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Getting to Know the Horse

AS EXISTS FOR HUMANS, there are four core personality styles for horses. These are called *Thinker* (LBI), *Worker* (LBE), *Actor* (RBI), and *Talker* (RBE) and their Social Styles complement human Styles—in this order: *Analyst* (LBI), *Powerful* (LBE), *Mediator* (RBI), and *Advocate* (RBE). (See more about this in the Social Style Grid—fig. 5.1.)

The traits that make up the four different horse Social Styles are those associated with these four components: *Introvert/Extrovert*; *Left Brain/Right Brain*; *Herd Order*; and *Learning Method*. A horse's conformational characteristics can affect personality, too. All are discussed in more detail in chapters coming up.

Why is it a good idea to determine a horse's personality? There are four basic situations where knowing and understanding the personality of the horse is helpful.

1 You want a horse that will be your friend: one that is as excited to see you as you are to be with him. If you choose a horse with traits contrary to yours, it can be difficult to form a bond so you want a horse that matches your personality. When that doesn't happen, you will probably spend less time doing the things you want to do with him.

2 You want to participate and be successful in a specific discipline: you not only will need to be aware of the horse's conformation, but also his personality. For example, just because you buy a Thoroughbred with good conformation,

The Social Style Grid

THINKER (LBI) Left Brain (Fight instinct) Introvert ("Wants" to keep his feet <i>still</i>)	WORKER (LBE) Left Brain (Fight instinct) Extrovert ("Wants" to keep his feet <i>moving</i>)
ACTOR (RBI) Right Brain (Flight instinct) Introvert ("Needs" to keep his feet <i>still</i>)	TALKER (RBE) Right Brain (Flight instinct) Extrovert ("Needs" to keep his feet <i>moving</i>)

5.1

doesn't mean he will want to go fast—his personality plays a big role as well. Some call it "heart." So you need to get a horse with the personality to be successful and be aware he may not match you, and you may be required to modify your personality to get along with him.

3 You want to rescue an abused horse. This is where your ability to understand personality really comes into play. A horse that has been starved may change quite a bit once he is "fattened up." And

one that has been severely abused may be very reactive to certain stimuli—his core personality may not be what you first see when he is rescued. You may be required to modify your personality several times as you work him back to his "original" personality.

4 You want to train horses. Understanding different horse personalities and having the ability to align with them will make you more successful. Not all horses understand things the same way. Some horses need to *move* to learn while others need time to *stop and think*. Knowing the difference is key. You will need to modify your personality from horse to horse.

Just like people, horses have core personalities and modifiers. Unlike people, horses rarely cross over the Introvert and Extrovert boundary, and the

The Four Horse Social Styles

THINKER (LBI)	WORKER (LBE)	ACTOR (RBI)	TALKER (RBE)
Inventive (will open gates)	Will work all day	Reserved (may have no facial expression)	Can be vocal (yells for his buddy)
Loves standing	Friendly (likes to play)	Devoted (acts like he wants to be “in your pocket”)	Impulsive (overly quick in actions)
Food-oriented	“Nippy” (likes to put his mouth on you)	Can be very intense	Hyperalert (overly active when fearful)
May be stubborn	Willful	Distrusting	High-headed
May charge or kick when fearful	Pushy (wants to go)	May be unpredictable	May panic: bolt or rear
May buck when upset or in play	May bite or strike at something that upsets him	May freeze (stop and lock up) then explode—rear, bolt, spin—in fear	Feet need to move when frightened
Is careful with novice or handicapped rider	Is confident with novice rider	Is precise when he trusts rider	Will go anywhere when he trusts rider

differences between Left and Right Brain are less obvious. Nevertheless, there are still four very distinct types of horse Social Styles (fig. 5.2).

As far as the rider is concerned, perhaps the most important component making up the horse's personality is whether or not he is introverted or extroverted (for more about introverted vs. extroverted horses, see p. 89).

The right- and left-brained traits, often just a matter of the way the horse reacts, relate to degrees of survival instinct. The strength of his flight or fight instinct determines how extreme his right- or left-brained trait will manifest itself, which can also be influenced by his age and training.

The left-brained horse is typically more suitable for the novice or rider with less experience, while the right-brained horse generally needs an experienced rider or a confident one with less experience (for in-depth discussion of left- and right-brained horses, see p. 90).

