking to verify the validity of what some skeptics might dismiss as mere "folk superstition."

Our detailed questionnaire was returned with observations on 1,500 horses. Since that time, I've spent years studying the phenomena in my own equine character readings around the world. The resulting system of analysis is proving to be not only fascinating and provocative, but also truly helpful.

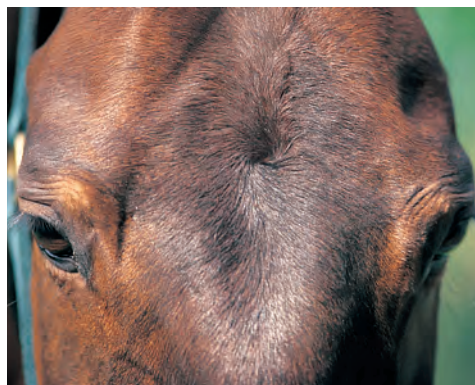
In 1979, in Israel, I visited a ranch overlooking the Sea of Galilee where guests could go riding. I was asked if I would look at a rent-string horse that was so vicious his owner was at the point of putting him down. The horse, a black gelding about 14.3 hands, kicked and bit and was difficult to saddle and mount. He had to be cross-tied and it took two people on either side to lead him.

I asked to see the horse and found that he had a long swirl on the forehead extending several inches below his eyes.

"You know," I said, "I don't believe this is a mean horse. Such a swirl usually indicates a friendly nature. There must be some cause of his aggressive behavior."

When we cross-tied the horse, I examined him and found that he was very sore in his neck and had hot, rubbed spots on both sides of the withers. I checked the fit of his saddle; it was one of the worst I have ever encountered. The pommel sat directly on his withers, and the gullet pressed directly on points below and behind the withers. Pressure on these points caused pain and also affected the horse's diaphragm, interfering with his breathing.

I did bodywork on the painful areas, using the Clouded Leopard TTouch, one of the TTouches. After I had worked on him for one hour, I was able to relieve enough pain that the horse stopped pinning his ears and trying to bite. His owner could hardly believe he was the same animal and decided



Two swirls on top of each other are often a sign of a highly emotional horse. Right: This swirl stretches up and down from its center, a sign of a very friendly horse.

to give the horse another chance, with a saddle that fit.

Now, if that horse had not had long swirls, I wouldn't have been so quick to think the problem was a physical one, but his behavior was extremely uncharacteristic for the type of swirl he did have, so I looked for pain in his body.

The best way to use face swirls in analyzing personality is to evaluate them in conjunction with all the other characteristics of the horse's head. For instance, a professional rider who lived and worked in Germany saw an article I had written for *Freizeit Im Sattel*, a German equestrian magazine, and wrote to me. She enclosed a photograph of a horse that was giving her a very hard time and asked for an opinion.

She had bought the horse to train in dressage, she wrote, but she was totally frustrated because she could make no real progress with him. He was extremely resistant and unresponsive, and worse than just being discouraged, she was beginning to lose confidence in herself as a trainer.

I took one look at the horse and thought, well, no wonder she's feeling frustrated. The horse had three clustered swirls on the forehead, short ears set close together, very nar-

row nostrils, small eyes and an extremely short mouth. The ear, nostril, eye and mouth characteristics formed a picture of a resistant horse with a low intelligence, and the three swirls added a factor of unpredictability.

In answering her letter I wrote, "Considering how many horses you have to ride and what you want from this horse, I would suggest you sell him to someone who is intrigued by a complex character and wants a challenge. Look for a rider who has the time, patience and interest to work with a resistant horse."

A few weeks later she replied, telling me she was so relieved to hear that the fault was not with her training. Many people feel like failures when they decide to give up on a horse. I've found that personality evaluation can be very useful in helping riders to make such a decision.

Note: Before you go on to the next sections on the types of swirls and their meanings, let me emphasize that when conducting a personality analysis, swirls must not be read simply on their own but rather as one of numerous contributing factors.

