

Helpful Knowledge About Horses

1. A horse is a wandering, grazing animal that does not hunt other animals. However, in his natural habitat, he is hunted by other predatory animals. His defense against threats is either to run or fight. With only a 50-yard head start, no predator in the world can catch him. He is the fastest living animal at any distance over a quarter of a mile. Some cats (cheetahs) and some animals can attain higher speeds than the horse for short distances. For 100 yards or so they may even go twice as fast as the fastest horse. But they cannot maintain that speed.

To be sure that the horse has a margin of safety, nature has endowed him with a fantastic warning system. His sensory receptors alert him to approaching danger and prepare him for instant action to escape. Horses do not have much reasoning power. They do not have the ability to question or think about a situation. A horse's alarm system operates through use of his eyes, nose, sense of smell and instinct. This sensory system depends first on sight and hearing, and to a lesser extent, on the sense of smell.

Most experts believe horses cannot distinguish between colors and do not have a good depth perception. A horse has the ability to use both binocular and monocular vision. However, a horse has a much better field of vision than a human - a 340 degree range. They can not see directly in front of back of themselves.

Without color or depth perception, the horse has some trouble differentiating detail. He sees lighter and darker shapes. A hiker with a backpack may look like a huge animal. In this flat, colorless panorama, motion sets off his alarm system. A horse's main weapon in getting to security is flight. However, if he is cornered, with the option of flight removed, a horse will resort to kicking with his hind feet where he can ward off danger with bone-crushing kicks.

Keep in mind that a horse's difference in color, depth perception, and vision affect how he views his world. Generally, his reactions to his environment are based upon instinct due to his alarm system, which has ONE PURPOSE - to alert him to danger and move him to security.

2. A horse that reacts when meeting a hiker, biker, or ATVer by attempting to run simply sees you as a threat and is responding by instinct. A horse that "acts up" when he sees you may be attempting to flee but is under restraint by the rider. A skilled rider will bring the horse under control. Understand that threat. Please talk to the rider so that the horse knows you are a human and not a predator.

3. Always keep in mind that a horse is easily spooked by strange sights and sounds. Do not attempt to pet horses. Although most horses are docile, this might be one of those occasions your action would spook him, and he might attempt to kick you. Always ask first.

4. Recognize that different skill levels exist among horse riders. Those less skilled may not be adept at handling a badly spooked horse.

5. *Regardless of rules and etiquette, COMMON SENSE SHOULD PREVAIL. Always think safety.*



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