

A STAR REBORN

Training the Whole Horse[®]

by Missy Axton-Wryn

When he arrived his mane was dreadlocked, his body covered in numerous flesh wounds and his knees were skinned. The beautiful buckskin paint Arab had just been gelded at the age of 5, only two weeks before coming to my place for training, (that explained the skinned knees). Frightened and angry, ears pinned and hooves overgrown he was very unhappy. His owner wanted him started under saddle with trail training for which I require a minimum of 120 days, but she added two extra months because “Star may need it” she said. “Hmm, maybe he will maybe not” I thought. I’ve had horses here that I started under saddle, finished with trail training and sent home in 75 days, so we’ll see.

My first session with Star was spent untangling his mane for an hour. Typically my first session with a horse is an “at liberty join up” to establish my leadership, but this guy seemed to need touch and gentleness before I began *moving his feet*^{NHT#1}.

NH Tip #1 - “Speaking the Language - Herd Psychology”; *He who moves the other’s feet first is in control.*

Star’s high head began to lower and his worry melted away as I brushed and cooed over him. I touched and rubbed him gently all over looking for “issue” areas and found under the belly, flank and general rear area (yeah he was just gelded) were his problem spots. He had obvious foot handling issues too which explained the overgrown feet, so I did some *touch and retreat*^{NHT#2} around each leg. I scrubbed Star’s wounds with Natures Balance Care (NBC) *Groomer* and applied NBC *Bare Skin Barrier* to keep the flies and insects off while it accelerated the healing. He seemed content to be cared for and quietly accepted a carrot as I put him back in his paddock. **Note:** I only give treats after a session and use carrots for chiropractic stretching. I **do not** use treats to train. I want a partnership, not a circus animal.

NH Tip #2 – Touch Retreat. If a horse doesn’t want to be touched in certain areas, for example the ears, rub in areas close to the ears and then touch the ears quickly and retreat as if you were never there. Continue to do this until the horse stops noticing and accepts being touched in that area.

The next day I did an “at liberty join up” in a 60 x 96 training arena (“at liberty” means with no halter or lead rope so the horse is free to move at will. The join up/latch-on is when the horse chooses to follow and mirror your movements). Our first “at liberty join up” took about 30 minutes for Star to latch-on. He floated over the arena floor in a beautiful natural pace with his tail flagged and ears forward. Star was a majestic sight showing his stallion-like beauty for all to see. He didn’t stay latched on for very long

the first attempt so I ran him off (NH Tip #1 above: he who moves the other's feet first is in control AND I'm the leader so I move his feet!), but he never kicked out as so often many horses do sassing the lead mare, "me". I gave him more time at liberty watching for *signs of submission*^{NHT#3}.

NH Tip #3 – Signs of submission: first, I want to see his inside ear back which says he is paying attention to me; lowering his head and licking his lips is a sign of submission and indication he's beginning to understand that I'm the leader; second, when I ask him to change direction he turns into me not away from me; third, he will start mowing the ground by lowering his head almost touching the ground as he is moving at a walk or trot.

Once Star began "mowing the ground" he was ready to join up. I stepped in front of the *drive line*^{NHT#4} and he turned to look at me. I immediately *dropped my pressure*^{NHT#5} by lowering my eyes and turning my shoulder to him, and I said "good boy". I walked up slowly with an outstretched hand, shoulder turned, not making eye contact and rubbed his face. I tickled under his chin as I moved to his shoulder and yielded his hind quarters while he followed my outstretched hand. As I got his feet moving we made bigger circles until he was following me in a forward direction quietly with his head relaxed. After a moment of forward movement I stopped and loved up on him while I put his halter on. Now Star was ready to be assessed and begin his training.

NH Tip #4 – Drive Line. The drive line is the area from the girth forward. To step in front of the driveline I simply take one step to the side without moving my other foot. This is a step in front of the drive line and a signal to the horse to stop and turn to me. Once a horse turns and looks at me when I step in front of the drive line I immediately drop my pressure, i.e. drop my eye contact, turn my shoulder to him and say "good boy". The horse has an "aha" moment and realizes he answered correctly.

NH Tip #5 – Pressure & Release. A horse learns from the release of pressure, not the pressure itself. Your release of pressure must be instant; as crisp as can be in order for the horse to learn he made the right choice. Always use a rope halter when training along with a 12' – 14' lead rope. The rope halter applies appropriate pressure compared to a web halter. I do everything in a rope halter from training to riding, even stallions.

