

Myths of the Horse World

by
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Control to Compassion

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Dolly Communication

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First edition

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*“I dedicate this book to Dolly—
the horse who changed my life by showing me the person I needed
to become.*

Kindness should not be mistaken for
weakness

Monty Roberts

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Preface

It breaks my heart to see people using whips and spurs and harsh tack on their horses. Horses are such loyal, loving and willing animals who have served us for centuries and we still don't appreciate their sensitivity.

There are many people who talk about how good a horse is for a person, it's a shame we very rarely hear how good a person is for a horse, unless it's to compliment them on their horse's obedience.

When I owned my horse, I wanted to understand her, but I seem to be one of very few people who were empathic, to their horse's feelings. When Dolly told me that she wasn't happy with something it was so obvious to me that she needed help but when I tried to help her my peers and the professionals around me just told me things like "hit her - she's a horse," "make her behave," and "make her more afraid of you than she is anything else. "

That last quote told me there was something seriously wrong with the horse world, but it took me a long while to become strong enough to speak out. I spoke out while Dolly was alive towards the end, and I am very sad that I was too weak to stand up to these people and speak out earlier. At the beginning I tended to do as I was told unless I totally disagreed for Dolly's benefit, because I didn't trust myself enough to do things

differently. Dolly was the one that gave me my voice, my inner strength and the knowing that this wasn't right.

This journey wasn't easy, but it was life changing. And if you've ever doubted yourself, struggled against criticism, or felt lost in the world of horsemanship, I want you to know—you are not alone.

There is a better way, and I'm here to help you find it in a way that suits you and your horse, without baffling you with science or costing you a fortune. I also want you to realise that you can stand up to the pressures of traditional horse culture. As you build a better relationship with your horse you will also learn a calm way to deal with the bullies.

I am writing this book so that you can make up your own minds and understand your horse is not your enemy to be feared, and you can have that dream relationship.

Introduction

The Journey That Led Me Here

Owning Dolly should have been the happiest time of my life. She was my dream horse, my partner, my heart. But instead of pure joy, those early years were filled with doubt, frustration, and heartbreak. Everywhere I turned, people told me I was doing it wrong. I was too soft, I was spoiling her, and I needed to be firmer. The weight of their voices made me question everything.

At the same time, I was on my own journey of self-discovery. After two narcissistic relationships, I was finally with a supportive partner who encouraged me to be myself. But standing up for myself was still new and unfamiliar. And yet, I knew I had to be strong—not just for me, but for Dolly. She needed me to protect her from a world that expected obedience, not understanding.

Just as I had had been allowed no voice, no opinion and no right to say “no” in those relationships. I could see how horses were also silenced, being expected to obey rather than being understood.

You might think that a horse trained through intimidation or force wouldn’t comply willingly—and you’d be right. But, just like humans in a narcissistic relationship, their voice goes unheard.

Horses, like people, can be manipulated into a state of coercive

control, where they obey without question. Their lives revolve around repetitive training, with punishment for getting it wrong. For humans and horse, they learn quickly what behaviour is acceptable or not to the aggressor/trainer and comply to avoid the punishment that will surely come. For a human it becomes that a single look can be enough to put them back in their place, for a horse, a simple cue demands obedience. The lives are not their own as fear of reprisal is always present in both cases. This kind of training can result in a horse seemingly working at liberty when in truth they are just as compelled as when they are in normal tack.

Through the years since I lost Dolly I have watched and studied the horse world. When I could see that the cruelty was coming to light, I knew it needed to happen, and I began to realise that so many horse owners were probably going through the same struggles that I had—trying to do right by their horses while being pressured to follow outdated methods, and I wanted to help these people.

This ebook highlights some of the myths that horse owners are continually told in order to reinforce the world of dominance and control. Then explains the logic and understanding behind why listening to your horse and connecting with them in a kinder and more compassionate way, creates a deeper connection and a safer and more enjoyable way to be with your horse.

Soon, I'll be launching my course, Horse Listening for Beginners, to help owners like you truly start to understand and communicate with their horses in a way that fosters trust, not fear. Helping you to read your horse and what it's trying to say without having to learn a whole course in horse psychology. Because although understanding the signs that your horse is trying to tell you something is useful to know, most horses are

past gentle nuances before they say an obvious “no” that gets them noticed. Our job as horse owners is not to blindly push them through this, judging them as being naughty or idle, but to look at the circumstances that are making the horse resist this particular action or activity and for that we need to know our horse, their surroundings and training, to figure out what is behind the “no”. This is something you won’t get from a psychology course because it is different for every horse and every event.

In the meantime I hope you enjoy this book and the information in it will help you to understand the way your horse sees you by the way you communicate with it, and I hope you’ll follow me on this journey by joining my Facebook group where you can ask for help in understanding how your horse is behaving and how you can change to make life easier for your horse.

[Dolly Communication - Horse Listening](https://www.facebook.com/groups/622525524030771) (Facebook)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/622525524030771>

1

Myth 1 - The Horse is a Dangerous Animal.

This is a comment that really surprised me. I've always known that Dolly was not a reactive horse, she was a slow thinker. I have seen ex-racehorses and how jumpy and reactive they are which makes them difficult to handle. I always find myself feeling sorrier for the horse than the handler as I see the animal's fear and anxiety.

So let's look at some facts and see exactly how dangerous horses are, and why they are labelled this way.

The Truth About Horse Safety: A Perspective Shift

When people talk about 'dangerous' animals, they rarely mention the real culprits. The deadliest animal on Earth? The mosquito. Humans, snakes, and dogs follow close behind. Yet, horses—despite their size and strength—don't even make the list. While they are large, powerful animals capable of causing harm if startled or frightened, they are not instinctively

dangerous creatures.

Horses are prey animals whose primary instinct is to flee from danger. They react in fear, to escape pain, or in extreme cases, defensively when they feel trapped. Unlike the dogs and cats, we welcome into our homes, horses have no instinct to hunt or kill. Yet, the horse world continues to use the term “dangerous” in a way that instils fear rather than understanding.