Facial Swirls

1. A single swirl between or above the eyes:

This pattern and position is the standard one displayed by the majority of the horses in our studies and in my observations. It indicates a horse with a generally uncomplicated nature, but there are variations. Sometimes swirls are set a little to one side or the other.

With swirls set to the left as you face the animal, the horse will tend to be a touch more complicated but still trustworthy. Horses that have a swirl set a bit to the right of center may be less cooperative than those with the pattern in the center or to the left.

In general, swirls of this sort are less indicative of character than the more complex patterns.

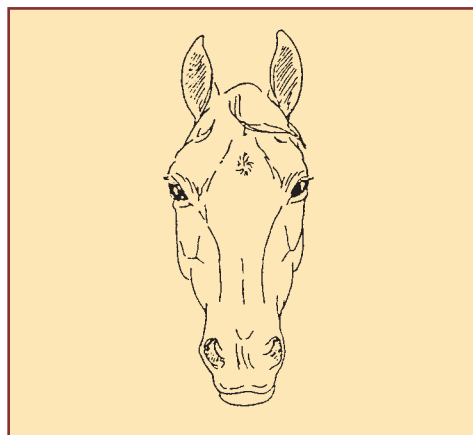
2. A single swirl several inches below the eyes:

I have found that over 80 percent of horses with this configuration are unusually imaginative and intelligent. They like to amuse themselves and can be quite a nuisance. I've known of horses that turned on water faucets, opened stall doors to free themselves and other horses, untied complicated knots, and found ways to escape the pasture.

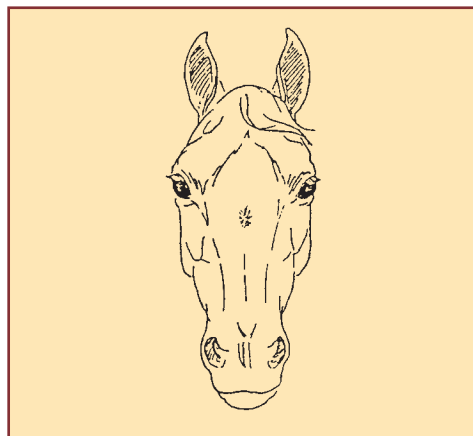
These horses are usually of above-average intelligence and interesting characters to deal with.

3. A single, long swirl that may be between the eyes or extend below:

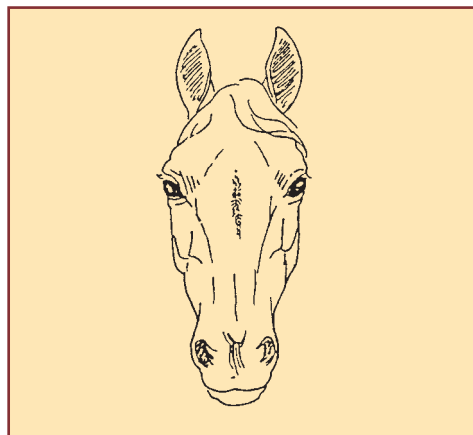
Indicates a horse that is friendly and particularly enjoys relating to people. Over the past twenty years I've repeatedly found that when horses with this swirl are unfriendly, it is because they are in pain or have been abused.