NH Tip #6 – Stick & String. I prefer to use a training stick & string for my safety and as an extension of my hand. The horse is in my space if I can reach out and touch him with the end of the stick. If I can touch the horse with the stick while lunging, the horse is too close and I'm vulnerable to a kick. Once I know a horse well enough a training session will consist of "forward and around & circle driving" which is bringing the horse closer to me and actually having the stick on their back as a desensitizing lesson. But, when first working with a new horse they must be out of stick range. Also, if a horse were to charge me the stick is firm enough to reprimand on the shoulder to avoid

getting run over – a lunge whip is too flexible so I don't use them. **Always** desensitize a horse to the stick as well as sensitize.

When I assess a horse the first thing I want to know is can he back up. My space is privileged and a horse is not allowed into my space without invitation. Backing up a horse is important for keeping a safe distance and showing respect.

I stood in front of Star with the lead rope in one hand and my stick in the other. I gently jiggled the lead rope and asked "back", but he just stood there. I began increasing the pressure by jiggling the rope harder and harder as I walked toward him, my eyes fixed on his (pressure); he threw his head up and stood his ground. I began waving the stick under the lead rope and he instantly took a step back. Releasing the pressure I instantly stopped jiggling, waving, walking and dropped my eye contact and said "Good boy". If he had not moved back I would have spanked him with the stick on his chest. With some horses while jiggling and walking towards them if the horse isn't moving back I would have simply walked up and yanked on the shank under their chin and backed them up. But this was a newly gelded, pinny eared, biter: I did not want to give him any opportunity to take a chunk out of me.

I asked Star again to back up with a gentle jiggle of the rope, no response. I jiggled harder, eyes fixed on his, no change. So I started walking into him with determination and "voila", he took a step back "Good boy" I exclaimed. He soon started backing with just a slight jiggle of the lead rope – "Good boy"!! I gave Star carrot stretches and put him away for the day to *soak*^{NHT#7}.

NH Tip #7 – Soaking Time. As soon as your horse "gets it" quit for the day. *The long way is the short way* with Natural Horsemanship. Nerve endings in the brain cells called dendrites continue to work making new neuro-connections while at rest. Have you ever noticed when you come back to your horse a day or so later he has bumped way up from where you left off in his training? That is because they had time to "soak". Their brains made new connections while at rest. It is important to stop, put him away when he "gets it". Whatever "it" is that you are teaching him, give him time to "soak". You will be amazed how quickly he learns and retains the training.

NH Tip #8 – Black & White Zone. You've got to make training black and white for your horse. The white zone is nice and loving. The black zone is real uncomfortable. *Make the right thing easy and the wrong thing uncomfortable*. Be very clear about what you are asking. Increase the pressure until you get the right answer then immediately drop your pressure and make it a nice place to be in the white zone – lots of "good boy", "good girl". I like to verbalize because it reinforces my overall body language – horses read body language.

NH Tip #9 – Always end on a good note. If things are going badly, go back to something you know your horse is successful at and end on that success before you become

frustrated and lose your temper. Come back later when you are in a better frame of mind. Always end the session at a place in training where both you and your horse feel good about the last moments.

Follow Missy as she starts this stallioness gelding under saddle and discover pain issues and possible ulcers. Missy Axton-Wryn, WNHP, Frank Bell Accredited Trainer/Instructor, “W” Holistic Natural Horsemanship Practitioner “***Building a Partnership for a Safer Ride***”.

Now that Star can back up with the slightest jiggle of the lead rope it is time to begin desensitizing, lunging, change of direction and most important teach him a one rein stop on the ground which will translate to a one rein stop in the saddle (the emergency handbrake on a horse). I have all ready desensitized him to the stick, but now I’m going to incorporate plastic bags, tarps, and saddle blankets, along with ropes and taking him on confidence walks.