Fear-Based Training: The Real Danger

A horse trained with fear and pain sees its owner, carer, or trainer as just another predator. It learns to behave to avoid punishment rather than out of trust or connection. This kind of relationship leaves no room for mutual understanding. When a frightened horse reacts instinctively, it does not prioritize the human’s safety—because trust was never established in the first place.

Horses subjected to dominance and punishment may appear obedient, but many are simply shut down, living in a state of learned helplessness. When forced into fearful situations repeatedly, they suppress their fear—a process called “stacking.” This buildup of stress will eventually erupt when the horse can no longer suppress it. At that point they may rear, buck, bolt, or even lash out in self-defence. Because the stacking is hidden within the horse the horse becomes labelled as unpredictable and dangerous.

Ironically, the very methods used to “control” horses are what create unpredictability and danger.

The Safer Alternative: Trust and Connection

The only thing that truly makes a horse dangerous is the stress and mistreatment it endures. A horse that is listened to, treated with kindness, and given autonomy over its movements learns to trust its human. Just as a horse in a herd looks to its companions for reassurance, a horse that trusts its human will seek guidance rather than react out of fear.

A calm, confident human helps create a calm, confident horse. When we approach our horses expecting danger, our anxiety signals to them that something is wrong—making them more nervous before we’ve even begun working with them. Horses read our emotions instantly, and it is our responsibility to bring peace to our interactions. A horse that trusts its human will not only be safer to handle but will actively avoid harming them, just as it would a fellow herd member.

The Power of Peace and Connection

I do not claim to be a horse trainer or professional. I have simply learned through experience that when you love a horse and treat them with kindness, they want to be with you. They will seek your guidance when they are uncertain, and if you are truly fortunate, they will welcome you into their herd—not just as a caretaker, but as one of their own.

Over the years, I explored many training methods, always seeking the kindest approach. I was mostly self-taught, as every spare resource went toward Dolly’s care. While I may not have mastered every technique, the most important lesson I learned was to listen. When I approached anything with focus and love, Dolly would try to figure out what I was asking.

Someone recently told me, “Peace and calm are emotions; you can’t teach them.” They were right—but you can cultivate them. The more time you spend feeling peace and calm with your horse, the deeper your bond becomes. When you become a place of safety for your horse, they will always want to be with you. And when trust replaces fear, both horse and human move together in harmony, free from the myths that divide them.

A Personal Experience: When Horses Protect Their Own

For those who still believe that horses are naturally dangerous, I want to share a moment that profoundly changed my understanding of the horse-human bond.

One day, I was alone at the yard, clearing a paddock for a friend. The paddocks ran parallel in one field, with my mare, Dolly, in a paddock further down the field. As I worked, a stranger pulled up in a car. We were always vigilant about strangers for the horses’ safety, so I approached the fence to ask if I could help. The man claimed he was checking power lines, but something felt off—there were no pylons nearby, and his car had no signage. As he started walking toward me, I felt a wave of unease.

Then, something changed. The man suddenly looked startled and stopped in his tracks. I felt breath on my neck and realized my friend’s horse had silently walked up to stand by my shoulder. A glance to my other side revealed the horse in the next paddock had done the same. These horses, who normally showed little interest in me, had left their grazing to position themselves beside me, creating an unspoken barrier. The man muttered something about coming back later and quickly retreated to his

car, driving off in a hurry.

As soon as he was gone, the horses simply turned and wandered back to their grazing as if nothing had happened. They did not seek a treat or a scratch; they had simply come to stand by me when I felt vulnerable. In that moment, I realized I had not just earned Dolly's trust—I had been accepted into her herd. These horses, who barely interacted with me before, had recognized a potential threat and instinctively stepped in to support a fellow herd member.

That day, I really understood the depth of the bonds that the horses create within their herd. They are sentient beings who respond to energy in ways we often overlook. When I realised those horses were by me like protective big brothers, my anxiety ebbed away and when I saw the man leave as quickly as he did, I knew he had felt the intimidation of their protection towards me too. I understood that I was no longer just part of Dolly's herd to Dolly, but also part of her whole herd in the field. To these two horses that I felt hardly knew me I deserve the protection of the herd through my connection with Dolly.

That realization never left me. Years later, I still feel the power of that moment—of being truly accepted into the herd.

2

Myth 2 - Control Keeps You Safe.

It's a common belief that being in control of a horse is the only way to ensure safety. However, this idea stems from outdated notions of dominance and submission rather than understanding the true nature of horses.

Horses are prey animals, hardwired to seek safety and connection. They thrive in environments where they feel secure and heard. When we focus solely on control, we are most probably seen by our horse as a predator. This may create resistance, fear, or confusion in the horse, which can increase the risk of accidents. A horse that feels trapped or coerced is more likely to react unpredictably, as in Myth One, undermining the very safety we seek.

True safety comes from partnership, not dominance. By building trust and mutual understanding, we create a horse-human relationship where both parties feel calm and confident. A horse that trusts you and understands what's being asked will cooperate willingly—not out of fear, but because they feel safe in your leadership.

Letting go of the need for control doesn't mean letting go of

boundaries or guidance; it means approaching the relationship with respect and empathy. When a horse sees you as a source of safety and stability, their natural instincts will align with yours, creating a harmonious and safe partnership.

A horse that feels safe in your leadership is going to look to you when it sees something that makes it nervous, because it trusts you. This means that when riding, you have the chance to relax your horse when it sees something scary. By bringing calm and a feeling of relaxation to your horse, it will trust you that the thing it has seen is safe. Thus, the horse will become more relaxed and will listen to you, avoiding reacting with fear and bolting, bucking, or rearing—situations that put you in danger.

The more relaxed your horse feels around you in everything you do with them, the safer it will be for you to be around that horse. Control may seem like a way to ensure safety, but in truth, it often breaks the trust that makes a horse truly reliable.

The Power of Peace and Connection

In a Facebook conversation, a +R trainer told me that peace and calm cannot be rewards because they are emotions, and you cannot train emotions. Someone else argued that a kind word is not a reward because “would you work for a kind word?”

But my experience tells me otherwise. Horses, like humans, respond to the energy and emotions around them. Peace, calm, love, and kindness turn the need to “train” into an act of shared experience, where the horse is curious and wants to be with you. This removes the need for normal rewards like treats and requires little more than words of praise or encouragement to let the horse know it is doing the right thing.