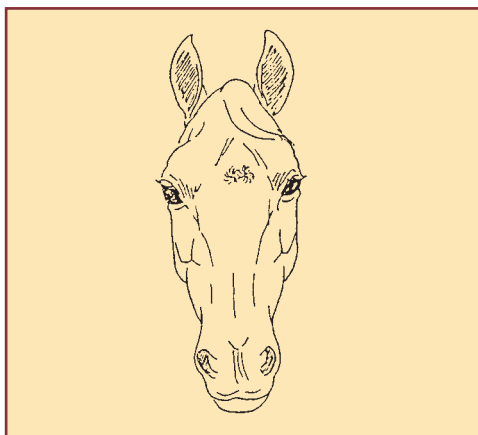
1. Single swirl above or between eyes



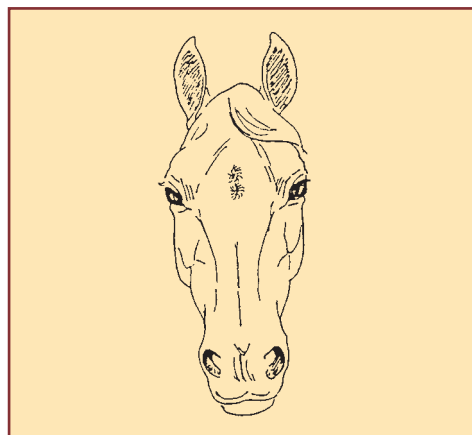
2. Single swirl below eyes



3. Long, single swirl



4a. Double swirl, side by side



4b. Double swirl, one above the other

4a & b. Two swirls adjoining, either one above the other or side by side:

These can be above, between, or below the eyes and are sometimes set at an angle to each other. The information to be gained by reading this pattern has proven to be of particular value to riders and trainers over the years. Horses with this combination tend to be more emotional and over-reactive than average. They tend to become upset without apparent reason, and at unexpected moments.

When such horses blow up, the best way to handle them is to back off and allow them to settle. Punishing them doesn't help; in fact it usually only aggravates the behavior more and can even bring on more resistance.

I've found that this evaluation holds true about 70 percent of the time. However, a horse with two adjoining swirls can be a great horse. Some of my very best show horses have had this configuration. But generally, horses with this pattern are not ideal for inexperienced riders.

Before I developed the Tellington Method, I usually recommended that horses with

two swirls adjoining be ridden only experienced riders. Now, however, with patience and using the Method, you'll find you can almost always eliminate undesirable, over-reactive tendencies.

Robyn Hood, my sister and inspiring advisor, raises Icelandic horses. She has observed that Icelandic horses tend to have more double swirls than other breeds. Some of them, she says, do seem to be somewhat emotional, but less so than other breeds with the same pattern.

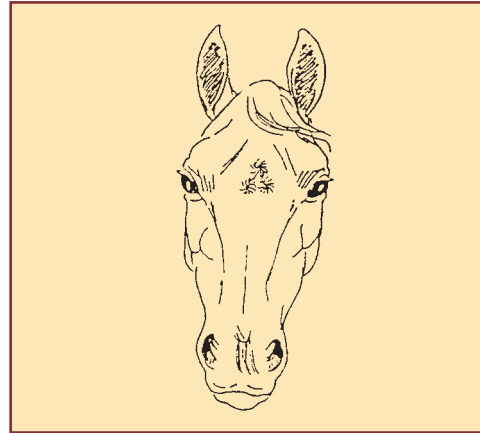
Robyn has also noticed that Icelandic horses have a lot more swirls in general on different parts of their heads, like the cheeks and the sides of the face just above the mouth. In these horses, the frequency of the swirls doesn't seem to correspond with the complexity of the horse to the same degree as it does in other breeds. Interestingly, Icelandic lore has it that when Icelandic horses have swirls on the neck or crest, they make good swimmers. This is useful in that country with its dangerous rivers and shifting tides.

5a, b & c. Three swirls close together on the forehead (not up under the forelock):

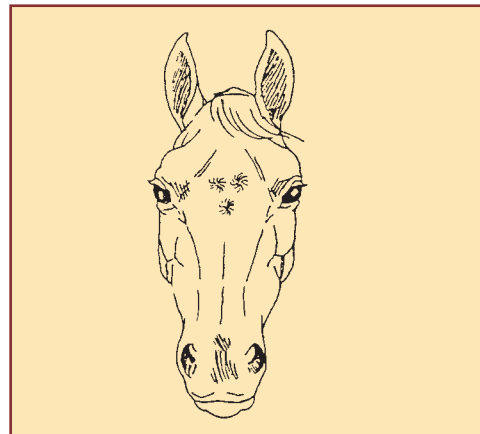
Triple swirls are rare; very few were reported in the survey. However, from my own observations in the ensuing years, I've seen that, in geldings and mares, the triple swirl indicates a complex individual but not an unpredictable one. Stallions, however, are another story entirely—about 80 percent of the stallions I've observed with this marking have exhibited unreliable, often dangerous behavior.

