

PERFORMANCE THROUGH NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP



Horses are herd animals and they like to know where they stand in the herd hierarchy. Very few horses want to be herd leader. More than 99% of them are happy for their human partners to take over the leadership roles and it is our responsibility to make the rules of this new relationship clear.

The vast majority of our horse's social interactions here in Singapore are with us rather than other horses and we can use this to our advantage during our training. Horses communicate with each other using 'pressure', both physical and psychological. The more dominant horse will move the other controlling both speed and direction – exactly what we do when we ride or handle the horse in any way.

Using the horse's language of pressure, we can gently guide him through his new world. In this new world we have all the 'good ideas'. We want to go showing, jumping, play polo or go trail riding. It is our job to convince the horse that it is a good idea. It is rather like a business partnership but the horse has all the money.

As herd leader, the more direction we give the horse the more confident he becomes. Horses are creatures of habit and, like us, find predictability reassuring. They are often accused of being 'unpredictable' but nothing could be further from the truth. If a horse appears to do something unpredictable it is usually only because we have misread him in some way or failed to heed the warnings he gave us.

The single most important and effective thing that we can do to place ourselves as herd leader in the horse's mind is to teach him to put his head down. By putting his head down the horse is relinquishing leadership to us. A horse with his head down is more relaxed, not looking for danger around every corner or behind every tree and has allowed us to take over the job of protecting him.



Before



After



Horses are not naturally trusting animals but we can earn their trust by involving them in the learning process thereby giving them confidence in us as herd leaders. This is true both on the ground and under saddle.

Regardless of the discipline that you ride, most of your riding time is spent 'training' and we don't always take advantage of that. You can use this time to teach your horse, the polo pony, dressage horse, show jumper and the hack, to put his head down, give to the bit and travel in-frame. By doing so, you build up his top line, make it easier for him to carry you, allow him to elevate his shoulder and get his hindquarters underneath him; all of which ultimately gives you better performance.

The simple act of teaching the horse to give to the bit, break at the poll and travel in frame then not only places us as herd leader but ultimately gives us the control we need to make the most of the 5-7 minutes that we spend in the competition arena.

Kate Fenner, Kandoo Equine – Performance Through Natural Horsemanship, is a trainer and clinician living just 2 hours drive south of Sydney in Australia. She conducts training courses tailored to suit the needs of the individual (supplying horses for you) and has beautiful self-catering accommodation on the farm. To find out more please visit: www.kandooequine.com.au

Kate has recently launched a DVD series designed to 'teach you to teach your horse'. Each 60 minute DVD comes with a printable lesson plan guiding you through step-by-step. Topics range from Give to the Bit, as discussed here to flying changes, haunch turns and long lining. Check the website for details and ordering.