We learn best from those who guide with respect and patience,

horses are no different.

We can control them and make their lives fearful, or we can approach them with love, understanding, and calm leadership. When we choose the latter, we create a relationship where work becomes just another enjoyable experience together.

A Personal Experience: When Trust Overcomes Fear

One day, a 12-year-old girl who often rode Dolly, asked if she could go out for a hack. Since no one was available to accompany her on horseback, her mum and me walked up the road with her so she could have a canter up a field track. All was well until as they trotted up the track, a large bird scarer went off on the other side of the hedge. It startled all of us, and Dolly instinctively jumped forward a few strides. Had I been riding her on a loose rein, she would have automatically come back to a walk. However, the young girl had contact, and when Dolly shot forward, she instinctively pulled on the reins. This startled Dolly further, and she continued at a canter. The girl kept pulling, but Dolly was not responding.

You could say she was bolting, though in Dolly's gentle manner, it was more of a canter than a full-out gallop. I thought I was powerless to assist as they cantered away from me, but I called after them, telling the girl to ease the reins. To my surprise, hearing my voice, Dolly instantly started to turn in a wide arc across the stubble field until she locked her eyes on me. I could see she was stressed, so I called to her in a calm voice, reassuring her. She slowed to a fast trot, her eyes still on me, snorting and blowing. As she returned, I spoke gently, and once she reached me, she stood by my side, puffing and shaking her head.

That day, Dolly had a choice. Instead of running off into the unknown, she came back to me—her place of safety. This moment reinforced that control is not what keeps us safe. It is trust, understanding, and the ability to bring our horses back to a place of calm.

it is trust, not force that creates safety.

3

Myth 3 - “Hit it—it’s a horse; it can’t feel it.”

It’s astonishing how often I’ve heard this said about Dolly—especially when I gave her time to think in new situations or when people assumed she was being idle. The truth is, horses are highly sensitive creatures who feel pain, both physically and emotionally.

Horses Are Highly Sensitive and Do Feel Pain

Horses can detect the lightest touch. If you’ve ever watched them react to flies landing on their skin, you’ve seen just how sensitive they are. If a tiny insect can make them flinch, imagine the impact of a whip or harsh pressure.

Hitting a horse does not encourage cooperation—it creates fear and emotional distress. If a horse refuses to move forward, it is often in a state of “shut down” or freeze mode due to fear. Any added force won’t inspire responsiveness; instead, it will deepen their fear. This fear builds up over time, stacking inside them until it erupts as a flight response—bolting, bucking, or

rearing. None of these reactions are good for the horse or the rider.

If we pause and truly listen to our horses, we can recognize that what is often labelled as “naughty” behaviour is actually a sign of distress. Hitting or forcing them only masks the real issue instead of addressing it.

Building Trust and Communication Is Key

A trusting relationship with a horse is built on calmness, patience, and clear communication—not force or punishment. It takes time to nurture, but the reward is a willing partner who enjoys being with you. Horses, by nature, are curious and eager to learn when they feel safe. Stress, on the other hand, blocks their ability to process information and learn effectively.

Many believe that simply spending quiet time with a horse is unproductive, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Being present and calm in their space creates a peaceful environment where both horse and owner can relax. This builds a sense of safety for the horse, leading them to be more attentive and trusting.

A horse that trusts you doesn't need force to move forward. Instead, they respond to clear instructions in a calm environment. When encountering something scary, a horse that trusts your leadership will look to you for reassurance. If they hesitate, dismounting and placing yourself between them and the object can offer the security they need to move past it. A horse that feels safe will naturally relax and follow your guidance.

Horses are incredibly attuned to human emotions, mirroring fear, stress, or confusion. Managing your own emotions is crucial in helping them stay calm. To establish true trust, you

must always approach them with love and kindness. If you fear your horse—because of misconceptions rooted in myths—you unintentionally add to their anxiety.

Trusting your horse is the first step in building a trusting relationship, but we need to be consistent in our calmness and kindness when working with them too, so that they can continue to trust us. If we revert to control and force during training or riding, they will become confused as we are switching into the energy of a predator which heightens their natural fear and starts the process of stacking once again. Doing this, then makes it much harder for your horse to trust you when you do come to them with calm and peace.

From Control to Compassion: Changing Your Mindset

When a horse exhibits unwanted behaviour, the common instinct is to punish. But shifting your perspective can change everything. Instead of seeing misbehaviour, recognize that your horse is trying to communicate. Learning to read their body language and listen to their signals is key to responding in a way that strengthens your bond. However, a horse that is showing unwanted behaviour is past the gentle nuances of body language. They are shouting "I can't do this."

Rather than forcing compliance, take a step back. Observe what your horse is expressing. Is there pain? Are they physically able to do what you're asking? Are your cues clear? Listening to that first sign of resistance is the foundation of becoming a true horse listener.

Being a horse listener isn't about being soft—it's about understanding. It's about recognizing when your horse is struggling and addressing the root cause rather than just silencing the

symptom. When I first owned Dolly, we had a great time riding out almost daily. But over time, things changed—because of me.

Dolly's Story: A Lesson in Listening

After about a year, Dolly started resisting our solo rides. She would nap and refuse to go forward. I was stressed in my personal life, and without realizing it, I carried that tension into our rides. One day, I fell off, and Dolly turned to go home without me. When I returned to the yard I wanted to get back on, but the yard staff prevented me from going to her. The fourth time this happened they were behind us in vehicles, I saw Dolly becoming more distressed as they caught her. They tried to put a young rider onto her. She was tense, fearful, and wouldn't stand still, unrecognizable from the gentle horse I knew.

When I got back to the yard, I was told the yard owner had taken her into the school "to teach her a lesson." When she was brought out, she was sweating, blowing, and visibly shaken. When I reached for her reins, she jumped away from me, eyes wild with fear. She didn't recognise me as her adrenalin her head "had gone." She didn't know where she was and hadn't recognised me. I was devastated. The kind, trusting horse I had built a relationship with had been traumatized in my absence, and not for the first time.

