



Biting Horses, Issue 14, Part 1 of 1

by John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

Did your horse tell you today that he's going to bite you next week? Will you bet your finger on that? Or your daughter's arm? Do you even know the signals? When you cinch up your horse and he pins his ears or you ask him to move away and he "purses up" his lips like he's mad, he's sending you a message. The message is simple and it's one of two things. It's either "I am the boss. Who are you, mortal, to ask me to do a dang thing?" or "I'm planning on taking over; expect a coup next Thursday."

Biting is the single-most dangerous vice your horse can have. It's more dangerous than bucking, than rearing, kicking - or anything else you can name. A horse can take off a finger, an ear or objects I can't mention in this article in an instant. If your horse has developed that habit (or you fear that it might be about to), then nip it in the bud. Establish a tough zero tolerance policy and act aggressively.

But if your horse drops an ear - is he firing a first shot or flicking a fly? Should we haul off and belt him regardless, just to be sure?

How do you know the difference between a threat and an innocent stance? As you would expect, it's just common sense. A horse that's copping a bad attitude will couple his pinned ears with other facial features or body language that anyone (or thing) would recognize as a warning. Just look at the horse's features as a whole and simply ask yourself if you've been "dissed." Does he look mad, freeze up or otherwise look irritated? What's the little voice in your head say? Did you have any doubt the last time your mother got mad at you? Same thing.

But what about "mild irritation" vs all-out anger? Again, do we belt him either way "just in case"?

The answer is that when your horse disrespects you in any way, he's taken the first step toward his own little revolution. Act accordingly. Nature has programmed every horse to expect someone/thing to be a leader. Some horses want to be the boss, others accept

the job begrudgingly - but all horses expect a leader to exist. If you act the role of subordinate the horse will view that as a call to take over.

Whether your horse already bites or has just signaled that he plans on starting, we need to establish a zero tolerance policy to squash the very thought. Of course, we can't read their minds, which leaves plenty of room for error. "Is he grouchy today or threatening to bite my head off?" "Did he just give me the evil eye - or simply twitch his ear?" If he bites you and takes a thumb with it, we've got a pretty good idea that he "did bite me." But guessing calls for mistakes while reacting to the horse biting (or near missing) puts us in the position of being reactive as opposed to active. In a horse's world being reactive marks you as second banana. Where does that put you, then, when you approach a horse with a reputation for biting and you move around him, "just waiting for it to happen," deflecting the horse's every move "just in case"? Answer: It makes you the banana.

To fix this issue, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. As stated above, horses that bite are either trying to take over or are convinced they're already the boss. There's far more to it than "he's just having a bad day." Think of it this way: Would he do that to his mother? When you realize the simple fact that he wouldn't bite his own mother (not more than once, anyway) then you realize that the way to fix this requires getting the horse's respect.

Once you gain their respect, can they still bite? Yep. Unless you stay consistent with your training, never allowing the horse to think for even one minute that a "coup is a good idea." Be the boss, always, and the biting will take care of itself. And never, ever give them an excuse or rationalize. It's never okay for the horse to diss you, not for any reason on any day.

To be proactive then we need something we can do to the horse that creates a win-win situation, something that's impossible to screw up and something

"If your horse disses you, he's taken the first step toward his own little revolution."

that gains respect. That leaves out reciprocating with a smack(s). Smack your horse and you could create a larger problem if you're timing is off or if you mistake a harmless stance for an affront. That certainly won't bring us much respect. Now, for some folks, smacking may work; it's just never worked for me. I think that's because horse training is such an emotional roller coaster as it is, that such "negative energy" just kind of left me in a funk. John Lyons suggests an alternative that seems to work well.

We will use the same method then to fix your horse whether it's already biting or has signaled that it might try. There are two parts to this fix.

First, think back to the Warner Bros. character Peppy LePew. He was a skunk, right? Do you remember the classic episode when he fell in love with a black cat? She couldn't stand Peppy. He'd hug her tightly, oblivious to her wriggling frantically to get away. He was in love; she thought he stunk. Literally.

To fix your biting horse, you'll be Peppy LePew and your horse a cat. Quit sneaking around your horse and instead start looking for excuses to hug and love on him like Peppy and his gal. The next time he signals his displeasure at anything, even for an instant, you will drop what you're doing, take his nose between your hands and pet and pet and pet. Pet him like you've had a snoot full. You'll pet until he takes his head away – and you'll grab it back and do it some more.

Then you'll start having fun with this. Push your horse a little. Dare him/her to show aggravation – and the moment he does, pet your fool head off. You've got to do this until the horse screams "enough!" and tries to pull away. More importantly, you have to have fun with it and look for excuses to do it. That is what makes you "active." No longer are you waiting for an attack. Being active puts you in the driver's seat and gains you respect. (Free tip: This same "fix" works with horses that act like goofs when cinched up. You pull the cinch tight, they throw their head up or dance around, that sorta thing.) You'll do this for days if not weeks. Sorry, but McDonalds doesn't have a drive-up fix for horses for a reason. It takes time.

