

contents

Foreword by Anne Kursinski	vi
Foreword by Linda Zang	vii
PART 1: Getting Started	1
Introduction	3
One: A Strategy for Avoiding Behavior Problems	13
Lay a Solid Foundation	16
Two: How to Start a Green Horse: A Brief Guide	19
The Appropriate Use of Aids	19
A Training Timeline	21
Three: Training Step by Step: Work on the Ground	27
In-Hand Training Methods	27
Four: Training Step by Step: Ridden Work	39
Mounting	39
Summary: Building Blocks	45
Five: Behavior Problems: A General Assessment	47
Physical Issues	47
Educational Issues	49

PART 2: Let the Games Begin	57
Six: Before You Begin: Horse and Rider “Self Examination”	59
Evaluating the Horse	60
Evaluating the Rider	61
The Common Problems Most Riders Can Solve	64
Section I: Contact Issues	65
First Rule Out: Physical Causes	66
Grabbing the Reins	68
Head-Tilting	72
Grinding Teeth	74
Tongue Issues	75
Crossing the Jaw and Grabbing the Bit to Bolt	80
Strong Horses or “Pullers”	85
Section II: Unruly Outbursts	91
Rearing	91
Bucking	99
Bolting	110
Spooking	112
Barn Sour/Nappy/Drops the Shoulder	116
Unclear Transition with Unexpected Results	119
The Stubborn “Freeze”	122
Nervous and Anxious	124
The Horse That Lacks Confidence	128
The Bully	130

Section III: Jumping Problems	133
General Jumping Philosophy	133
Running Out	135
Drifting	140
Stopping/Refusing	148
Rider Ineffectiveness While Jumping	161
Rushing the Fence	169
<i>Bonus Section</i> The Pace of the Canter: How to Jump Different Types of Fences	172
PART 3: How It Can Work for You, How It Has Worked for Me	185
Seven: Strategies for Future Success	187
Minimize Your Training Aids	187
Applying My Philosophy to Other Problems	188
When and How to Raise Your Expectations	189
Conclusion	191
Eight: Real Case Studies: Horses I Have Ridden	193
The Alchemyst	194
Crown Talisman	198
Valant	202
Running Order	204
Acknowledgments	211
Index	212

III

Unruly Outbursts

For the lack of a better term, “unruly outbursts” will cover a number of behaviors, tricks, and ploys your horse may use to get out of work, or worse yet, get rid of you! All of these problems can often be stamped out in short order as long as you are vigilant and “grab them by the horns.” Most horses will give up all of these games once they realize that they are just wasted energy.

Rearing

What Happens

The horse rocks back and balances on his hind legs, while his front end comes off the ground. A horse rears in order to evade something. Whether he is trying to intimidate the rider or is scared of a situation, he stands on his hind end.

Rearing is one of the most dangerous behavioral issues you’ll encounter. It’s a behavior used by the horse either to intimidate a rider or avoid a frightening object or situation in his path.

First, when used as intimidation and the rider (whom I do not blame) then backs off, the horse has won! He has now trained the rider: When the horse is asked to do something he doesn’t want to

Rearing (p. 91)

Bucking (p. 99)

Bolting (p. 110)

Spooking (p. 112)

Barn Sour/Nappy/ Drops the Shoulder (p. 116)

Unclear Transition with Unexpected Results (p. 119)

The Stubborn “Freeze” (p. 122)

Nervous and Anxious (p. 124)

The Horse That Lacks Confidence (p. 128)

The Bully (p. 130)



II.1 A-F A rearing sequence showing Crown Talisman's ("Tali's") progression of movement. Throughout, I'm trying my best to keep my hips slightly in front of my shoulders. This prevents me from getting ahead of the motion and allows me to positively influence what is happening rather than struggling for my balance as my horse attempts to maintain his.

do, he can rear and the rider releases pressure thus allowing him to continue doing what he likes. Second, rearing when the horse is scared may precede him bolting: Remember that horses are creatures of flight, so the sensitive ones that want to get out of an uncomfortable situation as quickly as possible can rear. In both cases, your horse will often use the rear to spin 180 degrees. The general progression of a rear is as follows:

- 1** Your horse “drops behind your leg.” By this, I mean he goes from a forward-thinking “feel” to one where he feels as if he’s just dropped into neutral; or worse yet, the parking brake has been applied (fig. II.1 A).
- 2** He will start to drop one shoulder and take the opposing rein (e. g. drop the left shoulder and take hold of the right rein).
- 3** You will feel his front end slightly drop and begin to turn (fig. II.1 B).
- 4** Next, the rear begins in earnest. His front end lifts off the ground (fig. II.1 C).
- 5** The rear will continue to elevate until reaching the apex. You’ll feel a momentary pause at the apex, then his front end returns to the ground (figs. II.1 D & E).
- 6** The horse will bolt, rear again, or continue as if nothing has happened (fig. II.1 F).