I was instructed to untack her, turn her out, and leave—no treats, no comfort. In that moment, I realized something profound: I knew better than these so-called professionals. Their methods were not about training—they were about pointless domination and control through fear.

After that weekend, the yard withdrew all support from me

when I rode. People were discouraged from riding out with us, and I was told I'd never be able to ride Dolly alone again. They even tried to persuade me to swap her for a different horse. But I knew the truth—I needed to get us out of there.

Eventually, I moved Dolly to a new home, and we rebuilt our trust. I rode her again, but I learned that whenever I was stressed, she would resist. At the time, I believed the myth that she was just being difficult. Now, I understand that she was responding to the trauma she had endured. The experiences in that school had left an imprint on her, and my tension was a reminder of those painful memories.

The Power of Understanding

Looking back, I see that Dolly wasn't being difficult—she was communicating. When I was calm, she was willing. When I carried stress, she resisted. Her refusal to let me mount wasn't stubbornness; it was self-protection. Once I fully understood this, our relationship deepened even more.

Horses don't need punishment to learn—they need understanding. They need us to listen, to observe, and to build trust through kindness and patience. When we stop trying to control them and instead work with them, we create a partnership built on mutual respect.

The myth that horses don't feel pain or emotion is one of the most harmful misconceptions in the equestrian world. But by changing our mindset, we can change the way we interact with them—for their well-being and ours.

It starts with listening. As in the previous myths using force or punishment does not equate to communication—it actually disrupts it.

4

Myth 4 - Horses Need Feeding Three Times a Day

This myth often stems from stable routines which often follow human routines and needs rather than what is actually best for the horse. There is also a big industry in horse feed and big company marketing which causes people to misunderstand what their horse needs. Horses do not thrive on scheduled, limited meals of hard feed —what they need is consistent access to forage. Supplements are available when required and can be fed with just a little sugar free chaff

The Truth About a Horse's Digestive System

Horses are natural foragers, designed to eat small amounts of fibre-rich food continuously throughout the day. Unlike humans, their stomachs continuously produce acid, meaning long gaps without food can lead to discomfort and even ulcers. A horse's stomach is roughly the size of a rugby ball and can be completely empty just four hours after its last meal.

Feeding large amounts of hard feed at once can overwhelm

their digestive system, pushing undigested food and stomach acid into the intestines. This disrupts the balance of gut bacteria, increasing the risk of colic and other digestive issues. Instead of large, grain-based meals, horses benefit from a diet cantered around fibre, such as hay and grass.

The Impact of Feeding on Behaviour and Well-being

Restricting forage can lead to stress, frustration, and even aggression in horses. When horses experience food insecurity—whether in stables or starvation paddocks—they may binge eat when food is available, develop vices like cribbing or weaving, or become food-aggressive out of fear that they won't have enough to eat.

Conversely, overfeeding hard feed while reducing natural forage intake can contribute to health issues such as obesity, laminitis, and colic. It can also make a horse overly energetic, reactive, and difficult to handle. Many so-called “hot” horses are actually reacting to an inappropriate diet.

Challenging Feeding Myths and Peer Pressure

Many horse owners feel pressured to feed hard feed, even when it is unnecessary. The truth is, most non-competition horses thrive on good-quality pasture, free-choice hay, and minimal supplements. The key is to understand your individual horse's needs rather than blindly following livery routines or marketing claims.

I have experienced this pressure firsthand. At one yard, a fellow owner repeatedly insisted I was neglecting Dolly because I didn't feed her additional hard feed during the summer.

Eventually, I gave in, despite knowing she was a good doer. Within three days, she gained weight, and despite stopping the extra feed, those extra pounds never fully came off.

At another yard, a simple change from chaff to alfalfa caused a dramatic shift in Dolly's behaviour. In just three days, my calm, reliable horse became overly energetic, as if she were a racehorse at the starting gate. That one small dietary change had a huge impact on her.

The Importance of Fibre

Horses should be fed a minimum of 1% of their body weight in dry matter fibre per day, ideally between 1.5–3%. Fibre is essential for their digestion, hydration, and overall health.

Why Fibre Matters:

- **Sustains Energy Levels** – Fibre provides slow-release energy, preventing spikes and crashes.
- **Maintains Gut Health** – A healthy gut depends on continuous fermentation of fibre, which also prevents colic.
- **Hydration** – Fibre helps horses retain water, acting as a reserve in their digestive system.
- **Vitamin Production** – Gut bacteria break down fibre to produce essential vitamins.

Risks of Fibre Deficiency:

- **Colic and Ulcers** – A lack of fibre can lead to digestive distress and pain.
- **Diarrhoea and Dehydration** – Without enough fibre, gut function is compromised.

- **Weight Loss and Constant Hunger** – Horses on low-fibre diets struggle to maintain weight and often feel hungry, leading to behavioural issues.
- **Boredom and Stress** – Horses without enough forage may develop habits like cribbing, weaving, or chewing on non-food objects.

Feeding for Health, Not Habit

Horses in the wild don't develop ulcers—our modern feeding practices are to blame. Fortunately, we can prevent many common digestive issues through proper management:

- **Prioritize forage** – Hay and pasture should make up the bulk of your horse's diet.
- **Avoid excess hard feed** – Starch-heavy grains increase stomach acid and disrupt gut balance.
- **Choose fat sources wisely** – Flax and chia seeds are better than inflammatory vegetable oils.
- **Offer high-quality protein** – Alfalfa and other legumes help maintain muscle and digestive health.
- **Support gut bacteria** – Prebiotics and yeast can aid digestion and nutrient absorption.
- **Reduce stress** – Feeding routines should align with natural eating habits to prevent anxiety-driven behaviours. Other horse management issues like isolation from friends, constant stabling and certain training can also cause the production of extra gut acid.

Horses don't need rigid feeding schedules dictated by human convenience. They need access to forage, thoughtful nutrition,

and owners who question the myths that dominate the horse world. Feeding should be based on their natural needs—not tradition or peer pressure.

The wrong feed can change a horse's character.

