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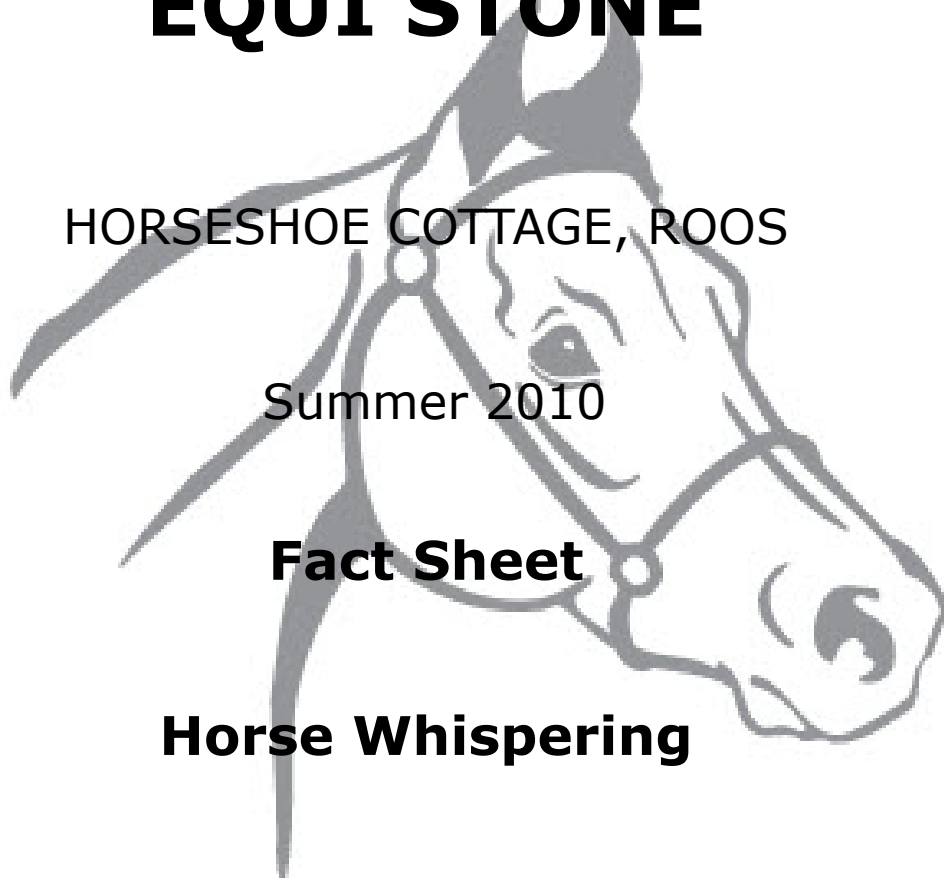
EQUI STONE

HORSESHOE COTTAGE, ROOS

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Fact Sheet

Horse Whispering





Horse Whispering

What is Horse Whispering?

A broad term that describes subtle ways of influencing and communicating with horses. The word 'whispering' is used because the signals between the horse and human can be so subtle and quiet as to be like whispered something and the horse, having understood, changes its behaviour.

By 'talking' the horse's own language and understanding the horse's nature, we can learn to develop ways to interact more effectively with these wonderful creatures and achieve fantastic results for ourselves and our horses.

Equipment for Horse Whispering

The most important piece of equipment you need for horse whispering is your **BODY**; that is why it is good to look after it by taking care of safety issues and wearing the right clothing. You need to know what you are saying to the horse with your body, and to make sure you're not saying anything you don't want to be saying.

Halter - Strong, soft and comfortable.

Headgear - Current safety standard riding hat.

Ropes - Strong, soft and comfortable of a length 12ft (3.6m) .

Gloves - Sensible to reduce the risk of burning and damage to the skin.

Brushing Boots - To protect the horse from itself.

Boots - Footwear that gives good protection and firm grip.

Understanding the horse's language

Although horses do use vocal sounds - neighs, screams, etc. - to communicate with each other, the main way they talk to each other is with body language. Horses are incredibly expressive with their bodies and almost constantly show how they feel and what they are thinking, by their body language. This is the main way that the horse whisperer uses to communicate with horses: using body language to understand what horses are saying and also to influence horses to do certain actions.

It is important to remember that every horse is unique and, like humans, horses can express the same messages in slightly different ways.

Eyes

Eyes wide open, slightly glazed and wild looking - the horse is feeling very emotional, probably fearful, they will want to run away or may fight if he cannot run.

Eyes soft and slightly droopy but horse's body is in motion - they are relaxing, maybe accepting another (hopefully you) as leader, emotionally settled and doing what he is asked.

Eyes droopy - the horse is dozing on his feet (horses are good at that).

Head Position

Head very high - tension, fear, excitement.

Head turned away from you - not interested in you, attention is on something else.

Head turned towards you - giving you his attention, may want to be with you.

Head low - snoozing, being submissive and saying 'OK, whatever you say' ; or if it is a stallion, a low, snaking head can be a way of driving other horses along.

