



# The Equestrian Center, LLC



## Hoof Prints & Happenings Newsletter

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### Another Gorgeous Summer

TEC has been on a role between clinics throughout the US and here in Sandpoint, working students spending between one and four weeks “learning the ropes,” horses in training, lessons and of course an afternoon helping of the Pack River to keep us cool.



**Pack River Bridge**



**Picking wild strawberries**

Sam has been pleased with finding an increasing number of students finding those “Ah ha” moments in realizing a major part of building their ideal quality relationship with their horse starts with raising their own self awareness and stimulating their own thought process in order to become mentally available for their horses.

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE SAM AS A GUEST SPEAKER OR CLINICIAN? EMAIL HER TODAY TO FIND OUT MORE!**  
[sam@learnhorses.com](mailto:sam@learnhorses.com)

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### Thought of the Day

Sadly there are too many summer stories of “horse camp gone wrong,” “trail ride melt down moments,” and general “all of a sudden he....” accidents. A majority of these scenarios could have been prevented by listening to that little voice in your head.

Whether you’re an experienced rider with miles under your belt or a newbie to the horse world, remember that SAFETY for you and your horse should be a priority. Just because you CAN doesn’t mean that you SHOULD. Too many times after a dramatic incident the rider realizes that they “had a feeling” but ignored it- HOPING that it would all work out okay.

Your goal should not be to “survive the ride”- but rather feel that you have the awareness to assess, the tools to communicate and the confidence to make black and white decisions when working with your horse. Operating in the “gray” allows for your horse to get creative and typical offer unwanted behaviors.

I know that for many people their horses are their outlet from work, stress, family, and other demanding responsibilities in life. They see it as “their” time and rarely stop to consider their horse. There needs to be a respect towards the horse that has his own brain and emotions and a “need” for continuous 2 way clear communication.

When undesired behavior appears, most horses are asking for help, but the rider misses or ignores it because they are operating with an “I want” mentality without being honest if it is appropriate for where their horse is at mentally and emotionally. Remember, the physical actions you see your horse presenting are a reflection of his emotional and metal status. So the next time you head out to ride, take a moment to evaluate yourself. Let go of “reality,” appreciate the small moments of your horse offering himself to you and remain clear, focused and available to work WITH your horse. You’ll be amazed at his sensitivity to recognize your clarity. Happy Riding!

## Ask the Trainer

Usually I format this as a regular Q & A but recently I received an email and then the correspondence that followed I appreciated for the questioner's thought process and wanted to share it with all of you.

Topic\_Info: aggressive stallion

Name\_FullName: Matt C

Location: Accomack Co. Virginia (E. Shore)

Date: July 07, 2009

Question:

My 3 and a half year old stallion had been a sweetheart. I was able to saddle him, put my full weight on him leaning over the saddle, handle his feet so I could trim them, touch him all over without a problem and even tie him out. However, he has become studdish to the point of being very dangerous. One day I was leading him by the halter, which he had always cooperated with perfectly, and then he pulled away. I held on, thinking he would get the point, but he reared up and as I turned he struck me in the back with his front hoof leaving me with a contusion over a large area of my back and left side. That was about 2 months ago. This morning I went in with him, finally gathering the courage to do so, took him by the halter and began to lead him. After a few seconds he reared up again. I walked away and he followed, rearing up a few more times. I clapped my hands hoping to discourage him from following me, but he reared up and I got out of there. He still comes to the fence and lets me pet him, but I don't trust him not to bite me (which he used to do until I discouraged him by squeezing his nose). I have a 3 year old filly separated from him a field with another field between them. He is constantly watching her. He might have actually bred her (she looks as though she might be pregnant) on time when I decided to put them together, hoping he'd be less frustrated. I never saw them breed and assumed it hadn't happened, but now I wonder if that's so. The filly is also a problem now (sometimes sweet, sometimes not); I will ask about her another time, since the stallion is a more pressing issue. My questions are: will the stallion ever be safe again? Would castration work or is it too late? I appreciate this opportunity. Thank you. Matt

Answer:

Actually it sounds like a basic lack of clarity in communication and understanding with your horses is what is causing these scenarios to happen. Certainly because your horses are young (they take quite a while to mentally and emotionally mature even if physically they look "grown up") there will be a constant asking from them towards you "Do you really mean it?" This is not done in a challenging way, but is rather their way of trying to discover the boundaries of what behavior will "work" and what will be unacceptable. Many times when horses appear "sweet" and want to be near us physically we are interpreting this as affection and care. In a lot of cases it is actually the horse that feels he is "dominating" the person in the situation, even if they do not seem dominant or aggressive towards the particular person that they are near.