Dolly was a native breed horse and as such was a good doer. At one yard she was having a small scoop of chaff when she came in in the winter because the other horses were being fed at that time. This was fine for her as it wasn't a very large amount. As spring approached the lady owning the yard finished the bag of chaff and as Dolly was the only one eating it she decided not to buy any more as they would be going out at the end of the next week and they wouldn't be needing the feed. So that Dolly still had something in her bowl when the others were being fed, she gave her a small scoop of alfalfa. After three days when I went to fetch Dolly in, she was excitable, on her toes, and really full of energy, making her quite a handful to lead in that night. This behaviour continued for the rest of the week, and I was so relieved when they stopped coming in. Just that one small scoop of alfalfa with all the extra goodness to the plain chaff was enough to heat Dolly up and make her a handful to lead. As soon as they've been out a few days and she was not having any more alfalfa she was back to her gentle kind self.

If I hadn't have seen it for myself I would never have believed the change in her with, just a small amount of food but it was the only change that had been made, and once it stopped she reverted to her old self.

This proves the fact that feeding with the wrong food for your horse can change their character by "heating them up". Feeds high in starch and sugar, like alfalfa, oats and molasses, are

rapidly digested, releasing energy quickly, which can cause any horse, even a slow thinking breed like Dolly, to become excitable or “fizzy”. They become more reactive and harder to handle.

If you are not sure about your horse’s weight here is a good webpage to help you.

<https://www.bluecross.org.uk/advice/horse/how-to-body-score-your-horse>

The link doesn’t always go through to the intended page but if you look under advice, horse , you get the choice of reading about weight, feeding and health. To make sure you are getting it right.

5

Myth 5 - Your Horse Should Respect Your Space and Obey Without Question

Myth No. 5: “Your Horse Should Respect Your Space and Obey Without Question”

The idea that a horse should always respect a human’s space and obey without hesitation is often rooted in the desire for safety and control. However, true respect is not about submission—it’s about mutual understanding and trust. Horses do not understand respect in the same way humans do; their behaviour is shaped by clear communication, safety, and boundaries.

Boundaries, Not Submission

When people demand respect from horses, it often translates into enforcing submission through pressure or punishment. While this may create compliance, it does not foster a relationship where the horse feels truly safe and willing. A horse that appears “respectful” may, in reality, be acting out of fear and avoidance, rather than trust.

Respect among horses is about mutual boundaries. Instead of demanding respect, we should focus on setting and respecting boundaries as horses naturally do. Rather than asking if a horse respects us, we might ask if the horse understands our boundaries, if we understand theirs, and whether we have created an environment where both horse and human feel safe and can trust each other.

True respect comes from kindness and mutual understanding—not from demands or dominance.

Resistance is Communication, Not Disobedience

Horses are sentient beings with emotions and preferences. Labelling their reactions as “naughty” overlooks the root causes—fear, pain, confusion, or uncertainty—that they are trying to communicate. The belief that horses should never challenge human authority assumes that a horse expressing an opinion is being defiant and should be punished. However, punishing a horse for communicating discomfort can damage trust and create further resistance.

Listening to what a horse is trying to communicate allows us to address the underlying cause of their actions. Encouraging a horse to have a voice does not spoil them—it fosters a cooperative partnership where they take responsibility for their role. This approach is particularly valuable in situations where horse and rider must work together over long periods, such as in cattle herding, endurance riding, or other disciplines that require a thinking, engaged horse.

True Partnership Allows a Horse to Think and Act Autonomously

In working relationships, such as cattle herding, horses are trusted to make decisions without constant rider input. American cowboys and Australian stockmen teach their horses how to move cattle by observing their behaviour and reacting accordingly. These horses are not micromanaged; instead, they develop the ability to respond independently to shifting situations. When a cowboy dismounts to rope a calf, a good cow horse instinctively positions itself to shield its rider from an anxious mother cow.

Of course, we know that “breaking” common in the past—rodeo traditions still remind us of that. And just as today, horsemanship varied in quality. Whether those different approaches produced confident, autonomous horses or animals operating under coercive control is something we can only speculate on.

As I shared in myth One from my own experience, horses look after humans they see as part of their herd. But a horse that is shut down and obeys without question is not acting from trust—it’s operating under suppressed fear, making it unpredictable in tense situations.” Cowboys understand the difference in a horse’s behaviour if not the cause of the training behind it and a good cow horse is well value, demanding high prices when sold.

Horses Have Worked Autonomously Throughout History

Many cultures throughout history have relied on horses to work independently and in partnership with humans. Native American horses travelled nomadically with their people, warhorses were trained to engage in battle alongside their riders, and working horses have always been valued for their ability to think and react appropriately to their environment.

An autonomous horse always has a choice—they can do as they have been taught, or they can leave. Throughout history, people have understood that true partnership is far more rewarding for both horse and human. By training horses with kindness and respect, they have built relationships where horses willingly participate, not out of fear, but because they trust and understand their role in the partnership.

6

Myth 6 – A Horse Needs to be Ridden or Have a job.

Many people believe that horses are only of any use if you are riding them. That in itself, is a myth as horses have worked for humans pulling carts, waggons and carriages, ploughing and working the land for probably as long as they have been ridden. Yet this idea is deeply ingrained in equestrian culture, where horses are often seen as needing to “earn their keep.

Horses Are Not Built to Be Ridden

Although a horse's back may seem naturally suited for riding, their anatomy tells a different story. A horse's spine functions like a suspension bridge, supporting the weight of its own body. When we add the weight of a rider, the horse must learn an entirely new way of carrying itself to compensate. This is where the term carriage when referring to the way they move, comes from and this is why proper training and muscle development are crucial to prevent discomfort or injury.

Some horses naturally find it easier to carry a rider's weight,

while others struggle. Unfortunately, many riding disciplines today, especially high-level dressage, force horses into unnatural postures that can cause discomfort and stress. While riding may bring us enjoyment, it's essential to recognize that it is not inherently enjoyable or comfortable for all horses, and the way we train and ride our horses can cause them pain and emotional stress. I am not against riding horses. I understand that it is in our blood to ride as much as it is to love our horses, and riding is the main goal of the majority of horse owners. I do believe though, that as the horse's responsible owner it is as important to understand the mental health of our horses as it is their physical health, and to that end we should be aware of the physical demands we put on our horses and their ability to carry them out without pain or stress. Then your horse can enjoy your riding as much as you do.