Though most rare, I have seen cases of multiple swirls on the face, and would venture to say that such patterns would tend to indicate complex horses. Many years ago I was a judge at a horse show in California, and in the line-up I noticed a small, liver chestnut mare that had an amazing 16 swirls on her head.

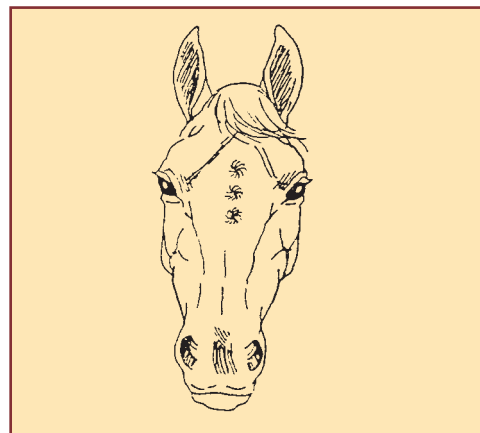
It turned out that she was a very successful junior jumper, but her owner, a 15-year-old boy, was the only one who could ride her. The young man said she had been very difficult to train initially, but now she was very attached to him and would do anything for him.



5a. Triple swirl, one above two



5b. Triple swirl, two above one



5c. Triple swirl, three in line

MORINGA GIRL
A 12-year old Thoroughbred

Moringa Girl used to be a racehorse, but she suffered a traumatic accident on the track and was then retired as a broodmare. However, she was difficult to get bred so she was sold to be trained as a pleasure horse.

Moringa Girl has a “dry” head (a term used to describe Thoroughbreds that have the chiseled look of skin drawn tightly over refined bones), a small muzzle combined with large eyes, nostrils and jowls: all indicating we are dealing with high intelligence and a mare with ideas of her own. She has a straight, honest profile and a special inward “look of eagles” in her eye—another term used to describe race-



Top right: Moringa’s broad forehead and widely set ears speak for her intelligence, but the uneven nostrils—one pulled up higher than the other—could spell out a changeable character.

Above: Long forearm, short strong cannons, well-sprung ribs, well-set withers, and a good angle to her croup add up to an athletic individual.



The refined head, well-defined lower lip, large nostrils, and distant look in Moringa's eye add up to a character that will take a lot of patience in order to gain her trust, respect, and interest.

horses that tend to distance themselves from people and have a reputation for great heart and courage for racing but are not known for being cooperative! My first impression was that this horse needs an equally intelligent owner. Her ears are very finely chiseled, a sign that she is “emotional,” that is, hot tempered. Her nostrils are a different size from one another, which suggest she can have a “Jekyll and Hyde” personality. The distant look in her eye in the picture above shows she is “not present,” which could make her unpredictable. Look closely at her lower lip. It has an indentation that separates her lip from the chin that I have seen on extremely clever horses, ones that tend to have their own ideas and are resistant—

except with a rider who respects and actually admires the potential intelligence of such horses.

Unfortunately, you cannot see the two unusual swirls this mare has on her forehead. The one that is visible between her eyes is about an inch long, and there is another similar one directly above this one under the forelock. Whenever there are two swirls near each other like this, there is a 70 percent chance that the horse will react unexpectedly to situations. Combine these swirls with the uneven nostrils and distant look in her eye, and you have a mare that could be a fascinating “teacher” for a patient rider, that is, someone who would be willing to listen and learn with her.