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How To Stop Your Horse From Rearing And What To Do If He Does It Unexpectedly

By **Andy Curry**

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There is a dangerous problem that horse owners should be very aware of. It's when a horse stands up on his back legs. It's called "rearing." This problem can be quite dangerous and cause severe injuries to the rider and/or horse.

Rearing is perhaps a horse's most effective defense against the rider. It is dangerous in that the horse can fall over backward onto its rider. Because of a horse's enormous weight this can cripple and even kill the rider. Thus, it is good to know why, if possible, a horse rears. But even more importantly, how to stop it.

If your horse ever does rear with you on him, there isn't much you can do. If he rears suddenly, he could lose his balance and fall or he could rear so explosively that he can throw himself back to the ground with the rider under him. If you're on him while this is happening and you use the reins to pull on to keep from falling, you're likely to pull the horse over.

Although it's not one hundred percent infallible, the best way to protect yourself when a horse rears with you is to lean forward immediately and put your hands forward so you have loose reins. If you have to, you could even put your arms around his neck, let go of the reins and slide off. For my money, there aren't any other safer ways to deal with a horse if he suddenly rears.

Why do horses rear? There are several reasons why. Here are some examples.

I've read where a rider was on an obedient horse while trail riding. They came upon cows and it scared the horse because the horse was not used to cows. The rider tried to get the horse to go toward the cows to get it to learn that cows are not spooky. The horse obeyed and went forward but finally became so frightened that it reared up, lost balance, and fell on its rider. The rider suffered numerous broken bones.

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The rider later understood the horse felt trapped. The horse obediently went forward even though it was frightened. As it got closer, fear overpowered the horse and it had nowhere to go but up.

Some horses rear because as colts they were too young to be ridden. Another reason rearing happens is because training may confuse the horse. The horse may be asked to do too much at one time and not know what to do.

Sometimes a horse will rear if it is forced to yield to the bit. Other horses may rear if you try to get them to put out more energy than they can. On the opposite end, some horses may rear because they want to go and you don't let them.

So how do you stop a horse from rearing?

First, let's take a look at the anatomy of a horse while it rears. A horse cannot rear while running. A

horse must stop (or be barely moving) to be able to rear. If a rider has had enough experience on a horse he can feel when the horse gets light in the front. In a way, it would be a bit like sitting in the middle of a teeter-totter where you can feel one side getting light.

So, if a horse has to stop to rear up then it makes sense to keep the horse moving so it cannot rear up. Thus, if you feel your horse getting light in the front then you move him forward and do it with meaning. Not just a patient "cluck" from your mouth. Do it like you mean it. And it's also important he has a place to go forward - don't have him blocked in by anything.

If your horse rears up and you weren't ready for it then lean forward and give your horse loose reins. As soon as your horse's feet are almost back to the ground then make your horse go forward. Let the horse know, with no doubt whatsoever, to go forward. Boot the horse "hard" into going forward. When your horse has gone forward a little ways then double him and drive him forward out of the double. Then double him the other way and drive him forward from it also. Then bring your horse to a stop.

What does it mean to "double" your horse? Essentially, you will pull his head back one way towards his hind quarters. The moment he is committed to the turn then boot him forward. This impresses upon your horse's mind that you can control him.

Other so-called "schools of thought" to stop rearing are to hit a horse over the head with a two-by-four when he rears up. I've even read where people break beer bottles over the horse's head. Some people use the handle end of a riding crop. Not only are these inhumane ways to stop rearing, they are rarely, if ever, effective. They don't teach a horse anything except to fear the rider. Hitting a horse over the head when you are trying to build a trust relationship will destroy all you've worked for.

As is almost always the case, the best way to get a horse to do what you want is to use psychology of the horse. Get him to move and you can accomplish miracles.

Andy Curry is a nationally known horse trainer and author of several best selling horse training and horse care books. For information visit his website at

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Horse Training For Napping Horses

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If you ever rode a horse that would stop and refuse to go forward then you would know how absolutely annoying it is.

Why do they stop? Because that's their reaction to a worrisome or unpleasant situation. Even nervous and timid horses can stake themselves to the ground because they are apprehensive about leaving the herd or the barn.

What other reasons are there for napping? One is the horse simply doesn't know what to do. They'd rather stop and stand than move forward. If your horse naps in a place he's familiar with (ie. your home area) then you should check your tack for things like a bad fitting saddle. The pain could finally become unbearable and the horse simply won't move.

Often, horses will react to bad fitting tack by rearing or bucking. So when tack is bad fitting, napping is a pretty good alternative compared to rearing or bucking.

Another place a horse may nap is riding around an unfamiliar area. If he naps during this then it's likely he's doing it out of fear. The same can be true if he sees unfamiliar objects.

A secret tip about nappers is to closely observe where they're napping. If you find they get nappy around certain things then you might spot a pattern. For instance, every time your horse rides by a hay tarp and he stops then that is likely your culprit. But it could be lots of different things. It could be bushes. Trees. Dog pens. Etc.

When trying to solve napping from fear, you should take the approach when working with a spooking horse. A horse that spooks needs to be treated kindly. He shouldn't be forced into stepping over his "fear boundary". You have to talk to them, pet them, and be patient.

It just so happens that this is one of the easiest and most effective ways to solve the napping problem. The tradeoff is that it also takes the most time. But so what? Horse training is about patience.

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So what do you do? Simply sit in the saddle. You'll want to give your horse enough rein to stretch his neck but don't give him so much that he can graze. Then you simply sit there until he decides to move forward. Don't let him go left or right. Don't let him back up or turn around and head home. Don't kick him. Don't yell at him.

You are telling your horse it's okay to stand still but he doesn't get to anything but stand there or move forward.

At some point the horse should move forward. When he does, give him plenty of reward.

The results from waiting for your horse to move forward are far better with patience and kindness than trying to force your horse to move. Sure, it may take a l-o-n-g time for him to move but he'll eventually feel safe enough to do it – or he may get bored just standing there – and you should know that boredom and feeling safe are almost the exact same thing in the horse's mind.

Next time you take your horse out and he naps it may take half the time for him to move. Then the next time it may only take a few minutes. It's kind of like the old rule of training. The more you work on it the lesser time it takes.

What do you do while you're patiently waiting for your horse to move? If you're with friends then warn them before hand this may happen. You may have to sit there and have a conversation. If you're by yourself bring a crossword puzzle or even a book. Do what it takes for you to pass the time and not get impatient.

Just remember to treat it like you would a horse that's spooking. Most of the time, napping is a reaction to spooking. You simply have to be patient and wait it out.

Andy Curry is a nationally known horse trainer and author of several best selling horse training and horse care books. For information visit his website at www.horsetrainingandtips.com. He is also the leading expert on Jesse Beery's horse training methods which can be seen at www.horsetrainingandtips.com/Jesse_Beerya.htm

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