

Horse Training How-To from Horsemanship101.com

When Your Horse Rears: How to Stop It

by John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

*Part of the "Horse Training How-To" Series from Horsemanship101.com
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The material in this chapter was previously written to teach the beginning's of a reining spin, the reverse-arc circle, "neck reining," and shoulder control in general. Looking back at it, I realized how beneficial it would be for the owner of a rearing horse to gain the ability to consciously cause the horse to shift its balance from the front to back legs (as for a spin) and so it's included here.

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John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

Preface

You can't make your horse stop rearing with a "bigger, badder bit." You can't "wish it away" and he'll not magically "get over it." You've got to proactively retrain his brain. Here's how.

In the old days, they would fix a rearing horse by waiting till he reared up then break a Coke bottle over his head. Sometimes they'd pull the horse over on himself, cover him with a tarp, and beat the devil out of him. Luckily for you, me and the horse, we've learned simpler, less melodramatic methods of fixing the issue. You'll pick up the necessary exercises and theory here - and you won't be needing a soda bottle or tarp.

Simply put, horses rear because they're not thinking "forward" and because their learned reaction to any sort of pressure is rote resistance. It was cool when the Lone Ranger did it; but it's scary and dangerous as the devil when your own horse does it.

In this book, "When Your Horse Rears: How to Stop It" we'll end rearing by training your horse to accept pressures typically associated with stopping and backing and the like. We'll learn the theory and practice allowing us to soften and relax our horse, giving us greater control over his mind and various body parts. We'll teach respect for the bit while building smooth transitions from standing to walk to trot to lope.

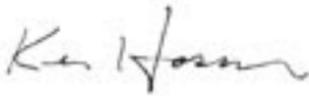
Section I (containing “Days 1 - 5”) is a set of instructions, the step-by-step steps required to rid your horse of this dangerous habit. In essence, this is all you need. However...

Section II offers the additional training and insight I’d want you to know if you were a student of mine. Bluntly put, if you were previously practiced on the material in these pages, your horse wouldn’t have been rearing in the first place. It’s a bit bass ackwards, but first we’ll fix the problem, then we’ll learn to prevent it.

See the first half of this book as a set of detailed instructions designed to fix your horse; see the second half as a way to develop and improve you the rider/trainer, your training habits and methods.

In the end, you’ll be able to make ordinary requests, (to “stop” or “back,” for instance), without fear that your very pressure is an overt invitation to rear up. In fact, once you’ve put the time in, you’ll be amazed at the difference made in your overall control, safety and enjoyment.

Good luck in your training!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Hosman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Day One

“The First Thing I Do”

Horses are taught to rear. Somewhere along the line, a rider climbs on its back and puts pressure on the reins. The horse resists, raising his head. Perhaps the rider then applies enough pressure to cause the horse to consider rising up to relieve himself of the pain caused by that hunk of metal in his mouth. If the rider is using a leverage bit, the pressure applied through his hands is magnified exponentially by the leverage offered by the shank. The longer the shank, the more pressure applied to his chin and the top of his head. His head is squished in a giant nutcracker and he reacts by throwing his head and body up, toward the direction of the pressure. When his feet come up, the rider gets scared and releases. And there, in that instant, the horse receives an immediate reward for his actions, takes note of this fact, and begins playing this card anytime he's asked to do something against his will.

It's important that owners of rearing horses understand that successful partnerships come from “training their brains,” not through coercion. Had the rider in that first paragraph resorted to using a stronger bit, the horse would have minded for awhile - until he got really aggravated - and then he'd blow up bigger than ever.

When you've got yourself a rearing horse, you're going to want to start fixing the situation from the ground where you're obviously safer. And, being that a rearing horse is the very picture of "rigid resistance," you're going to want to tackle all that "stiffness" first. It's common sense. Could your horse stand up on two legs, scaring the devil out of you, if his muscles were, stem to stern, soft and relaxed? No, obviously not. Jelly fish farmers never, ever face this issue, so take note. A large part of his body grows stiff and rebellious as he rears and so our solution is first found by actively working to soften - and keep softened - both small and large sections of the horse. We begin by seeking out and "pounding out" the stiff muscles we find. We take away and keep away this rigidity, and go a long way to solving our problem.

Beyond the actual danger inherent in the situation, there's also the fact that a horse resisting to the point of actually throwing himself up in the air is never going to carry out any maneuver with grace or beauty. That makes for a lot of time in the saddle spent fighting (or just trying to survive) when you could be performing sweet sliding stops or beautiful lead changes or even just going down the trail peacefully with your friends. No, instead, your horse spends his time tensing up and resisting - and that's exactly how he looks and moves: tense and locked up. In the same way that you can't play the saxophone if your arm is held rigid, your horse isn't going to round up, collect, and travel gracefully when he's consciously keeping his neck or hind section stiff. Fixes found here then, in these pages, will also help improve our horse's overall athleticism and way of going - and that's a win times ten.

We'll begin small in asking for our change. We're not going to just throw ourselves on our horse and start demanding wholesale changes in mind and man-

ner. The fact is, the rearing horse is holding all the cards anyway - so any aggression offered by us will only add gas to the fire. Nope, we'll ease in. In the same way that the bachelor doesn't pull off his shoes and rub his feet in front of his new girlfriend, (but instead waits until she's locked into the deal with a wedding ring and four kids), we'll be sneaky, asking for little concessions first, dipping just our toe in. We'll wade in slowly, building on tiny changes until, before the horse realizes it... he's begun working with us.

Our horse, of course, won't actually be rearing when we go out to begin this work (at least, for your sake, I hope not). So, we'll begin making our changes where we can. In fact, what we'll do first is the same thing we should "do to" our horses each and every day: Give them a "resistance test" to see which side of the stall the horse "got out of the bed on." If he's relaxed, great, we move on. If he's tense, we deal with that before plowing ahead.

Note: If you get just one thing from reading this material, it should be this: Any resistance from your horse while he's hanging out, just standing next to you munching grass, will be many times worse when things get hairy. Testy now in hand means bolting or bucking or rearing later when under more trying circumstances he wants to do "A", but you're thinking "B." If it takes one pound of pressure now to pull him away from that grass, it'll take one hundred when he gets spooked on the trail. And if it takes one hundred pounds of pressure to control him when he gets real riled up - and you can't use your reins at all because you know he'll rear - you're gonna wish you paid up that life insurance. Let's not get there. Make it job one to get your horse to always do your bidding with zero-to-none pounds of pressure because "zero times zero is zero."

Books by This Author

Check out these titles from Keith Hosman:

- Get On Your Horse: Curing Mounting Problems
- How to Start a Horse: Bridling to 1st Ride
- Rein In Your Horse's Speed
- Round Penning: First Steps to Starting a Horse
- Stop Bucking
- Trailer Training
- What Is Wrong with My Horse?
- When Your Horse Rears... How to Stop It
- Your Foal: Essential Training

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Your Foal: Essential Training

Meet the Author

John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman



Keith Hosman lives just outside of San Antonio, Texas and divides his time between writing how-to training materials and conducting training clinics in most of these United States as well as in Germany and the Czech Republic.

Visit his flagship site horsemanship101.com for more D.I.Y. training and to find a clinic happening soon near you.

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