Neck

Neck soft - relaxed.

Neck hard - worried, emotionally charged.

Neck low - submissive.

Neck high - feeling tense or excited.

Ears

Where the ears point is where the horse is putting its attention - the ears can point at two things at once, which means the horse's attention is split.

If an ear is pointing at you, it is aware of you - if neither ear is on, he is more interested in something else and it's time to get his attention.

Ears flat back - can be expressing physical discomfort, dislike, annoyance or anger; the horse whisperer will notice this and try to figure out what the horse doesn't like.

Ears back, but not right flat back - this can mean the horse is submissive to you or is listening and concentrating on being good; people often misinterpret this as being angry when it is not.

Ears pricked - they are alert, keen and feeling excited.

Ears flopping - the horse is relaxed.

Muzzle

If the mouth and muzzle are tight or wrinkled - it may mean the horse is tense, slightly uncomfortable, determined to stick to his way, or saying he doesn't like something.

Bottom lip hanging - relaxed, dozy and emotionally settled.

Gentle nipping at objects (including you) with lips - inquisitive, trying things to see what they feel/taste like, playing (horses sometimes use their mouths to explore and play with things as they don't have hands like we do).

Top lip curled right up towards nostrils - horse 'tasting' the air with his highly sensitive sense of smell.

Baring teeth and coming at you - he is telling you to back off, he doesn't like something and is threatening or intending to bite.

Licking lips and grinding his back teeth - he is being submissive, saying you're the boss.

Licking lips and yawning wide a lot - he's saying you're definitely the boss.

Legs

Kicking with back legs - fearful or reacting to danger, being dominant by using kicking to intimidate others.

Kicking with buck - full of fun, energy or slight annoyance.

Legs stuck to ground - fear has rooted him to the spot; could be stubbornness, but you would have to ask yourself 'why?'

Striking out with front legs - annoyance, slightly aggressive greeting.

Pawing ground - frustration.

Lack of rhythm - unsettled mentally and emotionally, unbalanced body because mind is distracted or worried.

Can't move quickly enough - wants to get away.

Overall Body

Turns his back on you - leaving you, not interested in you.

Turns towards you - interested in you, maybe saying you're the leader.

Body keeps moving away from you - maybe doesn't trust what you might do, apprehensive about you.

His body barging your space or coming too close - dominating you or showing you are not the leader.

Body energy very high, lots of movement and horse looks bigger and 'taller' than usual - tense, fearful or excited.

Body energy low and horse looks 'smaller' - relaxed, and horse feels he is safe.

Breathing

Very fast short breaths - tense and fearful.

Fast but deeper breaths - could be hot, or mentally processing something.

Noisy breathing while moving - exerting himself.

Breath slow and soft - relaxed and comfortable.

Tail

Tail high - excited.

Tail clamped down - tense and fearful.

Tail Swishing - uncomfortable, annoyed or warning that he may be about to kick.

Human Body Posture for Horse Whispering

It is essential for the horse whisperer to become aware of what his/her body is saying to horses and to learn to speak to horses using different body postures. Here is a simplified guide to what our bodies can be expressing. Most of these are useful at some time or other for talking with horses.

Dominant - Square shoulders, looking tall and larger than life, eyes looking straight at you, slightly stern face.

Use this to move horses away from you or to keep them out of your personal space.

This says, 'I'm the big boss and you best respect who I am and which patch of ground I'm taking up'

Positive - Standing comfortably upright and confident, eyes looking straight ahead but a little softer, gently smiling.

This is a very useful way to be much of the time around horses as it makes them feel safe that you know what you are doing (even if you don't!). (Very nervous horses may need you to tone it down.)

What Positive says is, 'I'm trustworthy and unflappable. I know what I'm doing and you are safe with me'.

Passive - Generally relaxed, quiet inner confidence, one leg resting, body turned slightly away, eyes casual and lowered, soft look on face.

This is a way of saying to the horse, 'Everything is cool', or 'relax, you've done well,' or 'I'm not bothered. There's nothing to worry about here', or 'Ho-hum, I've got all the time in the world.'

Inviting - Welcoming, giving the horse space, eyes and body soft but still confident, gently smiling face, slow and smooth movements. This says, 'Come and be with me. I'm very laid-back and it's comfortable being close to me'.

Timid - This posture is not very helpful with horses. It tends to make nervous horses feel even more nervous and can make many other horses walk all over you! This says, 'I'm nervous, small and insignificant - stand on me, push me about, knock me over or bite me if you want.'

Invisible - Incredible inner stillness, your eyes, body and movements become invisible, like you're no longer there any more. Sometimes horses can get emotionally fraught that they need you to be passive to the point that you're no longer a visible presence. Come back to being visible again when their emotions have settled, and they'll be delighted to see you.

Accidentally Invisible - The other type of 'invisible' is where you appear totally insignificant and get into the wrong place at the wrong time, with the wrong horse, and the horse doesn't see you - and you get hurt. Horse whisperers very rarely do 'Accidentally Invisible'.