CAUTION: The consequence of less-than-optimal timing when applying aids during a rear can result in serious injury to you and your horse. So, if you have any reservations whatsoever, please consult a local professional for help.

Rearing has many causes: Some horses learn to rear as an evasion to avoid going forward or maintaining contact. Others begin to rear because they are nappy, barn sour or herd bound. For this chapter, I’ll discuss how to deal with the behavior itself rather than the trigger, which I will cover later (p. 116).

► **Cause One**

Some horses resort to rearing due to mouth pain or discomfort.

Solution

I mentioned it earlier in Section I on Contact Issues, but I want to reiterate here that you should have a dentist check the horse's mouth before going further with a horse that rears. It's best to rule out any physical issues that may be contributing to the problem at hand before attempting any of the solutions that follow.

▶ **Cause Two**

I would also caution those who use Happy Mouth plastic-covered bits to check them carefully each time you ride. I've had bad luck in the past with them becoming very sharp—they are pliable enough to come apart after being chewed.

Solution

See my discussion of Happy Mouth bits (p. 66).

▶ **Cause Three**

Rearing can have many triggers, but the action on the horse's part is always the same. Once the trigger has been "pressed," whether a deer jumping out in front of you or simply your horse does not want to go forward, he will quickly lift his front end off the ground and finish up standing on his hindquarters.

 **tip** *This is a good time to discuss the two types of horses that exhibit this type of behavior. Personally, I will only deal with the first type—the horse that has some sense of self-preservation even though he may exhibit all sorts of bad behavior. He's the type that approaches a fence, rock, or anything that might endanger him, and stops in order not to injure himself.*

The second type is the horse that will do anything as an evasion, including injuring himself. He doesn't care if he kills himself in the process of trying to get you off. This horse is not one worth riding—ever.

Where do you draw the line? I like to think that if I'm riding a horse, he too does not want to get hurt. If he backs up or runs into an object more than once, I'd seriously consider looking for another horse. Your health is worth it, be conservative. The sidebar on p. 95 details just one example of a horse I decided was better off in a field than in my ring.

Solution A

Dealing with a rearing horse requires the rider to have extraordinary balance and timing. As the horse lifts his front end off the ground you need to stay in balance. For this to happen, your body should remain perpendicular to the ground; the higher the horse goes up, the closer your upper body will be to his neck—very much like riding up a steep hill. If you have to err on one side or the other, you'd rather be *too far forward*, that is, hugging the neck. If you get caught leaning back, *do not pull on the reins for balance*—especially during Step 5 of the rearing progression (see p. 93)! When you've lost your balance and use the reins for support, you are likely to pull your horse back and over on top of you. Should you happen to feel yourself falling, your best bet is to bail out. As hard as that may seem it's the better of the two unenviable options you have at the moment. You're much better off landing on the ground alone than with your 1,200-pound friend on top of you.

A Learning Experience

A number of years ago we had a three-year-old that was in our barn to start. She had an incredibly quick rear. It had begun with a previous rider and I was asked to hop on and see what I could do with her. I had never been on such a horse. With virtually no warning, she would rear with such ferocity that she'd fully rotate and land on her back. (Usually, when a horse flips over once, he doesn't flip again.)

This mare would flip repeatedly—not bothered a bit. The first time she went up, I found myself instantly on my back with her landing on me. I was very lucky

that she didn't land squarely on me, but off to the right on my thigh. The tree of my saddle actually broke on my leg. After a few minutes I did get back on, but I was not riding for a few weeks due to a leg that was purple with a swelling the size of an apple on its inside.

When I eventually got back on, I rode without stirrups. She would begin to rear, I'd bail, and she'd land on her back. After a day of this happening repeatedly, I decided there are times you must cut your losses and move on to a different horse. It's not worth getting hurt.