When answering the questions in the Horse Personality Questionnaire below, it is critical to be honest about your horse. Do not view any of his traits as negative. Every trait makes that horse perfect for a specific job. For example, if he has a defiant personality, it makes him a perfect horse for the mounted police: he can stand his ground when an officer rides him into the middle of an angry crowd.

If you already own or know a horse well, this questionnaire will help you determine his personality. However, when you are looking at a horse to buy, you may need to have the current owner help you fill out the answers, or failing that, a good trainer who understands horse personality.

Horse Personality Questionnaire

There are 24 pairs of statements in the Horse Personality Questionnaire. As in the Human Social Style Questionnaire (p. 22) you need to pick one item from each pair that best describes the most typical behavior of your horse. You may have never seen your horse do one of the actions but try to use your

gut instinct that tells you “he would do one of these,” then pick the behavior that fits.

Circle the chosen item’s number where it appears under the four core personality styles listed under the questions, or photocopy the page; jot your answers down on a separate piece of paper; or download the questionnaire from the *Know You, Know Your Horse* page on the Trafalgar Square Books website (www.horseandriderbooks.com).

Make your choice as spontaneously as possible.

TEST

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. My horse gets frustrated when I want him to stand still.
_____ | 15. My horse likes to “go.” |
| 2. When coming upon something new, he will stop and smell it.
_____ | 16. He likes going slowly.
_____ |
| 3. My horse is “mouthy.” | 17. My horse likes new and different things. |
| 4. He likes being in a group.
_____ | 18. He is unpredictable.
_____ |
| 5. My horse likes to see the tail of another horse in front of him. | 19. My horse is distrustful of many people. |
| 6. He has a lot of endurance.
_____ | 20. He is smart.
_____ |
| 7. My horse likes to race. | 21. My horse values treats over any distraction. |
| 8. He will work for food.
_____ | 22. He has a tendency to run.
_____ |
| 9. My horse runs and runs when he’s turned out. | 23. My horse understands best when an exercise is repeated several times in succession. |
| 10. He enjoys trying to find ways to escape.
_____ | 24. He gets bored easily.
_____ |
| 11. My horse learns through repetition. | 25. My horse can be pushy when he’s nervous. |
| 12. He influences the behavior of other horses in a group.
_____ | 26. He will paw when he wants something.
_____ |
| 13. My horse can be defensive. | 27. My horse will think before he does anything new. |
| 14. He is receptive. | 28. On the longe line he anticipates coming back in from the circle. |

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- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>29. My horse moves really quickly when he is frightened.
_____</p> <p>30. He is unconcerned about new things.
_____</p> <p>31. My horse thinks anything around the barn is something to play with.
_____</p> <p>32. He spooks easily.
_____</p> <p>33. My horse can spin on a dime.
_____</p> <p>34. He goes more slowly the more you push him.
_____</p> <p>35. My horse does not like being held to a walk.
_____</p> <p>36. He does better with a gentle hand.
_____</p> <p>37. My horse doesn't like to back up.
_____</p> <p>38. He doesn't come when called.
_____</p> | <p>39. My horse enjoys new tasks.
_____</p> <p>40. When startled by another horse or human he will kick.
_____</p> <p>41. My horse can be over-reactive.
_____</p> <p>42. He is stubborn.
_____</p> <p>43. My horse rears when scared.
_____</p> <p>44. He easily forgives humans for their mistakes.
_____</p> <p>45. My horse bucks or paws when upset.
_____</p> <p>46. He is timid.
_____</p> <p>47. My horse likes to be told where to "put his feet."
_____</p> <p>48. He doesn't like to move sideways.
_____</p> |
|---|--|

Questionnaire Scoring Chart

Extrovert (E): 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 15, 22, 26, 28, 35, 37, 48

Introvert (I): 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 16, 21, 25, 27, 36, 38, 47

Left Brain (L): 12, 14, 17, 20, 24, 30, 31, 34, 39, 42, 44, 45

Right Brain (R): 11, 13, 18, 19, 23, 29, 32, 33, 40, 41, 43, 46

Results

Left Brain Introvert (LBI) = **Thinker**

Left Brain Extrovert (LBE) = **Worker**

Right Brain Introvert (RBI) = **Actor**

Right Brain Extrovert (RBE) = **Talker**

5.3