

Opposition Reflex (Continued from Page 12)

prevent since they don't understand and the horse always pays.

Recognizing things that cause this reflex action will help you control your actions so you can prevent this reflex. Pulling on a horse to trailer load, pulling on a new born horse trying to lead it, pulling on the bit when a horse is scared, kicking a horse when it won't move, pushing on a horse when they is standing on your foot, all these things promote this reflex action. Steady, consistent, controlled, rhythmic and progressive pressure helps teach a horse and helps a horse to understand what you want. Hard, fast, aggressive, pain, reactive, ambushing pressure causes this reflex, which to the unknowing, appears that the horse is resisting, fighting or being stubborn. This is all wrong, but for most humans, being wrong means blaming the horse.

Moving through, running through, jumping past, fast strong reactions is how Mother Nature tells a horse to break away from predator to survive. Without this reflex the horse would just give up and not fight to get free and they would become easy prey and their numbers would decrease and their species would not last long. It is unfortunate that people can't or don't see this. Horses have survived for centuries using their fear and Opposition Reflex. They have been doing the opposite of what Predators want them to do for a very long time and it has served them well. Most think that just because a horse is so called "domesticated," that all other instincts suddenly and magically disappear. This is why most people (85%) that get into horses tend to get out of horses within the first year. This can be contributed to lots of things like fear, injury, confusion, frustration and all of these are commonly caused by Lack of Understanding of the horse.

When a predator wants its prey to go left, the prey's reflex tells it to go right - natural opposition, survival, instincts and opposition reflex helps the horse survive. The prey is not bad or wrong; it probably is not even thinking about it, it is DNA taking over. It is Mother Nature's way of saving the prey from the predator. After people have these basic understandings they can begin

to see that there are no bad horses or mean horses or stubborn horses, there is only a misunderstanding and disconnect between prey animals and predators. In the world of horsemanship - there are no absolute rules only guiding ideas and principles. Every question in horsemanship can be answered with "It depends". And that normally depends on how much understanding the human has.

Horses tend to seek out leaders. They will lead in the absence of a leader to survive, but instincts tell them to follow the strong. Horses tend to interact in many ways, such as rhythmic pressure, steady pressure, rhythmic motion, fluid and flowing movements. This is what we call feel and timing. For a horse to accept you, you must learn to control and use these forces in harmony. This calm behavior by you will give your horse comfort and security. If you watch flocks of birds or schools of fish move, they seem to flow, move, bend and become one. Horses do this as well, but it is easiest to see when the herd is in flight or fear mode. Horses will gather up, get tight, become one group as if they feel each other's energy and can predict each other's movements. This is instinctual behavior for a horse, much like fish and birds, does not have to be taught. Humans must work hard to learn this and then must practice it and use it often, in order to become skillful. Over time it will become subconscious behavior for the human and it will not have to be thought about before it is done. (See my article on The Horse Learning Model. This is when you will see good horsemanship). This is when horses become comfortable with you. Other humans may call you a horse whisperer or see some magical secret you possess. This will not happen overnight and if it is not used continuously, it will fade away and the horse will know.

Feel is something that humans have to learn. We may know how to feel like predators but we don't know how to feel like prey. Our aggressive predator instincts make us want to grab, jerk and make fast sudden hand movements. We are a dominant species so we dominate. Asking gentle is not in our DNA, especially

men. Learning to be soft, smooth, rhythmic, steady increasing pressure works much better with horses. Most humans want to grab, squeeze or hold tight to a lead rope, this creates hard pressure and can make the opposition reflex activate. Whereas a soft, light hold where the rope can softly slide in your hand and where it does not snap or jerk the horse, will teach the horse to give or not fear the pressure and will NOT activate the opposition reflex. The same is true with the reins. Tight non-give grip (what most do when they are scared, insecure, lack confidence or are fearful) causes a horse to pull, resist and fight. Whereas a light, soft, smooth hold on the reins allows for pressure to be controlled, released and applied rhythmically. This will better communicate to the horse and will NOT activate the opposition reflex. Soft hands make soft horses and hard hands make hard horses. Many think this only applies to reins, it applies to all handling of horses, leading, lunging, picking the feet, rubbing the face, handling the ears, rubbing the tail, if your hands are used around your horse they should be soft, smooth and flexible, NOT hard, rough and stiff. And this applies to all body parts as well, legs, arms, seat, etc.

Rhythmic pressure seems to get a horse to move away whereas steady pressure tends to cause a horse to go against it. So by learning to use rhythmic pressure, both physical and non-physical, natural opposition reflex is diminished. Understanding pressure and when to release is critical to getting the proper answer or response from your horse. Of course timing comes into play here as well. When teaching a horse to yield to pressure, the pressure must be continuous until the horse yields. If it is not the horse learns to ignore, push, resist, or react aggressively to pressure. It is really easy to teach a horse to be aggressive to pressure. To do this you simply STOP pressure when the horse is aggressive, rears or kicks. Then the horse learns that is the correct response to pressure or the correct response to get relief from pressure. This is so common and probably one of the biggest

mysteries to most horse owners. Without knowledge or understanding of a horse's reflexes, instincts and survival skills, most people teach this dangerous lesson over and over. And when the horse learns this lesson well, he is sold or auctioned for being dangerous. People must know that pressure CANNOT be stopped during wrong or dangerous responses from the horse. The problem here is many people are scared of horses and they TRY things and the horse does have opposition reflex action and instinctual behaviors, the people get scared or fearful and they stop pressure, thus teaching the horse to be dangerous and to do dangerous things in order to get release of pressure.

