



Should we bring our Horses down to our Level?

Mark Langley

I got asked an interesting question recently: **Are we training our horses to come down to our level so we can handle them or are we rising up to match the potential of our horses so they can be at their best and happiest?**

This question sounds like it should have an easy answer but the answer is actually requires quite a high level of understanding of a horse - both mentally & physically. As every horse and rider has varied personality traits we also have different body rhythms.

Body rhythm ?? This is what I mean. When you get up in the morning, how long does it take you to put butter on your toast? Do you have a short shower or a long shower? How quickly do you walk? These sorts of personality traits and movement routines are found in horses too: some horses trot up to their feed, some walk – match a horse's rhythm with yours & you'll get a better training match.

Many horses will appear to have an unmatched body rhythm to ours because of various reasons like worry, anxiety or lack of understanding. They can have their focus somewhere else; some keep it at home, some throw it over the horizon. It seems that their body is forever trying to catch their focus. Getting their focus back to us will help us to know what horse we have.

I believe that when we ride a horse we need to like its natural rhythm and its natural unspoilt personality. But both of these things can only be found when our horse is happy. *Is our horse happy?*

Sometimes we can be stuck trying to train a horse not only to perform advanced manoeuvres but also trying to bring them up or down to our rhythm. If you are always asking your horse to walk faster and no matter how much you practice, every time you stop asking, your horse slows down, you are out of rhythm. If your horse always walks fast but you think that it is rushed and anxious and you try to always slow it down, you are fighting against your horse's natural body rhythm – it's just naturally fast.

Personality is another big player in this relationship but sometimes we focus so much on trying to change our horse's personality that we forget about our flawed personalities. And this is probably the one that needs to change the most to build a trusting relationship.

Our training should be focused on building a trusting relationship so that when we are with our horses, they are relaxed and happy to work with us. This may mean that you bring your horse down, relax them - in order to get that trust.

It is only then that we may get a feel for their natural rhythm and personality. As horses can feel rushed most of the time, (due to a number of anxieties) or lazy most of time (due to sourness of repetition), their personalities can be erratic, frightened, or malicious but none of these are any indication of the true horse that we are riding. And, unfortunately, most of these traits have been caused by people failing to rise up and better themselves or recognise the mismatch.

Horses are capable of meeting our rhythm too, though. I have trained quite a lot of horses which required me to spend a lot of time matching their rhythm but after some time, they were happy to match mine.

I feel privileged when a horse allows me to hang around it. All the feelings that I want the horse to feel for me I have to reciprocate. All of my training is presented as help. As a horse owner, it is my responsibility to bring happiness into my horse's life and to give my horse as many opportunities as I can to help my horse have an interesting life whether that

be work with meaning, companionship with other horses, or breaking up its everyday routine.

So, ensure your horse is happy and relaxed - then their natural personality will have more chance to show - and you have more of a chance to work out if you are matched together or not, naturally.