I began Stars confidence building desensitizing by rubbing him all over with my hands gently and increasing my motion and intensity. When he raised his head out of concern I simply asked him to drop his head with the slightest pressure on the shank under his chin (*where the mind is the body follows*), and stroked his neck to nurture him through his fear. As Star became more relaxed about my rubbing him all over I began jumping up and down so he could see me above his head. To my surprise he quickly became agitated, pinned his ears and lashed out at me with an open mouth. Star must have felt threatened, but as his lead mare he found out that was the wrong answer. I quickly reprimanded him with short firm yanks on the shank backing him up making the ssshhh ^{NHT#10} sound while I kicked dirt at him. Kicking dirt is what a lead mare will do which is humiliating on the receiving end. I even let out a growl of disapproval and my eyes fixed on his (pressure). The backing up lasted only 3 seconds, but I continued staring at him until his head dropped and he began working his mouth as a sign of submission. Star dropped his head, but didn’t work his mouth so I walked up to him and rubbed his head with forgiveness then stuck my fingers in his mouth feathering his tongue to get his mouth working ^{NHT#11}.

After the explosive biting episode I was mindful of Star’s pinny ear behavior, but he never lashed out again. However, Star continued to pin his ears and raise his head as I resumed the jumping up and down, but I made the *right thing easy and the wrong thing uncomfortable* by making the ssshhh sound and backing him up each time. He soon learned that his behavior was unacceptable by the lead mare (me), and began to relax not caring about my actions. Star had just been gelded so his behavior was understandable, but he had to learn it was not acceptable.

NH Tip #10 – SSSHHH. I prefer to use the ssshhh sound instead of “NO”. The ssshhh sound is quick and startling enough to get the horse’s attention. “NO” tends to be used with a deep voice, but the ssshhh is a real attention grabber. I only reprimand when a

horse behaves disrespectfully or dangerously. The level of the reprimand must fit the behavior. For instance if a horse tries to rub on me knocking me off my feet I'll ssshhh and back them up a few steps making the wrong thing uncomfortable. If a horse tries to bite me I will attempt to make contact with the back of my hand under the horse's chin then make the ssshhh sound several times while backing up the horse vigorously kicking dirt a few times at him. When a horse learns the ssshhh sound often that is all it takes for him to realize he's crossing the line with me. By then he would have experienced increased pressure for offensive behavior so the ssshhh sound usually stops him from going down that road.

NH Tip #11 – Chewing his thoughts. When training a horse and he's had an "ah ha" moment the horse will likely work his mouth for which I will pause so the horse can *chew on his thoughts*. When the mouth is working the horse is *licking his brain or chewing his thoughts*. If a horse just "got it" that which I was teaching, but doesn't work his mouth I will stick my fingers in the horse's mouth and feather his tongue to get him chewing. This assists in accelerating the thinking part of his brain *chewing his thoughts*.

Desensitizing is key to building confidence and trust in your horse. If we limit what we do with and around our horses to keep them from being afraid or spooking, that leaves us with very little we can do with our horses. I want to be able to go anywhere and do anything as a partner so that means my horse has to gain confidence and trust. Through desensitizing, horses become more confident and trusting.

To teach Star to lunge I stood in front of him, with the stick in my right hand and lead rope in the left. I lifted my left hand, pointed to the left with my index finger and tipped my head in the direction I wanted Star to go. He just stood there looking at me "what?" I tugged at the lead rope in the left direction and clucked. "What?" was the expression on his face. I started to walk towards him making short quick jerks on the lead rope to the left, but Star began to back up not understanding me. As I continued walking towards him I raised the stick in my right hand and thumped him on the left side of his neck with the stick. He continued to back up so I thumped him again and he took a step to the left away from the pressure, "good boy" I exclaimed immediately dropping all pressure (dropping my eye contact, lowering both hands and turning my shoulder to him). He looked at me like "what did I do?" I asked again by lifting my left hand, pointing and tipping my head to the left, no response so I gave a short quick tug on the lead rope in the direction I wanted him to go, but he started backing up again so I raised my stick and walked towards his neck. Immediately Star took a step to the left without me touching him with the stick. "Good boy, good boy" I said releasing all pressure. "Ah ha" he thought and soon understood my body language with just lifting my hand and pointing without tugging on the lead rope or using the stick. Star "got it"!

As a high energy Arab, Star was off and trotting in circles carrying his tail high floating around me. He shied into me at first as he lunged around noticing the "horse eating" wheelbarrow and muck buckets. I stopped Star and walked him to each of the scary

things to help him overcome his fear. I stroked his neck and allowed him to view each item with me standing one side and then the other of his eyes (remember *what you do on one side you must do on the other*). After spending time desensitizing and nurturing Star through his fears we resumed lunging. He still shied at times so I used the stick to tap him on the shoulder to keep him out of my space (remember *if you can touch the horse with the stick he's in your space*).^{NHT #12} Soon Star understood to stay out of range of my stick (the extension of my hand) and respect my space while overcoming his fears.

