

Fear, Respect, Trust and Experience

Fear, respect, trust and experience are the four things that dominate, drive, determine and shape a horse's life and all of his behaviour. It can be a delicate balancing act as too much of one or too little of another can be a recipe for a difficult or dangerous horse.

Today's article will focus on the first and probably least well understood of these – fear.

In the wild a horse lives or dies by his response to fear. In his natural environment, the horse is conditioned to run first and ask questions later. To make the domesticated horse safe we need to teach him how to control his fear. While we can't teach the horse not to be afraid we can condition him to look to us for reassurance when he is fearful.

Fear can lead the horse to do dangerous things and is often mistaken for bad behaviour. The horse in the first photograph is not being naughty, he simply doesn't understand, and is therefore fearful of, the saddle and is trying to get it off. In the second photograph, taken 15 minutes later, he has put his head down and is listening to me. In the final photograph, taken a few days later he is confident and relaxed because he has overcome his fear.

A fearful horse that is 'really' bucking, such as the one in the photograph, is vastly different from the horse that kicks at the whip or leg or 'pigroots' when asked to canter. The latter is a result of experience and a lack of respect; both of which will be discussed in a later article.

Horses are fearful of anything they don't understand or find unpredictable. A horse that has been well trained and had things properly explained to him will be much less fearful than one that has been rushed through lessons without being involved in the learning process.

So how do you know when your horse is afraid and not just being 'naughty'? The most obvious indicator is head elevation. A frightened horse holds his head high, keeping him alert and ready to run. Your horse will also be tense – try running your hand down his shoulder and see if his muscles are soft and relaxed or hard as a rock.

Tell us your horse story on the Kandoo Equine Horse Training Blog – www.kandoo.com.au Learn what's happening at Kangadoo, follow horses in training with regular updates, photos and video and discover a friendly place to share your horse experiences with like-minded people.

Happy riding!



Ace, first saddling



Ace, 15 minutes after first saddling



Ace ride 3 in arena