10 Characteristics that are Unique to the Horse

Equine Care

Jo Bek
1. Flight

• Primary Defense

• Most timid

• Must feel safe
2. Most Perceptive 5 senses

- Taste: likes salty and sweet, not medicinal
- Hearing: directional ears, keener than humans, mood indicator
- Smell: becomes familiar
- Touch: very sensitive, especially around head
- Sight: monocular and binocular
Sight

- Lateral, Monocular
- Binocular
- Limited color, Movement more important.
- Large vision
- Horizontal Visual Streak-Head position determines visual field
- Has to turn eye sideways to look at ground
In Focus:
Eye Parts
Points of View
(peripheral vision)
Points of View
Points of View
More than 300 degrees of vision
3. Fast Learner

- Fastest of domestic species
- Learn in 3’s
- Learn from RELEASE of pressure
- Generalize learning: same in multiple locations
4. Reaction Time

- Faster than Humans

- If they really want to get you; you won’t see it coming.

- Blow up with no warning
5. Desensitization

• 2 types:
  – 1. Progressive: approach and retreat
    • Best for adult horses
  – 2. Flooding: persistent and quick
    • Best for imprinting foals
6. Memory

- Forgive but don’t forget
- Mules don’t forget or forgive
- Retention very high
6. Memory cont’d

• Catergorize
  – Fearful but doesn’t hurt them

• Do not stimulate the amygdala
  – Permanent
  – “No dust”

• Horses don’t rationalize
  – 2 sides - 2 horses
7. Leadership

- Horses easily dominated
- Person or horse in charge of movement
- Wild: 2 leaders
  - Alpha mare: seniority
  - Stallion: owns herd
  - Handler needs to be both
- Assertive, not aggressive
- Means Leadership **NOT CRUELTY**
8. Body Language

• Handlers have to be able to read
  – Use their own to control horse
• Flight position
  – Head elevated, flight hormones working
• Defensive: rounded, tight and ready
• Muscle guarding, sinking
• Submissive: head down, licking, vulnerable
9. Dominance Hierarchy

• Only species dominated by movement
  - It is Survival

• If you control the feet, you control the horse

• Control in 2 ways:
  – 1. Dominant makes submissive move when
      doesn’t want to
  – 2. Dominant takes movement away from
      submissive

• Leadership established
10. Precocial

- Imprinting period: first few hours after birth
  - Don’t stop till foal relaxes: if not, will learn to fight humans
- Critical learning period: 3-5 days after birth
- Learn: human can touch me anywhere they want, horse must not touch human
Horse Training and Learning

• Aids- things important to a horse
  – 1. SAFETY-most important
  – 2. Comfort
  – 3. Play
  – 4. Food

• Horses learn from release, must be fast
  – Pressure is the motivator
  – Release teaches
    • Quicker the release, faster learning
Learning and Training cont’d

• Watch body language
• Horses have opposition reflex:
  – Never pull harder than horse is pulling
• Claustrophobic
• Always stand so that handler is in as safe a position as possible