NH Tip #12 – Safety with stick & string. When using the stick to tap a horse out of your space or energize him, tug lightly on the lead rope to bump the horse's nose towards you in order to keep the horse's hind feet away from you if they choose to kick out. A horse may still kick out, but when you bring their nose towards you it causes their hind end to swing away from you. Before I tap a horse with my stick I make sure I have contact with the horse's nose by taking out excess slack in the lead rope. I want to be able to pull the horse's nose towards me in case the horse likes to “talk” with his back feet.

Star is ready for a one rein stop on the ground (the emergency handbrake). To teach him this I want to take him to the *safe and loving place* I established earlier when I brought his nose to the girth and bonded with him. As Star circled around me I dropped the stick on the ground and drew the lead rope through my hand as I walked towards his girth. When approaching Star he continued circling around me fearfully worried about my approach. Calmly I walked closer and closer to him not making eye contact and relaxing my posture while talking in a soothing voice. When I got to his side he continued to move around me as I rested my left hand on his back pulling his nose to his girth lightly. I stroked him gently with my right hand saying “hoe, hoe”, without releasing his nose until his feet stopped moving and he gave me a nod towards his girth.

NHT #13

NH Tip #13 – One rein stop. When flexing a horse laterally (pulling the nose towards the girth area), do not release the flex until the horse's feet have stopped moving and he nods his nose towards his girth. Release the lead rope or rein immediately (I drop it like a hot potato) when the horse nods. Remember to *release the pressure for the slightest try, the smallest change*.

With eyes wide Star finally stopped moving his feet under my gentle encouragement as I held the lead rope flexing his nose to his girth. He leaned on the halter for a moment and then started bobbing his head upwards trying to get away from the pressure. I could not release him until he nodded his nose towards his girth. As Star was trying to figure out what I'm asking he started moving his feet, so I simply moved with him not releasing his nose. I can not release him for the wrong answer so in a soothing voice while stroking his neck and kneading his withers with my right hand I asked him to “hoe hoe”. He finally stopped moving his feet, paused for a moment and then gave a quick nod towards his girth. I instantly opened my left hand releasing the lead rope and said

“good boy, good boy, that’s what I wanted”. A few more one rein stops on the ground in both directions ^{NHT #14} and Star was ready for some desensitizing.

NH Tip #14– Your horse has two brains. *What you train on one side of the horse you must train on the other side.* Because horses have eyes on the side of their heads they see independently with each eye. As a prey animal this allows them to be on alert from any direction. This also creates an independent brain for each side of the horse. Therefore you must train consistently on both sides of your horse which bridges the two brains so the horse can “think” first instead of the instinctual “react” creating a safer horse. If a horse spooks and flinches in place he’s “thinking” instead of fleeing – that’s what we want.

Each day I worked with Star I began with bonding, and then groundwork consisting of lunging, one rein stops, change of direction, flexing and disengaging of the hind quarters ^{NHT #15}. By the end of his first week he was able to walk with a tarp completely over him covering his eyes, he carried the saddle on his back and allowed me to lay on him and stand in the stirrup on both sides.

NH TIP #15 – Disengaging the hindquarters is like pushing the clutch in on a car: all power goes out of the forward motion. Horses are impulsion animals pushing from their hind legs. To disengage the hindquarters you want the inside foot to cross in front of the outside foot which takes all the power out of the forward motion. A horse can not buck, rear, or bolt when the hindquarters disengage. As you do a one rein stop on the ground the horse begins to circle around and you’ll notice the inside foot crosses in front of the outside foot. When flexing a horse laterally, put your knuckle into the side of the horse where your heel would be in the saddle and press until the horse moves off the pressure. Wait for the inside foot to cross in front of the outside foot and then rub the spot where your knuckle was until the horse stops moving his feet. Do not release the flex until the feet have stopped moving. Disengaging the hind quarters is a “complete” one rein stop. A horse can run sideways with their nose to their girth, but once you disengage the hindquarters the horse can no longer buck, bolt, or rear. Get this good on the ground with just the slightest pressure and then practice in the saddle.

I began noticing Star would throw his head and pin his ears every time I would step into the stirrup. At first I thought it was his stallion-like attitude, but I realized I’d better check for pain issues in the withers, shoulders, back and hips before I start riding. If he’s in pain no amount of training would keep his head down and change his attitude. I wanted Star to be a willing partner and not bracing himself to cope with pain.