The beauty of this method is just this: First, acting

like the teasing older sister or brother, antagonizing your horse, is just plain fun. Second, were you to hit your horse, he might be able to tell other horses "I bit her 'cause she's always hitting me. She asked for it." But if you try the opposite approach (the maniacal petter) what's he gonna say? "I bit her 'cause she petted me"? You'll find that when you don't bring pain or anger into the picture that the horse isn't so quick to travel to the dark side and that vices just sort of evaporate. This petting thing works because you're being proactive, teaching the horse that sure, you can bring your teeth close – but I'm going to pet the devil out of you. What you'll start to notice is that they start keeping to themselves, sorta hoping you don't

Recommended Tack

John Lyons Reins

10', 4 colors: black, gold, white, blue

The same "continuous loop" reins used in our clinics • continuous reins give you more control over spooky horses

\$41.99

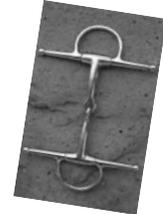


Full Cheek Snaffle Bit

available in copper & stainless steel

The gentle bit used everyday by John Lyons to train his own horses and make big changes in others!

\$38.99



Reins are also available in 12' for larger horses

Buy these products online 24/7 at
HorsemanShip101.com/Tack

notice them and start getting all weird again. Ever see a 1200 pound animal try to wish himself invisible?

Recall that there are two parts to this fix. The first was the petting part. Next is the zero tolerance part. Sorry to break this to ya, but if you have had your horse for more than two months YOU trained the horse to bite or, worse, allowed it to continue. Two months is enough time to fix something like this – so unless you picked up the horse a few weeks ago, you're in the hot seat. Accepting that fact will help you real-

“Acting like the teasing older brother or sister, antagonizing your horse, is just plain fun.”

Trailer Training Horses

by John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

An excerpt from Day 1 of 5:

"Is this you? On a good day your horse will get in the trailer after a few minutes of cajoling. More often than not, it's about fifteen. Today you're headed to a riding club event and the group leaves at 10am sharp. You're running a bit late, but as you lead your horse to the trailer, you're figuring you'll make it fine if the horse is having a "good-to-medium day." If he loads by 9:15; you can drive the speed limit and stop for coffee. If not, you gotta do 80 – past Starbucks. You "like" your horse at this point. Problem is, your horse has gotten up on the wrong side of the manger and he's thinking "I'll die first and take you with me." Insert your own worst nightmare here. Forty minutes later you're thinking things like "It's just a stupid trailer," "I'll drag your butt in" and "Your (expletive deleted) mother was the same way."

"Horses either get in smoothly or they balk. If your horse balks, he doesn't load. Period. Trained horses simply walk into the trailer – and not after 10 minutes of begging. That's lesson one and our ultimate goal. If your horse has become a hard-luck case then it's going to take time, consistency and work from you to get this straight – but you will. The good news is, horses are actually easier to teach to trailer than you'd think, the bad news is, it takes the patience of an oyster. Not so much time, as patience. Horses that "should trailer but don't" have had some steps skipped in their trailer training. No big deal. We'll cover A to Z here; you'll take it one step at a time and we'll get that (expletive deleted) horse in the trailer together!..."

Excerpted from "Trailer Training Horses," a 5-day course from Lyons Trainer Keith Hosman. Get the full course at Horsemanship101.com/Courses.

Print this course from home in 2 minutes, be training in 5!

ize mistakes made – and help you realize changes that need to be made in your interactions with the horse. It's a tired cliché but true – to change your horse, first you have to change.

All that petting stuff we just discussed won't have a lasting impact if you don't make up your mind to start expecting your horse to tow the line.

If your horse is biting or threatening a nibble, then here are some things that you could be overlooking: You're a little slow to bring the grain and your horse bangs on the gate with this feet "Hurry up!" You're leading your horse through a gate and the horse pushes through before you. You undo your horse's halter and it bolts off, kicking it's heels back at you. The horse moves as you try to mount. It's a total pain to pick the horse's feet. It takes 3 hours and 4 neighbors to put the bit in its mouth. Your horse gets aggravated near other horses and kicks out. You let it run to the head of the pack on trail rides. Your horse gives you the bum rush when feed is poured out.

See the pattern? Would your horse do any of those things (and survive) to his mother? Of course not. Those are all respect issues – and fixing a combination of them will fix others on the list. Don't see your horse on that list? Trust me, think about it long enough and you'll see moments in your interaction with your horse when it "disses you." Insist that your horse lead with manners, teach her to pick up her feet politely or to give it's head softly for bridling... throw in the "over petting" technique described above... and you'll find that the biting has disappeared. Telling you exactly how to fix all the behavioral issues described in that last paragraph is beyond the scope of this article, making the biting horse owner understand that "disrespect" in any form leads to more serious vices (like biting) is not.

Our articles and study courses are available 24/7 at Horsemanship101.com/Articles