Overall Volume - Within each of the above postures there can be many gradual increases and decreases in volume, e.g. Positive posture could start so softly that it is almost a Passive posture; with a gradual increase in volume you make yourself bigger, until it turns into a Dominant posture. It means, as a horse whisperer, that you have many levels of expression with which to talk to horses. This is useful because every horse is different, and while some horses may need louder body language, many other horses require your body language to be very, very quiet for them to not be too skittish or frightened.

Hands, Voice and Breathing Signals

Signals with your hands - Generally speaking, the less we use our hands around horses, the better. There are, however, a few subtleties that can be useful in getting our message across.

Fists closed tight - makes us appear more firm and have a stronger stance. Using the back of the hand - to stroke the horse - some sensitive horses prefer this since the back of the hand is less like a claw.

Fingers wide open - arms hanging, palms facing the horse - useful in a round pen to ask horses to move on more; the hands imitate predator's claws.

Hand(s) held up in front of you - between you and the horse - this is a blocking signal to help stop the horse from coming closer or taking over your space.

Use of the Voice - most horses communication, and therefore most of the horse whisperer's, is done using body language. It is sometimes useful, however, to use sounds to help you with horses, but these are best used sparingly. As we humans are so used to relying on words to talk to each other, it is easy to start forgetting about your body language with the horse if you talk too much!

Whistling - with a downwards slide in pitch is also useful for bringing the horse to relaxation. Whistling also puts you at your ease as well as letting the horse know you are not another horse, as horses can't whistle.

Humming - quietly has a relaxing effect on horses. Quite a number of horses 'hum' to themselves as they walk along in a relaxed way when out hacking.

Using your breath - horses and humans have very similar breathing patterns, and because of this, the way you are breathing tells the horse something about how you are feeling in a way that he understands.

Keeping a check on your breathing is a very useful method of staying in control of a situation, and sighing loudly a few times is a handy way to take a horse's energy level down.

Getting Horses to follow you (join Up)

Mental attitude - it is important that you are calm, unemotional, without shouting or getting angry, impatient or frustrated. You do not want to upset the horse. The horse will be trying his best to figure out what is expected of him in this situation and he may not understand you immediately. Be kind and persistent, and be pleased with very small results to begin with.

Getting Started - Stand in the middle of the area stroke the horse to let him know you are a friend and being with you is pleasant.

Now look directly at the horse with your eyes and body. Adopt the positive or dominant posture, starting with your body fairly quiet and increase the volume of your posture until he moves away. If you need help sending the horse away from you, stay out of kicking range and start swinging the rope towards the horse behind the saddle area.

Note: Some horses are sensitive, so your body language may only need to be very quiet for them to go away from you; some horses are more laid back and your body language will have to be louder.

Staying out of the way - Make sure you don't stand in front of the horse or 'get in the way', otherwise he will slow down, stop or change direction.

Once the horse is moving, stand in the centre as much as possible. The horse may choose to trot or canter. If he is calm enough you may ask him to move on a little, although with some sensitive horses this method can even work in walk.

Your body language - Follow his eyes with your eyes, your body facing his body, and only swing the rope if he tries to slow down, stop without you asking, or if he tries to change direction without your permission.

The horse's body language - read the horse's body language as he goes round.

If his head and ears are away from you, ask him to keep moving.

If he turns his ears or head towards you, comes in closer on the circle or drops his head and licks his lips, drop your eyes down and change your body into a soft, passive posture. Back away from him by a few steps and invite him to stop if he is ready. (If he carries on at the same speed regardless of your invitation, bring your body back up to 'positive' again and ask him to keep going for a while longer.)

Creating the connection - If he stops when you lower your eyes and body: Good. If he moves even one step towards you or even just stands looking at you: Good. Quietly walk over to his shoulder (with your body and eyes still softly passive) and stand and stroke him for a few minutes.

The horse following you - Now is his chance to choose to follow you. Casually walk away from the horse's shoulder in an arc, feeling for an invisible connection between you and the horse. Don't walk directly in front of him at this stage as he is less likely to choose to follow; instead, walk away from his shoulder at an angle. It helps to change direction a lot as you walk; making ninety degree turns every few steps to help him stay closer to you.

If the horse follows you a few steps, pause and stroke him again, before continuing to walk. If the horse follows for a while then chooses to leave, you can always send him off around the pen again a couple of times to let him think about the wisdom of his decision not to follow you, then give him another chance to stop.

Waiting for the connection - If the horse doesn't follow you at all and you've given him a little to think about it, quietly send him off around the pen again, this time in the other direction. Again watch for signs from the horse that he is ready for another chance to follow you, and if so, drop your positive posture and allow him to stop again for you to stroke him.

Explanation

This method works by using the horse's natural desire for company. By making the horse move away from you, and then allowing him to be with you, you establish a desire in the horse for the safe and comfortable connection of being close to you.

If you introduce a new horse to a herd horses will usually make it stay on the outside of the herd until it gives the same signs as you are looking for in the pen, then they will let it join the safety of the herd.



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