To check for pain I ran my thumb down his neck, over his shoulders and withers, down his back and tail area watching for muscle spasms and body language “ducking under my thumb from pain”. Sure enough he pinned his ears and had muscle spasms at the shoulder on both sides, and hollowed his back under mild thumb pressure. I picked up his front foot slightly to stretch and he came off the ground from shoulder pain. Ok.

That told me he needed the horse chiropractor before I start riding. I better schedule Star's tooth floating and wolf teeth removal too before the chiropractor visit since he will definitely need an adjustment for his poll and atlas after the dental work (the dental work was discussed with his owner upon arrival and is care I provide using a veterinarian dental specialist).

Poor Star had a terrible time with the vet when it came to sedating him for his dental work. I think he had been fairly traumatized by his castration, so his behavior was understandable. It took three attempts to get him sedated while Star had dragged the vet and me all over the arena. Once sedated the float and wolf teeth removal went without any complications.

By the time the chiropractor arrived the following week, I had noticed Star's belly beginning to bloat. Since the chiropractor is also a licensed equine veterinarian I asked him about the bloating and he chuckled "he's pregnant". "Well that's pretty funny, but really what is going on"? He suggested I get a fecal sample to see where Star's worm count was and de-worm if the count is higher than ten. He also checked Star's ulcer pressure point and found him to be very sensitive. The chiropractor gave me a homeopathic remedy to treat Star for ulcers along with suggestions on appropriate feed for ulcer conditions.

As the doc began his examination he found Star's poll, atlas, C2, C5, TMJ, T1, shoulder, elbow, floating rib, sacrum and tail needed adjustments. After Stars adjustments his eyes softened, mouth relaxed and for the first time I saw in his eyes he was content and happy. I followed up with a fecal sample and his count was 125!! He was overloaded with worms. Trying to paste him was a challenge as he lifted me off the ground when I attempted to insert the syringe on his near side (left side). So I proceeded to approach from the off side (right side) pushing a little of the paste that was apple flavored onto the end of the syringe and giving him a taste. He liked the flavor and in an instant I had pushed the plunger dosing him fully before he knew what happened. Three weeks later I followed up with another fecal sample and his count was negative – hooray.

After a couple days of rest from the chiropractic adjustments Star will be ready to ride.....

The change in Star was amazing after his chiropractic adjustment! His eyes softened along with his countenance and attitude. I had not realized he'd been subtly trying to tell me he was in pain. For instance, after his chiropractic adjustment he stood quietly for saddling with no fuss or fidgeting. I thought the fussing was a training issue for which I continually corrected him, but all the fidgeting and fuss went away along with the raised head and hollowed back after the adjustment. Star was ready for the next step to carrying me as a rider.

Every time I ride any horse, even my "been there done that" school horses, I run each horse through my Five Fundamentals. This re-establishes my leadership and flushes out any issues I want to address on the ground before I get in the saddle. Star had been learning Frank's steps all along with his ground training and now it was time to teach him the 7th step in the saddle. I tossed the lead rope over his neck and converted it to reins through the shank of the halter. ^{NHTP#16} I then flexed his head on his near side with my left hand drawing his nose towards the girth resting my hand on the saddle. I held the rein until he nodded his nose and softened and I instantly released. Star had to understand the difference in the feel from lead rope to reins on both his near and off sides. ^{NHT#16}

Typically it only takes about 5 minutes to run a horse through the first 6 steps of Frank's safety system and Star was no exception as I completed each step. Now it was time to mount. From Star's near side I tipped his nose slightly to the left, grabbed rein and mane with my left hand and the cantle with my right and stood up in the stirrup. I held myself there watching for any reaction, but Star was calm and confident with the exception of a step to balance himself. ^{NHT#19} I slowly swung my leg over and gently lowered myself on his back. His eyes widened a bit so I took a deep relaxing breath and stroked his neck. I cooed over him drawing his nose towards the girth (partial one rein stop) while leaning down to rub his forehead. This was a reminder that nose to the girth is the *safe and loving place* we go when we are in trouble. I had established the *safe and loving place* on the ground in the first 6 steps of Frank's system before I mounted ^{NHT#17} and now I'm setting him up for the 7th step in the saddle, the one rein stop.

