

Between the Ears

Horses are great levellers! We never get more out of them than we put in (unless you are talking about what comes out the other end) and they never give us more than we expect to get. If we are in a hurry and spend a few days just throwing food in their general direction rather than spending time with them we know about it later. If, on the other hand, we have the luxury of spending time each day with our horse then he will be quite different, not to mention much nicer to be around, by the end of the week.

Not all of us have such a luxury so it is important to make the most of the time that you do have available to spend with your horse. Horses are learning all the time and have extraordinary long term memories. If we keep this in mind when we are with the horse, even if it is just for 5 minutes a day, then we can make the most of that time together.

Horses learn patterns quickly and easily. Have you ever found when you were riding your horse that he is scared in the same place every time despite the fact that the 'scary' thing that was there a month ago has long gone? As trainers and owners we need to make use of this pattern learning ability.

Horses are sequential thinkers. Allow the horse the time to learn the pattern rather than being too quick to correct. It is easy when we are in a hurry to tell the horse not to do something before he has even done it, for example. Let's take the horse that has a tendency to rush at the feed as soon as you put it down. He has done this for the last 3 evenings and you, making use of his remarkable pattern learning abilities, have politely asked him to step back, placed the food on the ground and then invited him over. On the 4th evening you enter the yard already asking him to back up without giving him a chance to do it himself first.

There are a number of other things that should be taken into account when we are 'training' our horses (even if we don't realise we are training them) and these include: our expectations, the horse's stress levels within himself generally and the environment around him and his quick intelligence that can lead him from boredom to mischief in two easy bounds.