Not knowing the history of your horses, I will guess that both of your horses are trying to be the dominant horse. When you come out into their pasture, they are probably trying to decide whose herd you will join. There could be a few different things going on at the same time but it may look to you as if it is one big scenario. Below are a few ideas to think about when addressing your horses. Make sure that you associate each horse separately as they are individuals even if they appear to be acting "the same."

- A.) Lack of respect towards you and/or any other human.
- B.) Lack of understanding of personal space and awareness towards people.
- C.) Lack of emotional and mental availability to ask a person, "What would you like?" They are rather filling in the answer themselves with what they think is right.
- D.) Lack of "try" to understand when working with a person (such as being caught, led, tied, groomed, tacked, etc.) that they need to focus on the person rather than "everything else" going on in life.
- E.) When they experience insecurity they need to feel or find leadership from the person who is working with them.

Keep in mind that most times when a horse's behavior becomes apparent or "big" there were usually many warning signs of frustration, insecurity, worry, fear, or otherwise ahead of the

(cont'd Ask the Trainer) "dramatic" behavior. Especially when working with young horses, every moment, every step, every thought matters. It is a lot of "work" for a person to be aware constantly of both what they are doing and offering their horse and how their horse is receiving and interpreting this information. You will have to address some of the issues I mentioned above separately and independently before trying to attain the "whole" picture.

Your stallion is trying to discover the "boundaries" and is asking for help. As long as he is asking and there is "silence" or an unclear response from you towards him, he will continue to display his dramatic behavior. Just as with a child, if they learn that a certain behavior once accomplishes something, they will continue to display this behavior until they are shown that it will not work. They tend to gain more confidence displaying the unwanted behavior the more that it works.

Stallions are used to being "dominated" by the mares in their herd. It makes them feel better about life and it helps clarify their "place" in the herd. You will always need to prioritize your safety first. If you do not have the experience you may need to enlist the help of someone who will prioritize helping you and your horses to become "clearer" in how, when and what you are communicating. You have not "lost" your horse because of the behavior he is showing, but the longer it goes unaddressed, the more convinced your horse will become in his lack of respect and clarity which in turn is resulting in dangerous behavior. The sooner you can show him that he needs to show his fear, worry, concern or insecurities in a "reasonable" manner the better both you and he will feel about life, and this will cause all of his dramatics to disappear.

**The following is the second letter- the questioner's writing is in black while my responses are in blue:**

Dear Samantha,

Thank you for the detailed response to my question. I understand all you wrote. Horses are not unlike children (who are less dangerous). I recently had a woman come to see the horses and she thinks the stallion is actually a very nice animal and that it might be a good idea to geld him since although he is a very fine animal, he's not top quality (mainly

because he is not a very large animal). She said she might come and work with him occasionally, but I know she is a busy person.

I do think that once he "respects" me in that I will not allow certain behaviors, he will be a good horse one day. For me personally "one day" isn't soon enough. From the moment horses hit the ground they talk horse- yes they need to mentally and emotionally mature- but they still talk horse. From day one there needs to be a black and white clarity of what behaviors he offers that work, and those that do not. This is on all levels- from his energy in how he approaches you, to his feelings in being loose around you, to when you're out in the field with the distraction of the filly. You'll never see a horse in a herd "randomly" run into, over and around the lead horse. They will always stop at a respectful distance and literally ask to come closer; both of your horses ought to address you in the same manner. Calm, quiet, head down, relaxed body- then they can be near you, until then- they're just too big and dangerous to find out what might happen if they come barreling up on top of you. I just need someone to get in there with him because I am afraid of his rearing up again. If he rears and you move away- you're showing him that his behavior in "taking over" is working. You need to of course prioritize your safety, but when he rears you need to be able to literally send him away- whether with your lead rope or whatever you might have, just as a broodmare would send off her offspring from the herd to show the behavior he is displaying doesn't work. Being away from the herd is not where the horse wants to be. It is a bit like time-out; they need to go and sort out their brain, and then change their feelings before re-entering the herd. This woman said that he actually wants to play. Would you agree with this? No, a 3 year old stallion rearing towards you is not playing. He can go and play and be a goofball, which is good and they need to- but NOT around you.