NH TIP #16 – Always flex your horse on both sides after you convert your lead rope to reins before you mount. It is important for your horse to realize that you are now using reins instead of the lead rope which is a different feel. I do this every time before I ride. To find out how to convert your lead rope to reins visit my website at <http://horsenatural.com/id18.html> where you can download a PDF for detailed instructions or call me at 503-630-3744 and I'll send you a brochure.

NH TIP #17 – Upon mounting it is important to gently pull the horse's nose towards the girth (*the safe and loving place*) and reach down to love him up. This helps the horse understand you are the same leader in the saddle as you were on the ground. This is the beginning of the one rein stop in the saddle; the emergency handbrake.

After rubbing Star's head I slowly leaned back holding the rein resting my hand on my hip waiting for him to nod his nose towards his girth and soften before I would release the rein. He wasn't sure at first what I was asking so he started to disengage his hindquarters moving in a circle. I patiently stroked his neck with my right hand saying "whoa, whoa" in a soothing voice keeping my legs off him, and not releasing his nose: *do not release the nose until the feet have stopped moving* (NH TIP #13 Series II). Soon his feet stopped moving and I waited holding his nose until he nodded and softened. I instantly released the rein saying "Good boy, good boy" while I stroked his neck. I then gently pulled his nose to the right, held the rein with my left hand, reached down with my right hand and loved him up on his forehead reminding him this was the *safe and loving place* on this side too. When I sat back, he instantly nodded his nose and I immediately released the rein praising him for the right answer.

I continued flexing Star in a partial one rein stop (nose towards the girth) from one side to the other as he learned to nod his nose and soften. If Star was going to get silly I needed to be able to shut him down using his emergency handbrake, the one rein stop. Therefore, it was time to add the final step to the one rein stop; disengagement of the hindquarters. I began by flexing Star's nose towards the girth, then I added heel pressure just behind the girth, as I had done on the ground with my knuckle to move his back feet. Star immediately responded by disengaging his hindquarters (inside hind foot crosses in front of outside hind foot), but he tried to pull his nose out of the flex. I held on to his nose firmly with the rein while releasing all foot pressure and stroked his neck to help him relax. Once he stopped moving his feet I praised him, but held his nose until he softened and nodded then I opened my hand instantly releasing the pressure, "Good boy" I said. At times Star moved his back feet before I asked him so I made it my idea by adding my heel pressure; remember *he who moves the other's feet first is in control* (NH TIP #1 Series I). Soon Star was flexing and disengaging softly in a relaxed frame of mind and body ^{NHT#18}.

NH TIP #18 - When working with your horse it is not important that you get perfection the first day when teaching something new. What **is** important is to keep your horse engaged in learning without getting frustrated. If you are getting frustrated then **you** need to quit. If your horse is getting frustrated take a step or two back in what you are training and find a starting point that he can be successful at and then end the session. Always end on a good note as described in NH TIP #9 Series I. Once I feel comfortable that the horse understands the basic concept of what I'm teaching I will quickly move on to another learning experience. Often times at the end of a session I will come back to a prior concept I was teaching and do a little refinement so long as the horse's mood is still willing and he's not feeling overwhelmed.

I now know the emergency handbrake is working for Star, phew.... It's time to move his feet forward under saddle. I squeezed gently with both legs while rotating my pelvis pushing forward with my seat bones in the saddle. Star instantly moved forward; I

released my pressure by removing my legs and relaxing my body saying “Good boy”. He immediately stopped at the “good boy” so I squeezed again and he instantly moved off the leg pressure. As a high energy Arab Star was going to be fairly easy to teach walk, trot and canter.

Star’s forward motion was excellent, but he struggled balancing me at first, even when mounting. It is not natural for horses to carry humans so there is a time of adjustment working out the balance. You have to give your horse time to learn to balance you in each gait. Some horses learn very quickly, but Star struggled for a better part of a week. He sometimes staggered a moment when I mounted shifting his weight to balance me and I’m less than 140 pounds. (I note my weight because I believe it is important to be fair to your horse and ride the appropriate horse to your body weight).