I know when she was younger my horse Dolly loved going out hacking. I would bring her in and groom her and fetch her tack. As I walked back to the stable, she would always be stood head held high, ears pricked and happy to see me and the tack. The only time this wasn't the case was when she felt I was stressed, and it is well documented about our "mounting issues" and where this stress factor came from for this. When I was stressed, she would go to the back of the stable and not want me to tack her up, if I persisted, she would allow me to tack her up but when we got to the mounting block, she was the queen of evasion and would continually tell me that she didn't want me on her back. I learned to listen to her as I started to realise that when I was stressed, I wasn't fit to sit on a horse. That was when I learned of all the other amazing things she had to offer.

The Value of Horses Beyond Riding

The belief that a horse must “earn” its keep often stems from the high cost of ownership. Many people seek ways to monetize their horses, whether through lessons, competitions, or other jobs. However, horses offer immense value beyond financial return or physical labour.

Horses can be incredible companions and teachers. They provide emotional support, teach patience, and encourage personal growth.

Dolly taught me many things among them was:

calm authority, when I didn't know how to deal with confrontation,

the importance of focus and intention when I wanted to achieve anything with her.

She taught me about trust, how quickly it was to lose and how hard it was to regain.

She also taught me about forgiveness because whatever I'd done to her in the beginning and through the time when I was learning and making mistakes, she truly forgave me and her loyalty and friendship was something I've never come across before.

These are the things about her That I miss now more than the riding, although I must say when I rode her, I felt extremely safe and knew she always had my well-being at heart. Riding another horse has never been the same without that connection of trust.

Horses Enjoy Connection on Their Own Terms

A relaxed horse, given the freedom to express opinions and feel safe, often seeks out human companionship. Horses are naturally curious and social creatures, and they enjoy interacting with us when the relationship is based on trust rather than obligation.

Dolly would often stand at the gate when she heard my car arrive—not because she waited for me all day, but because she genuinely enjoyed our time together. When I learned to listen to her and to respect her feelings, she became an eager and willing partner. She loved exploring new places and often on our hacks she resisted turning for home, preferring to continue the adventure.

I am not against riding, nor am I telling anyone what they should or shouldn't do with their horse. What matters is that we consider our horse's feelings and recognize that trust is a more powerful and cooperative form of connection than any tool or piece of equipment. Horses are not just workers or riding animals—they are sentient beings capable of deep relationships, and that alone makes them valuable.

Interestingly it is often the horses labelled as 'difficult' that are the same ones that people believe need stricter handling. This leads me to the next common myth

7

Myth 7 - Harsher Tack Will Solve any Problem.

The belief that harsher tack—such as stronger bits, tighter nosebands, or leverage devices—can cure a horse's behaviour issues is a misguided approach that often creates more problems than it solves. While these tools might force compliance in the short term, they don't address the root cause of the horse's behaviour, and this can lead to long-term physical and emotional damage as it erodes trust, confidence, and even physical well-being.

Harsher Tack Creates Fear, Not Solutions

Horses react to discomfort, fear, or confusion by resisting, evading, or shutting down. Introducing harsher tack increases their discomfort, potentially escalating their reactions or causing them to suppress their natural instincts out of fear. While this may appear to create obedience, it actually leads to accumulated stress as the fear, confusion and increased pain causing the resistance is pushed inwards. This process of stacking the stress

within the horse, leads only to an unpredictable explosion when the horse can take no more.

The story about Dolly and the little girl that I shared in myth 3 proves that more pain does not make a horse safe. Dolly was more stressed that day than she had been since I moved her from that first yard. The bird scarer on its own would not have caused that much of a reaction in her, we had come across them in the past. She was pretty much “bomb proof” but not because she was burying her fear, because she was allowed to express it at a low level and then relax again. The difference that day from our previous encounters with frightening things was that the young girl was pulling hard on her mouth. The additional pain caused by the bit added to Dolly’s stress levels causing her to keep cantering. If I had been using a harsher bit, her reaction could have been far worse as the additional pain may have added even more to her fear, pushing her stress levels even higher. She may have broken into a full out gallop and been too stressed to recognise my voice, making the situation a lot more dangerous than it actually was on the day. This demonstrates that fear-based control does not make a horse safe—it makes them more reactive and unpredictable.

The Root Cause Matters More Than the Equipment

Rather than reaching for harsher tack, the real solution lies in understanding why a horse is reacting in the first place. Is the horse in pain? Are they confused about what’s being asked? Do they lack confidence or trust?

Horses see the world differently than humans, and changes in lighting, new objects, or even small details can make a previously easy task suddenly frightening. A horse refusing

a jump is not misbehaving—they might be struggling to process what they see, making them feel unable to take the jump safely. Allowing a horse to assess a situation and take their time builds their confidence and trust in their human.

Breaking tasks down into smaller, more manageable steps helps horses understand and cope. This approach is not spoiling the horse—it is setting them up for success. Trust is built when horses learn that they won't be forced into situations they don't understand or feel unsafe in.

This is not spoiling your horse. This is helping them cope with a difficult situation. By addressing these underlying causes through kindness, clear communication, and patient training, we can resolve challenges, strengthening the partnership between horse and human, and allowing the horse to learn to trust you and your judgement concerning their safety. Because I had always made Dolly feel safe, she had come straight to me in her time of anxiety. I had never heard of this happening before, and I have never heard of it since, although I am sure there are other instances, because I know there are people who have trusting relationships with their horse.

True Partnership Comes from Trust, Not Force

Horses relax around us when they feel safe and understood, and no piece of tack can replace the bond of trust and respect built through mindful, compassionate horsemanship. When we prioritize connection over control, we find lasting solutions that benefit both horse and human.

Some horsemanship and training teaches to control the feet to control the horse. Ultimately the control of the horse comes from within the horse. If you can connect with the brain that

controls the actions and keep that part of the horse calm and relaxed, your horse will willingly do what you ask, as long as it finds it physically possible and safe to do so.