Yes, I do understand the "following" behavior and interpreted it as you do, not that it is affection. I feel that both horses are actually testing me. They are testing in trying to find out where in the herd you and they belong. The filly is wonderful one day and the next tends to turn, ready to kick me. Be careful in what you call wonderful, many times people misinterpret their horse as being nice, when really, the horse is

(cont'd Ask the Trainer) training the person in how to work around them, instead of vice versa. I'm told fillies tend to be like that. Ignore the sexes. She talks horse, just as with the stud, it needs to be black and white. When I bought her she was treated very roughly in being trailered and I was afraid she would never trust again. One of the most amazing things about horses is that they are incredibly forgiving- let go of her past, no excuses for where she's been or what she's been through. Offer her today as the first day of her re-education and confidence and trust building experience. Much of what I am observing I believe is due to that. I have always been nice to her and, I believe, very consistent. Of course there's room for different interpretations of nice, but in my experience nice isn't what the horses need, they need a black and white leader who has opened the door to a two way communication. She needs you constantly be attentive in addressing whatever she is asking or offering, it's much like having to constantly watch a small child. I do walk away when she turns her rear legs toward me. Think of you and she as a yo-yo. The more you walk away, the more you draw her towards you, the more you walk towards her, the more she'll move away from you. Remember there are three types of pressure, when the horse is loose, you are using spatial pressure (which needs to include spatial respect without you accommodating what she thinks is appropriate,) then there's physical pressure, such as when you touch her or have a halter on her, and then there's vocal pressure. I am usually able to get a rope over her neck and lead her, as in the past, and soon will try to halter her again (not a problem in the past, but it became one for no reason I can figure). There is never no reason, horses never do anything just for the heck of it. She may have tolerated the pressure of the halter and lead rope in the past, but as she becomes less confident or unclear, things that you thought were okay will "suddenly" seem not to be. She is asking for help. When you go out with the rope and halter don't have the goal to be haltering her, have the goal to be that she is warm and fuzzy about you touching her with it all over her body (again you'll be creating a physical pressure when you touch her) but you'll need to remove it before she moves away and can't handle it touching her. She'll start to gain confidence to try and address the halter,

and then her curiosity will take over and she'll commit to participating when being haltered. By the time you halter a horse, they ought to present them self standing quietly next to you and you should be able to fuss and fidget with the halter all that you want without them ever feeling the need to flee and get away from you.

One question I had asked about the stallion was if gelding would make a difference. Taking any testosterone out of him would certainly help. My personal thought is that there is way too many back yard breeding occurring in a society that currently cannot support all of the horses we already have. Just because you can, doesn't mean that you should. The stud and mare always pass on a lot of traits to the foals, until you find you have a FANTASTIC pair to breed, don't do it. It's cruel to horses these days. Open any paper, horse mag, online site and look at all the unwanted horses.... I would guess that since he has not exhibited this behavior for too long that it would. I had trained a stallion before, one with cryptorchidism, and he was very trustworthy, even with children. Another we had gelded halfway through his training and he worked out well. I trained both horses from scratch, but am aware that I was also fortunate in having mild horses before this stallion and never considered myself a real trainer.

Just this morning I let the stallion and the filly share a field and after he approached her she soon became the one to chase him all over the field and would not allow him to get too close behind her. Yet she urinates whenever he tries. Is this necessarily a sign of heat? She could be. A lot of mares have problems with their ovaries, causing mood swings, constant winking, and pain. You might want to make sure she doesn't have any physical pain issues to start with. What are the signs what can I expect to happen between them in the next few days. The filly will try to take over. Did I err in putting them together? I did so because I hated to see him so frustrated and thought that maybe once he had been with her awhile he might calm down. He will also fall in love. You'll be moved down the list of "things" to consider. It is great to have them together, although she is breed able so consider that. But also know if you're relationship is lacking quality with each of them individually; it will certainly deteriorate more as they have each other to turn to. Wrong move?

(cont'd Ask the Trainer) Thanks for your help. Matt There is never a right or wrong, you ask a million trainers the same question and you'll get a million different answers. It's up to you to experiment and learn your horses. But they require an enormous amount of time, patience and participation from you which is hard when "reality" of others things in your life demand your time. If you're not clear mentally and emotionally when you work with your horses they pick up on it. If you're not a 100%, don't expect them to be. Sam

Dear Samantha,  
Excellent explanation, once again. I've asked many people about horse problems and had always found what they said less than satisfactory - something was always missing or not quite right. After reading your advice I think I know what it is. I am a trained scientist. Ethology (animal behavior of wild animals in their natural habitat) is my field. Your advice is scientific in nature; you approach horse training with scientific understanding and I sense you developed your techniques based on your experience as you have worked with horses, not some "cook book" advice (which is what I've been getting from others) - or you have worked with someone, also a behaviorist who understood horses very well. It's obvious that you understand animal behavior very well and horses in particular. Others I've dealt with, while very cooperative, are not scientific in what they understand and cannot relay it so that I understand it (because they really don't). You must be a fantastic trainer.

