

When Horses Won't ... or "No Bad Horses!"

By Marta Williams

Barbara Woodhouse, the dog trainer who was famous for screeching "Walkies!" at her troop of dogs in a high-pitched English accent, used to say there are no bad dogs, meaning that every dog has the potential to be good. That's probably true for all but the most severely abused animals. The trick is to figure out the real reason that an animal won't comply or is misbehaving, and then find the creative, nonviolent ways to address the situation.



*"I won't!!" Or is it really "I can't...?"
If your horse is resisting, refusing, or acting badly there are reasons for it.*

Sadly, when it comes to horses, people often assume that unwanted behavior is just "acting up" and they try to force the horse to behave, with poor to disastrous results. My trainer took a different approach when her Mustang gelding started getting nippy. She knew he was trying to tell her something so she started asking him, "Do your feet hurt? Does your back hurt? What's wrong?" Then she asked, "Do your teeth hurt?" As soon as she said that, he stopped biting. Even though she'd just had his teeth checked, she had the dentist come again and they found that her Mustang had a broken baby tooth way in the back of his mouth. Once he knew she'd heard him, he never tried to bite her again.

As an animal communicator specializing in horses, I'm familiar with the universe of misbehaving horses. People often call me complaining that their horse won't do what they want ... and my motto is if your horse is resisting, refusing, or acting badly there are reasons for it. The main possibilities are:

- Pain – Pain can come from bad teeth, ill-fitting tack, shoeing and poorly trimmed feet, ulcers, and uncorrected past injuries - to name just a few sources. Usually, there is no way for your horse to tell you about pain *except* by acting out.
- Past abuse – Abuse can set a horse up to be fearful, angry, and emotionally shut down. My barefoot trimmer told me about hav-

ing to deal with a herd of mini horses panicked by a former farrier who had flipped them and held them down to trim their feet. My trimmer used some of my intuitive techniques to help shift the situation. She talked to the minis out loud and promised them that she would never flip them over or hold them down. She sat on the ground with them and let them come up and visit. She promised them that if they pulled

back, she would always release their feet and let them go. She also sent them mental visualizations of how she would do their feet, showing them that they would have complete control of the situation. Then, from a sitting position she started to work with one of the minis. She gently pressed the back of the horse's foot and asked if she could have it. The horse yielded but then immediately panicked. She quickly let go of the foot, took a deep breath, and went back to sitting quietly. It took a while, but now she can trim all the minis in the herd with ease. They actually run to see her when she comes to visit, and they stand quietly and confidently while she does their feet.

- A poor relationship – Along with feelings of resentment, anger, fear, and alienation on both sides, in a poor relationship the horse does not see the person as a safe and trustworthy leader. This happened to me with my rescued Percheron, Liam, who was supposed to be easy-to-manage. Within the first week, he charged me in the pasture and turned and kicked at me in his stall. He refused to yield his feet and when I could wrestle one of those dinner plates in the air he'd slam it back down. I was afraid of him and resentful that this horse I had saved from the auction would be so ungrateful. My problem was that I was only thinking of myself and I had no idea how to be a good leader to a horse like Liam. With the help of a trainer I realized that Liam had been mistreated and was expecting me to be the same as all the other people he'd known. I used