



Can You Fix a Bucking Horse?

by John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

Bucking may or may not be something you can fix. I mean you, personally because, sure, in a larger sense, it's fixable. It's just not something for the less-than-accomplished rider. Beyond the danger, bucking has no single specific cure and it's something that can re-occur seemingly "out of the blue" for months despite our very best attempts to eliminate it. "Proof" of a fix is often simply the passage of time without incident - and an inexperienced hand might be riding around fooling himself into a few broken bones. Only experience, coupled with mileage and wet saddle blankets provide any sort of assurance that the remedial training has "took."

Too often I see non-professionals think they can fix this themselves by applying prescription A or B out of some book or video and ride comfortably one week later. Now, this might very well be true of bolting or rearing because their "fixes" are more obvious and structured (and proof that a fix has been obtained can literally be observed through the horse's actions), but bucking as an issue is more nebulous and fixing it is something you should take a pass on if you're not already an experienced rider. Instead, learn all you can to deepen your understanding of the issue... then call a pro. What's a few months with a trainer up against five or six grand for a day trip to the emergency room?

Now, look, I'm not trying to harsh your mellow here. If you've got an up and comer problem-child colt in the backyard and feel that you've got what it takes (after reading this and everything else you can get your hands on) to turn him around, then more power to ya. However, for the rest of you, pros are a great resource. Professional trainers have the experience to (more often than the non-pro) see a dangerous incident brewing. They can quickly change course and avoid the insurrection. Beyond that, they've built in the reflexes it takes to act quickly to shut down a buck and the muscle memory to sit it if necessary. Some even specialize in this sort of thing. Weird, I know - but they're out there.

How Do I Get My Horse's Attention?

By Josh Lyons & Keith Hosman

A "give" is three things: recognition, response and control. First, a horse has to recognize the signal from the trainer, which is pretty simple. It could be anything: it could be picking up the rein, it could be putting your leg on the horse. That's your signal, your "cue." He first has to recognize that. Second he has to respond to it - and third, he has to give control of that part of his body over to you. Remember: Recognition, response, control.

Horse trainer or not, I could walk by my horse all day and he doesn't have to even recognize that I'm here - and it would be a waste of my time to ask him to do anything. But if I took a stick and started poking him, then all of a sudden it becomes a whole lot more important to the horse that "I'm here." When you ask a horse to do something, a lot of other things are going to draw his attention and it's important that you become more important, no matter what it takes. As the trainer, the horse has to fully recognize that you're there. That's important, otherwise, you can't get to the next step: You can't get him to respond in a certain way.

You've all heard that you want to get your horse's attention first. That's nonsense. We don't care about the horse's attention; we really don't. When I ride, I don't expect the horse to think about me before he does something. Have you ever been on the trail with your horse when he did everything you wanted him to do? What were you doing? You were look-

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Pros have the reflexes to shut down a buck and the muscle memory to sit it if necessary.

Pros know that with bucking it's never a matter of "I school the horse on this and that and when he shows me this or that I'll know I've dealt with it." Nope, they'll work from the ground to instill respect... they do everything they can think of... then they get on and hope for the best. I'll say it again. They've done everything they can think of - then get on and hope for the best. Think about that before you decide to tackle something like this yourself. There simply are no assurances. Same goes for work from the horse's back: A professional trainer is going to put your horse through every exercise he knows to address the situation (after all, his health depends on it), yet still ride around hoping nothing "sets him off" before the schooling can sink in and lasting changes are made.

They know from experience that the bolting horse can be made a good citizen by being schooled on speed control and perhaps "fear management," and the rearing horse can be taught to keep his feet on the ground by learning to "give to pressure," (in both cases the horse will offer some proof in his movements when he's in a better place) but the trainer is simply not going to trust your "bucker" till they've got quality training installed - and time has passed sans incident. (Because, comparatively speaking, there are few outward signs that a horse is or is not prone to buck.)

So what are you to do? If you are an accomplished rider willing to chance (or tough out) a few launches into the dirt, then you might want to pick up every book or video you can find dealing with the subject, to consult more knowledgeable riders for advice and maybe even pay a pro to come coach you as you attempt the fix yourself. (Don't forget the helmet.) But, if this is not you, then stay off the horse and call a professional. (Get references first.) You'll still want to learn everything you can because the deepened understanding will help you prevent other issues. You'll also want to know why the pro you're paying does what he does so that the two of you can work together towards a lasting remedy.

* Note that throughout I'm speaking relatively as there are no absolutes with horses. Always employ common sense and err on the side of caution.

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Getting Your Horse's... (cont'd)

ing around, talking to people, enjoying the ride. Did you care for even one moment what your horse was thinking? No, you didn't, because he was doing exactly what you were asking him to do. You didn't care what he was thinking because there he was, walking down the trail, turning right when you asked him to turn right, stopping when you asked him to stop. You didn't care at all what he was thinking. You care when the horse either does - or does not - stop when you ask him to stop or turn when you ask him to turn. Getting his attention is a bi-product of training, of improving his performance. The better your horse stops or turns when you ride out on the trail, for instance, the more of his attention you get and the more control you have.

When you first go out to ride, you're not going to have your horse's attention. Your horse is going to be looking at all the other horses and looking around the arena or objects on the trail. You're not going to have any "attention" whatsoever. We don't need it; all we ask is his performance. We need him to turn right when we ask him to turn right and to turn left when we ask him to turn left. As you ride, concentrate on making those turns better because, again, as the turns get better you'll get more "attention."

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