II.2 A-D In A, Tali is both rearing and bolting to my left. I'm doing my best to open my right rein to increase the right bend. Photo B is such an awkward photo, but it clearly shows what effect my opening rein is having. The lock in his neck is nearly broken, and I'm beginning to feel as if I have the upper hand. Then, success! In C we're back on the ground with a right bend established. He doesn't look particularly pleased. We head back in the correct direction in D!



Solution B

Keep in mind that a horse will usually give you some warning before the rear happens (see Step 1 of the rearing progression, p. 93). Once these signs are identified there are a few key tools that can help.

Exercise

I I can't stress enough how critical your timing is when fixing a rearing horse. Your goal is to identify the rear as it is about to occur and quickly use an *opening*

inside rein with as much force as you can manage. (Generally you'd be heading in one direction just preceding the rear, in which case your *inside rein* is clear. And when on a straight line, 99 percent of the time you are working to push the horse left or right...again it's clear. But when it's not, then I generally pull to my dominant hand.) And, you want to implement the following aids between Steps 2 and 4 or after Step 5 of the rearing progression (see p. 93).

2 It is very important to use an *opening rein*, which should be at least 12 inches to the outside of where your hand is normally positioned, effectively above your knee or even farther to the outside: 12 inches is the minimum distance—more is better in this case. As the horse begins to rear he will try to lock his neck in a straight line, and most times, grab hold of the bit.

3 The opening rein serves two purposes. First, it breaks the lock he has in his neck, and you can get the upper hand when you can establish a bend. Second, the opening rein initiates a turn that will disturb the horse's balance so he won't be stable enough to stand up on his hind end (figs. II.2 A–D).

4 Once you've initiated the opening rein, your leg must instantly follow—it should occur nearly simultaneously. When you apply force to your rein the horse will begin the process of bending and your leg is used firmly to accelerate the bend through his body, and to make sure the horse does not fall onto the inside shoulder. If he falls in, he is better able to grab that *inside rein* again.

5 As the horse begins to yield from your leg and hand pressure, he'll start to lose his balance and his front feet will return to earth. Once on the ground he should continue the turn you asked for while in the rear. If you're able to keep him turning, you need to soften your inside rein and ride him forward in a small circle and progressively spiral out. You are looking to increase the bend through his body without getting too much bend in his head and neck. The spiraling should be driven by your inside leg, with the outside rein preventing too much bend and his "popping" the outside shoulder.

***tip** *You have to be very careful when dealing with a rear: If you are even a moment too late with your application of rein aids, your horse may remain locked in his neck, and the increased rein pressure will actually accelerate the rate at which he's rearing. He'll be standing on his hind end before you can even blink.*

6 When his feet get higher than 6 inches off the ground, it's too late to use an opening rein. Your window of opportunity has closed and you need to transition to flip-prevention mode. You must, at this point, release any pressure you had on the reins until the horse reaches his highest point in the rear. Just like a ball being thrown up in the air, he will get higher quickly, and just like the ball, he will slow and pause at his maximum elevation. When this point is reached, it's now safe for you to use as much opening *inside rein* as you can muster.

7 The goal is to break that lock in his neck before his front feet hit the ground and have a chance to go up again. This is the safest part of the rear: On the way down you can be as aggressive as you like with the inside rein and leg. When you can break this lock, you're in great shape.

Solution C

Once you've fixed the first rear encountered, your goal must shift to prevention of future rears. Good riding is defined by your ability to anticipate what is going to happen next, and begin to fix the problem before it arises. Horses are creatures of habit; they generally act in a consistent manner when in a similar situation. Look for the trigger that seems to lead this horse to rear. Once you've identified this precursor, maybe more than one, start using lateral exercises to your advantage. Many times you'll feel him drop his shoulder, or begin to suck back. Treat these instances seriously; they are an indicator of what is coming next!

Exercise

Ride in a circle just outside the area where the rear usually begins and start to spiral out of the circle toward the trigger spot: You should be getting closer and closer to it each time around the circle. Continue this process for as long as you are able to maintain the bend, which prevents your horse from grabbing the inside rein. When you reach the limit, stay there until you can keep him soft. Once he is consistently soft, move one track closer until you're passing just next to the trigger point.