With your sound advice and my understanding of animal behavior (along with forgetting most of what others have told me), I think I can work better with my horses. My only concern is the potential danger, but if I can knick that in its early stages I know I can do well.

I keep thinking of new questions as I read your advice, but I think I can figure out the answers for myself as I work with the horses. You've spent a lot of time on me already. Thank you so much. I am very fortunate to have your advice. I will let you know how I progress. Sincerely, Matt

For more Ask the Trainer advice or to submit questions <http://www.learnhorses.com/forms/forum.htm>

## Training Programs at TEC

At TEC we look to build mental availability in the horse's Sam works with in order to achieve the physical goals we set for ourselves and our horses. Customized training programs are designed to suit both the owner and the horse's needs along with a realistic budget.

We offer training packages from one week to six months. We ask that horses are current on shots, vaccinations, worming and hoof care. Horses do not need to be shod because we have mostly sandy footing. Included in the training package is training and either grass or alfalfa hay.

Horses are kept with a maximum of three other training horses of the same sex in wooded pastures ranging from one to two acres. They are fed twice a day and have access to an automatic water system at the top of a slight hill- this helps with self-conditioning every time they go to get a drink of water and burning off any excess energy. We currently have a waiting list- if you would like to enroll your horse in one of our programs please visit the link:

<http://www.learnhorses.com/training-programs.htm>

## Pony Pals Program

Ride our horse/pony or yours! We prioritize safety (helmets provided or bring your own) and the importance of horsemanship. Depending on the individual's focus and attention span we include topics such as: catching the ponies, grooming, tacking & untacking, safe leading & tying techniques, mounting- from a block, from the ground and emergency dismounting, veterinary care, trim/shoeing information, stable management skills, trailer loading experience, and so on. We try to keep the lessons varied and encourage students to ride English, Western or both in enclosed arenas (starting in 60' round pens), over poles, on our "beginner trails" (with an instructor), playing an array of games that help improve balance, coordination and confidence in the student and much more! WE NOW OFFER A LESSON/PRACTICE PROGRAM! Visit link:

[http://www.learnhorses.com/pony\\_pals.htm](http://www.learnhorses.com/pony_pals.htm)



## Full Immersion Clinics

We had another successful clinic with horses and riders learning how to create clear communication and build the foundation for a rewarding partnership.

Participants with varied experience and riding history all began to find common ground when taking the time to really watch and learn from the others and began to see the consistencies in how they interacted with their horses.

I have had more dates requested perhaps at the end of August or beginning of September- if you might be interested let me know.

## Return to the Grand Canyon

In my January newsletter I was thrilled to share my experiences based out of Mocassin, AZ located at the north rim of the Grand Canyon. An unexpected return trip was made possible in June and again I had a fabulous time.

Shane Johnson a reined cowhorse trainer who along with his family operates one of the last independent ranches in the area and whose ancestors date back to the original white settlers in the area have begun to take in outside customers along with their horses to offer a real life working cow horse operation.

You will get to experience the ins and outs of working with wild cattle (they only see people twice a year,) learn to appreciate working with Catahoulas that have a phenomenal ability to track and hold cattle, and then of course the driving of the herds once they have been gathered.

This is not the romantic version that you see in the movies. This is a hands-on real life experience where you'll spend long days in the saddle, sleeping under the stars, branding, sorting, doctoring cattle and all the rest of the labor intensive chores required to run such an operation.

Riding through phenomenal scenery that makes time appear to have stopped in its tracks you'll hearing stories narrated by descendents of the two oldest ranching families in the area (dating back over 100 years) it's a dying lifestyle and this is a rare opportunity to meet salt-of-the-earth people whose love and appreciation for the animals and outdoors is a vanishing mindset.

If you would like to find out more information contact Shane or Carrie Johnson at 928-643-6488.

**The Equestrian Center, LLC & Sam Harvey**  
**Summer Operation Sandpoint, ID April- Oct**  
**Winter Operation Yuma, AZ Oct-April**  
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