When people understand their horses there is no need for fear or control. Mutual trust bonds them more than anything else could possibly ever do. To put your safety in the hands of another is the ultimate trust anyone could ask for and yet we expect horses to do this blindly all the time without first earning that trust we demand.

8

Myth 8 - You Have More Control in the Saddle Than on the Ground.

Many believe that being in the saddle provides more control over a horse than being on the ground, especially at times of reaction and fear. However, this perspective overlooks the importance of connection, trust, and understanding to make your horse safer in the first place. Control is not about physical position—it's about the relationship between horse and human.

Fear and Confusion Cannot Be Controlled from the Saddle

A horse that is fearful, confused, or disconnected can be just as unpredictable under saddle as on the ground if not more so. In fact, a rider on a frightened or resistant horse may have less ability to diffuse a situation, as the horse's movement can escalate while the rider remains perched above. Conversely, a horse that feels safe and confident in your presence will behave calmly and cooperatively regardless of whether they are being ridden or led.

Groundwork provides the safest space to develop understanding. Without the complexity of a rider's weight and balance, a horse can more easily process cues and learn to trust their human. This trust carries over into riding, making for a safer, more willing partnership.

True Influence Comes from Connection, Not Equipment

Many riders revert to groundwork only when their horse needs retraining, treating it as a temporary fix rather than a foundation. In reality, groundwork is where communication, trust, and mutual respect are built. A horse that feels heard and understood on the ground will respond with greater confidence under saddle.

Traditional riding instruction often focuses on controlling the horse through reins, legs, and mechanical aids. However, real influence comes from a deeper connection. Many riders, myself included, were never taught about balance, weight shifts, and subtle body language as primary aids. Instead, we were told to pull, kick, and make the horse behave. But true partnership means guiding rather than forcing, listening rather than demanding.

Control vs. Compassion: A Shift in Perspective

The belief that horses must be dominated is deeply ingrained in equestrian culture, often encouraged by competition goals or financial pressures. Some riders see their horses as tools for achievement rather than sentient beings with their own needs and emotions. However, control built on fear is fragile, while

trust-based relationships create true reliability and safety.

Horses, like humans, thrive when they feel heard and valued. While life presents challenges—both in nature and in partnership—growth comes from overcoming them together, not through force. Horses enjoy engaging with humans when they feel safe and respected. Some love jumping, others enjoy exploring, and many are naturally curious about the tasks we present to them. The key is to offer choices rather than demands.

It is a sadness to me that the horse world has become such a place where people have forgotten how to love their horses, but in many ways, it is also a reflection of how we've forgotten to love ourselves. This world drives us to always try to be better, we feel we always need to prove ourselves and we expect ourselves to be perfect. This means in the horse world we also expect our horses to be perfect. Sadly, perfection is not part of the natural world and neither humans nor horses are meant to fit in a box of perfection. In humans and horses our uniqueness is what makes us who we are. Everyone is an individual and as such we have different skills, different abilities, and different beliefs. We have forgotten that what makes us unique is what makes us special, and the same is true of our horses.

What I'm trying to do in this book of myths is to help people understand that these phrases are used by certain people to encourage the domination and enslavement of our horses. There is a fully operating machine out there making money from people who own horses. The more, tack and gadgets they sell, the more courses and clinics the owners feel they must attend because their horse is a problem, it all feeds that machine, and I understand that some horse owners join the machine to be able to keep their own horses. As a concept it is not a bad thing.

We all need tack, feed, equipment and training. The problem is when the machine feeds us lies to generate needs within the everyday rider, and spoiling our deepest enjoyment with such sentient, loyal, loving creatures.

As people continue to seek kinder ways to interact with their horses, I hope to contribute to this shift in awareness. Through my books, podcast Horses Speak in Whispers, and short courses, I aim to help owners rethink traditional beliefs and find a path toward compassionate horsemanship.

My one-to-one coaching helps people become stronger within themselves to trust and defend their new beliefs. Every small step toward a better life for our ourselves and our horses is progress—and that's what truly matters.

Myth 9 - Natural Horsemanship is a Kinder Way

This is something that I truly believed when I started looking for a different way with my horse to the usual harsher ways. In the 80s I had seen Monty Roberts and the things he was doing with his horse whispering. I thought it was amazing the way he considered the horse and its natural way of life. I wanted to learn more about horse whispering, natural horsemanship and everything that would help me communicate with Dolly better.

During my time with Dolly I worked through learning from different people.

I was introduced to an Australian man called Steven Halfpenny who was involved in the Equine Assisted Learning course that I discovered, in my search towards helping people with horses the way Dolly had helped me. I liked his style and approach which seemed really in tune with the horse. I was particularly impressed with the video of him and his wife riding their horses

with just a neck strap and cantering around in the paddock where the other loose horses were just wandering around. The partnership of being able to canter figure eights with no more aids than their weight and balance was amazing. I learned a lot from that man about feel and really starting to appreciate being aware of my horse's intention to move before the move even happened.

I was really impressed with natural horsemanship, and I felt that the word natural meant being in the flow of the horse. Being a partnership and working as one. I know a lot of riders talk about this and I'll admit I've never really got it in the saddle, but on the ground the communication and understanding with my horse was wonderful. It created a feeling of awareness in me and safety around her. I could feel how she was going to move, before she started to move. It was almost feeling the thought even before the energy moved her weight from the limb to be ready to lift it. It's hard to explain unless you've felt it and I will try to explain about this further in other material.

Life has moved on more than ten years since I was doing all that. Now there are so many Natural Horsemanship trainers on the internet that it's hard to know who to listen to. There are other good people out there. I must warn you though that the title Natural Horsemanship is being abused by people who are still training using methods that deeply disturb me. Some rely on coercion, cleverly disguised as gentler training. Their techniques often involved subtle forms of pressure and control that are not immediately obvious, but are still based on dominance rather than partnership. The horse still has no voice.

Having a voice does not encourage your horse to be naughty,

it only allows a horse to show it's concerns with a task, and we should then offer them a less stressful version of that task, until we slowly work up to the task we require. Coercion does not allow a horse to show that concern, it ignores the behaviour and insists the horse completes that task as it stands, with no help or support for the concerned animal.

