

A NEW BEGINNING

You may recall the article a couple of months ago where I talked about the knock on affect that “disciplining” a horse through violence may have. In the article I mentioned one horse in particular that we had recently taken on to the yard who had been beaten with brushes etc, this horse had given me 8 stitches to my head in his desperate attempt to show his fears and anxiety. I told you how we discussed long and hard with the new owner just how fraught with difficulty his rehabilitation might be and that he may only get worse not better and that he may need to be put down. Well this is his concluding chapter.

We continued to work with this troubled character over the next few months, carefully building his confidence in us and our ability to understand his anxieties. We did some loose work in the round pen and let him understand that some humans can actually speak horse and are willing to listen to what he has to say. It became clear very quickly that he was trying very hard to work with us and that he genuinely wanted to progress and get along with people.

A big factor to his rehabilitation was being out with a mixed herd of horses all day where he could learn to relax and socialise and eventually play with his peers. This big boy really loved to play with the other horses and would spend hours on end in equine “joy” with his friends in the field. Each of the horses would take it in turns to entertain him and help him find a balance in his energy and his mind. This new found balance was reflected very quickly in the stable where he began to trust us to a point where I could carefully muck out in front of his legs with a fork without panic and fear taking over him. We were able to work in the stable with forks and brushes without him running away in panic and his owner could gently groom him without his spinning away and hiding in a corner.

There were moments when he would take a backward step but slowly and surely we began to overcome his fears and he rewarded us tenfold with a trust and confidence that began to shine from him.

I will now let his owner tell you in her own words how things progressed:-

“My dream horse turned out to be the horse from hell. Orion was a very handsome grey TBX 16 hh with major psychological problems – not the schoolmaster I was sold.

I could not ride him because he bucked, reared and bolted. I could not groom him because he would run away to stand shaking in the corner of his stable. If I approached him, he would turn away and face the wall. I was distraught.

I could sell him on and make him someone else’s problem and try to recoup some or all of my money to buy another horse and, if I’m honest, these thoughts did go through my head, but, something was stopping me. It was his eyes.

When he looked at me with his sad expression, I felt his fear of humans. He wasn’t threatening me – he was afraid of me. “What on earth has happened to you?” I asked him.

After much deliberation, the decision was made. He would not be sold on as I could not in conscience be responsible for, at best someone else’s accident, at worst – well draw your own conclusion. We would work together, trying to build up his broken spirit and repair the damage that had been inflicted upon him by others. We set about our cunning plan to include lots of ground work, gentle but firm handling, and most importantly, consistency. Orion was given space to be himself. His field etiquette was impeccable and he soon rose in the herd pecking order to be one of the respected leaders.

As it transpired, retraining and learning was for us both. Orion was a true mud magnet and became the dirtiest grey on the planet. He was learning to be a horse again. He was at his happiest having so much fun playing and gal- lolling about the field with his chums. I learned that having a clean horse was not as important as I thought – a happy horse is much better.

We both learned that grooming could be fun if done sparingly; allowing each other to accept that we both can make a mistake and it's OK. As such, we both learned patience. Working around such a sensitive horse who picks up on every emotion, my feelings, thoughts and even anxiety did not go unnoticed – Orion was my mirror.

I learned to make time and not rush things. It was a hard lesson but worth it. Orion became more secure and relaxed with me working around him and sometimes he would show the much needed affection and trust that we both craved. In summing up, he was on the mend. Eventually, after five months working together he was ready to move on to the next phase of his recuperation.

We found a sanctuary that would secure his future because we decided he could never be sold on. Orion would be a happy hacker with people who were experienced horsemen, fully aware of his issues, and who will continue the good work.

Now I am horseless with no finance to buy another to replace my Orion, but I'm content he can become the horse he was always meant to be.

I'm pleased to share with you that my story does have a happy ending for us both. The sanctuary has loaned me one of their horses who has had a hard working life in a riding school. He is a 19-year-old cob, who will retire into my care. King is to be my schoolmaster, and my happy hacking partner. He has just arrived at the yard and has already settled in.

I look forward to our relationship growing and both of us becoming firm friends and partners. Perhaps it is the next chapter – who knows.”

On this occasion everything seems to have worked out well but it could have been a very different story had Orion landed in the wrong hands. I am please to report that he is having an absolute ball with his new owners and they are delighted with him and his progress, he is at last a happy, well balanced horse and has a bright future to look forward to.