

If There is No Question... There Will Be No Question!

By Elizabeth Graves

Where does one find the question to the answer in the title for this article?

There is a concept so basic that many people skip it, or get to it last (if they ever get to it). But it can be hard to face the effects we, ourselves, have on the outcome of our horses' performance.

As gaited horse owners we need to look at ourselves and ask, "Do I truly want my horse to be OK with itself?" and "Am I OK with myself in order to allow a horse to be itself?"

It's often folks hear me say, "Don't humanize your horse and it will not horsalize you". I am trying here to help us all find a place of easier, clearer communication between horse and human for those who desire to find that deeper place of true horsemanship that so many of the great Masters - long before our time and of our time - knew. That level of understanding that allowed them those horse/human relationships that brought out the best in what each horse they taught had to offer.

Too often we reach for the answers in teaching our horses with the use of mechanical aids first, such as bits, strap work, whips, etc. and then a 1-2-3 approach of how to make our horse do what we want. The biggest tool each of us has in our toolbox is ourselves. How we approach our horses with our body language, our voice tone fluctua-



Author, Elizabeth Graves, feels and reflects, genuine affection and understanding of the horses she meets.

tions and our own internal emotional makeup all communicate to our horses.

Horses are intelligent and most of the time more aware and in tune to what we are giving off - confidence, security, fear and an array of other emotions - before we are ourselves. In order to get to a horse's body to perform reasonable tasks we ask of it, we need to be sure what we are asking is reasonable and within an individual's abilities. We must go through the horse's mind before the body will respond, but between this are our emotions and the emotions of the horse. We should understand and work through our own first so we can help a young, troubled or inexperienced horse have trust in us to perform the tasks we ask.

Loading a horse on a trailer is a common task in which I often see folks set their horse up for refusal. Many times I see handlers get ready for the worst through the way they present themselves to the job of loading a horse via body language and/or verbally. The horse questions the task and refuses or hesitates because we have told them to unknowingly.

Sound odd? If you approach your horse with doubt, anger, confusion, or worse, your horse will be too busy trying to deal with that, than with what you thought you were communicating to them, and the lesson will be lost.

A very simple answer to help any horse do what we ask, from the simplest tasks to the most complex, even

high pressure performances, is to first know and trust ourselves. Your horse will follow suit in itself and give even a smallest amount of willingness to do what you're asking. The instant he does, reward him, praise him, let him know how wonderful he is and how good it is for him to do what you ask of him. Over time your horse will no longer question you and give all it possibly can.

Given time, patience and our willingness to practice first class horsemanship we can all have on a regular flow of those "Ooh, Ahh" moments we desire in the time we spend with our horses.

Whether teaching a new foal or a re-hab horse, **we can make it easier for the horse by answering questions, not presenting them**, and by not placing blame on the horse for what they do not understand. A good goal for us all is to have horses without holes



Insights From Experience and Food for thought:

- ◆ Just be what you are as a human and allow your horse to be what it is, as two different species can find great success for both in a working partnership.
- ◆ It's not always about get "Big" with a horse, but also knowing how and when to get "Small".

*Don't humanize your horse **and it will not horsalize you.***

- ◆ Respect works two ways.
- ◆ Build on a horse's natural curiosity; don't kill it with your own fears, ego or insecurities.
- ◆ Be reasonable in what you ask of a horse.
- ◆ Make it as easy as possible for a horse to achieve success.
- ◆ It's not about conquering or dominance.
- ◆ Give positive re-enforcement for the smallest sign of willingness. Not only negative for what we don't desire of a horse.
- ◆ Don't only be a taker of a horse, but give to them in return.
- ◆ Don't put a time limit on your horse, allow a horse the time it needs to learn and understand a lesson completely before expanding or advancing to the next lesson.
- ◆ To have fears is real and a normal living creatures response. It's OK. Try not to carry it in your body's core. Put it somewhere in a brain file to work with or overcome in your own time and with training.