There is a lovely saying. "Your horse isn't giving you a bad time, they are having a bad time". When we start to think in this manner, we see a much more willing animal who is struggling to comply.

Good horsemanship is Good Horsemanship Whatever Name it Comes Under.

There are many ways to look after your horse, but at the end of the day if your horse is truly happy then you are probably doing it right. Bad horsemanship is horsemanship that does not consider the well-being and state of mind of the horse. Within that there are many grey areas, there are misleading training standards, and lots of discussion about positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, clicker training, the use of treats. Any training method, you name it there's a discussion on it.

When it comes to you and your horse, the best advice that I can give is try it and see if it works. I see and hear brilliant results with clicker training, but when I tried it with Dolly, I just could not get the timing right and I knew when I couldn't get it right it just confused Dolly. As much as I think it's a brilliant way of training, I just couldn't use it. I will try again when I get my new horse, because if I can't use it, it doesn't mean you shouldn't, or that it should not be considered. Like everything new it needs

to be understood and learned.

When it comes to your horse you are the best judge of what works for you. As long as you are considering your horse, making sure that what you do with your horse is something they are physically and mentally capable of, then if it works then that's right.

Listen to your horse.

If they object look at why they are objecting to and try to work it out together, and don't over responsibility to a trainer that convinces you that you can compel your horse to do something, through his fear, doubts or confusion. That kind of dominance will always lead to tragedy at some point, when the stress is stacked, and the horse can take no more.

By letting go of outdated beliefs, we can build relationships with horses based on true partnership, not control. Horses don't need dominance—they need understanding.

Conclusion

I am not here to judge those who use traditional methods, but I do believe the horse world has been misled for a long time. We don't know what we don't know until we learn it. My mission is to help people see a different way—to understand their horses rather than try to 'fix' them with harsher tack and training methods.

I understand that the world is full of compromises. We all want the best for our horses, just as we do for ourselves, but perfection is rarely possible. What truly matters to a horse is not a perfect life but one where they feel heard and understood, especially when they experience fear or confusion. Horses, like us, can cope with less-than-ideal circumstances if they are given the opportunity to process and adapt.

Dolly was an adaptable horse, but there was one yard where she truly struggled with the living conditions. She showed me her distress, yet due to circumstances beyond our control, we had to stay. The stress she suppressed for my sake began to affect her health—she developed breathing problems and girthing, likely the early signs of stress-related ulcers. Even

though I did my best to support her with veterinary care, her health never fully recovered after we left that place. This experience taught me just how deeply horses feel and how much they rely on us to listen.

People are beginning to realize that what we assume is good for our horses isn't always the case. As we learn, we adapt and improve. This is particularly true in the ongoing debate between control and compassion. People may struggle with the idea that they can listen to their horse while still achieving their goals, but trust and cooperation do not mean a lack of leadership. Even wild horses face challenges—they must navigate difficult terrain, interact with their herd, and make decisions for survival. Life, for all beings, is full of challenges, and that's how we grow. Asking your horse to do things with you isn't inherently wrong; what matters is how you ask and whether your horse feels safe and willing.

I have seen horses that love jumping, horses that love running, and horses that simply enjoy being out and exploring. Dolly often didn't want to go home from a hack—she was having too much fun! She even showed clear excitement about going to a dressage competition. In one of my podcast episodes on *Horses Speak in Whispers*, I share the story of how she made sure we had transport to get there. Horses do have preferences, and they will show us if we take the time to listen.

The cruelty in the horse world is finally being brought to light and addressed on different levels. More people are seeking compassionate alternatives, yet many solutions being sold today focus on “fixing” the horse rather than helping the owner understand the root of the problem. It is not easy to accept that the behaviours we once labelled as “naughty” or “disrespectful” were often responses to discomfort, fear, or confusion. For

years, we were taught that horses must be “made to behave,” and if a harsher bit or stricter discipline didn’t work, then we were simply being too soft. In reality, more force often leads to more resistance, and many “quick fixes” only suppress issues rather than resolve them. The same problems resurface in new ways, creating an endless cycle of “problem-solving” that costs horse owners time, money, and—most tragically—their horse’s trust.

There is an entire industry built around controlling horses, from the sales of harsh tack and training tools to expensive retraining programs. While general courses address common problems and private trainers work on specific issues, no one-size-fits-all solution exists. Every horse and owner have a unique relationship, and true understanding comes from within that partnership.

How I Can Help You

I am committed to helping horse owners shift their perspective and build stronger, trust-based relationships with their horses. Through my non-profit, *Dolly Communications CIC*, I offer accessible resources to support this journey.

- **My Books:** I will continue to write and share insights to help horse owners see their relationships in a new light.
- **The Horses Speak in Whispers Podcast:** I share real stories and experiences to illustrate how trust transforms the horse-human connection. YOu will find this on You Tube.

- **Online Courses:** My first course, Horse Listening for Beginners, launches in April. It will teach you how to recognize signs of stress, fear, and discomfort in your horse, shifting your mindset from “They’re challenging me; I must be stronger” to “I wonder what’s making them act this way?”

Topics include:

- How horses think
 - The effects of domestication
 - How our emotions impact our horses
 - Recognizing early signs of stress
 - Creating a safe space for your horse to express themselves
-
- **One-on-One Empowerment Coaching for Horse Owners:** I help you explore your personal connection with your horse, break free from traditional pressures, and trust your instincts. Coaching includes
 - Personal empowerment—helping you make choices that align with your values
 - Understanding why *you* are the best solution for your horse
 - Gaining confidence to stand by your beliefs, even when others disagree
 - Becoming the kind of leader your horse *wants* to follow

- **Future plans - YouTube Video Diary:** Once I can afford to keep a new horse in livery. I plan to document my journey, showing how I build a bond with them using kindness and understanding. I aim to explore horse agility with them, as

I learn about my horse's natural body language as a form of communication for training. I hope you will join me and we can learn together.

Owning a horse is a journey, one that should be filled with joy, trust, and mutual understanding. I am here to help you see a different way—one where you and your horse can thrive together. If you're ready to deepen your connection and embrace a kinder approach to horsemanship, I invite you to join me on this path.