Horses naturally push into steady pressure. Moving against it or barging through it is how they escape predators in the wild. Mother Nature tells them to break loose of a predator's hold or crash through any obstacle that's in the way of their escape. So pushing into steady pressure has become part of their programming for survival.

There is a system that works with every horse and this understanding is part of that system. However the predator must learn what is natural to prey animals because reading the intention of the predator is built into the DNA of the prey animal. There is no way to hide your emotions or thoughts. Horsemanship is a journey of self discovery, change, growth and understanding of one of the greatest creatures on the planet.

Although this topic may sound complex and seem advanced, it is just one of the many topics that go into good horsemanship. Never stop learning and never think you have it all figured out. I hope this sheds a small amount of light into the vast darkness of horsemanship. Remember, when you get better, your horse gets better. It is never the horse's fault. And a horse is only a reflection of you. Happy trails. ■

"It's never the horse's fault."

For more information please visit my website:
www.thinklikeahorse.org



Looking for More Bands
Blues • Rock • Country
Call Misty Summers
928-303-1409

www.lastchanceranchsanctuary.org

The **Last Chance Ranch Sanctuary** is a home for special needs, abandoned, hurt and needy animals. Those animals that have nowhere else to go that are truly down to their last chance. **Now, here is their "Chance"** It comes to these animals by way of a wonderful person named Annie Burson, founder of **Last Chance Ranch Sanctuary**. She is a Kingman resident who purchased 40 acres in 1996 because of her deep love for animals and has put all her efforts into creating a place for any animal who needs special attention, but especially those that were injured or ill and had nowhere else to go, on death's door, discarded and unwanted. Once these animals are accepted there, they stay forever to live out their lives happy and healthy! It is not an animal shelter that temporarily houses animals until they are reclaimed or euthanized, nor do they work like other groups that rescue, foster, and place animals - they know there are groups and humane societies that do an excellent job with that. They accept only those animals where all other options have been exhausted. Once an animal is accepted into the program, he or she is a resident for life. What do they get? Love, care, and hope. Some of the residents are the cats with no eyes, Radar and Cloe or Pudd'n with a broken jaw. The horses Ebony and Ivory that could barely walk due to severe dehydration, starvation and years of abuse. Pathos only weighed 360 pounds at nearly 3 years of age. He was covered from head to toe with lice, and had open sores from dehydration, was anemic and neglected from the get-go. His excrement looked like it was filled with sand. The dog Milo who was so severely beaten and used as a bait dog for fights that his leg had to be amputated. Caring for these animals is Annie's only passion. The best way to be able to provide adequately for the animals (food, medical care, habitats) was to become an ongoing and eventually self-sustainable operation, and be able to accept tax-deductible donations. Annie pulled together a small group of dedicated volunteers and began the process of association and qualifying for nonprofit charity status, which was successfully completed in April 2009.

They are truly the last chance for these animals, and so the Last Chance Ranch Sanctuary WANTS YOU!!!

In order to continue their quest in providing the optimal care possible for these animals the Sanctuary needs to build additional habitats, corrals and housing. Right now their goal is to stock up on food, supplies, and bedding. If you have these items to **donate**, please contact **Annie at (928) 692-3209** to arrange delivery. If you prefer to **purchase these items** on their behalf, please contact **Stockton Hill Feed, attention Nancy Jones, (928) 757-4125** and she will be happy to help you. If you want to **help with the veterinary bills** you can donate directly to their vet, please contact **Cerbat Cliffs Animal Hospital (928) 757-8855** and indicate that your donation is on behalf of the **Last Chance Ranch Sanctuary**. Donations are the only way they can stay in operation. The animals are counting on them, can they count on you. Any and all contributions are greatly appreciated and are tax deductible. **Volunteering** is another way to reach out and help and does not have to mean a large time commitment. There are many ways to help, like **animal care tasks, cleaning stalls and feeding animals**. They need **people to help with outreach activities** like events and fundraisers, clerical tasks, and data/website/social media activities. What they hope to accomplish in the future is: To be able to accept more animals, provide additional services such as more extensive rehabilitation options, provide training for people living with a disabled animal, hire staff to provide round-the-clock care, and develop their volunteer program. Thank You!

**Coming October 1st - Last Chance Ranch Sanctuaries fundraiser
Battle of The Bands, being held at
Castle Rock • 3743 N. Hwy 93 • Golden Valley • Arizona**