There is a huge difference between a horse that wants to move around when you are mounting and one that has a balancing issue. To help a horse with a balancing problem, before I mount I will position his feet squarely and then I flex his head slightly so the horse can reposition if needed; sometimes a horse will move the outside front leg to adjust his balance, that’s ok. Always work on mounting from both sides helping your horse to improve his balance. Remember your horse has two brains *what you train on one side of the horse you must train on the other side* (NH TIP #14 Series II). Mounting and dismounting is the most vulnerable position that we can be in as riders. If your horse moves when mounting and it’s not a balancing issue you must fix this immediately for your own safety.^{NHT#19}

NH TIP #19 – Mounting Issues: If your horse is moving around when mounting and you know it is not a balancing issue, you need to rule out pain before you apply any discipline. Sometimes horses are trying to tell us they are in pain when we mount so seek professional help for your horse if you are in doubt. If pain issues have been eliminated you need to make the *right thing easy and the wrong thing uncomfortable* (NH TIP #9 Series I). Here’s how: Did you check saddle fit and desensitize with the saddle? If not, check out the saddle fit and always desensitize first to eliminate any saddle issues.^{NHT#20} Using the process of elimination I’m going to breakdown my mounting into steps to flush out the specific action that triggers my horse to move. The first step is to flex his head as if I’m going to mount, but not pick up my foot. If the horse moves I will repeatedly make short jerks on the rein upwards backing him up making the ssshhh sound. I will do this for about 3 seconds, stop and stare at the horse until he drops his head in submission and licks or chews as described in NH TIP #11 Series II. If the horse didn’t move his feet I pick up my foot as if to put it in the stirrup. If he tries to move away I make short jerks on the rein in an upward motion and make the ssshhh sound backing him up *making the wrong thing uncomfortable*. After I’ve disciplined for movement when I picked up my foot I need to desensitize my horse for that. I will march around my horse lifting my knees high using nurturing techniques until he settles down and stops moving. Once I have desensitized my horse to my leg lifts I am ready to try mounting again, but this time my foot will make contact with the

stirrup. I have flexed his head, praised him for standing, have rein and mane, praised him for standing, I've lifted my foot, praised him, and have now made contact in the stirrup. If the horse starts moving his feet I immediately release my foot from the stirrup, take the rein that is in my left hand and repeat the short jerking motion upwards while making the ssshhh sound backing him up *making the wrong thing uncomfortable*. I try it again, praising for each benchmark and now toe to the stirrup, but if he moves his feet I immediately repeat making it more uncomfortable by jerking upwards on the rein backing him up further while making the ssshhh sound. You can see a pattern of consistency in my discipline. Typically it only takes a few discipline moments and the horse "gets it", but if not I stick with the consistent discipline and praise for each benchmark. You must remain consistent upping the pressure for each infraction, but don't get mad or frustrated; be patient and giving with praise for the *slightest try and smallest change*; it will work. By now I have my foot in the stirrup and I'm praising my horse and stroking his neck because he is standing quietly. As I begin to stand up in the stirrup I continue to praise him if he's still standing quietly, but if he starts to move I immediately drop out of the stirrup, jerk the rein driving him back making the ssshhh sound. Rarely have I had any further problems once I'm standing in the stirrup; by then the horse has "got it" and found it to be pleasurable standing quietly. Break the problem down into baby steps and praise your horse for doing it right and make it uncomfortable when he does it wrong. If you use a mounting block the same techniques apply, but make sure you have desensitized your horse to the block if it scares him.

NH TIP #20 – Saddle Desensitizing: I include saddle desensitizing every time before I ride. For instance I like to flap the stirrup leather closest to the saddle not hitting the horse and repeat both sides. I start by tipping the horse's head towards me slightly with the lead rope while I stand at a 45 degree angle at his shoulder. I have the lead rope in my hand that is now on his neck to nurture him. I begin by lifting the stirrup and slapping the upper portion against the saddle and saddle pad. If the horse tries to move away I am able to pull on his nose towards me which disengages his hindquarters so he can't run off. I then stroke his neck and nurture him, but continue slapping at a reduced noise level until he stops moving his feet. Once I have a starting point I can increase the slapping noise until it no longer bothers him. I do this on both sides of the horse. Then I will use the end of my lead rope to tap the saddle rhythmically. I repeat holding the lead rope tipping his nose towards me standing at a 45 degree angle at the shoulder in case he gets frightened by the slapping sound against the saddle. This position gives me safer control if he was to try and get away. You'd be surprised how many horses get spooked by the slapping sound. Repeat as you did with the stirrup finding a starting point if your horse gets frightened and work up to the horse not caring about the slapping. Make sure you do not slap the horse, just the saddle.

Time and patience with Star resolved his balancing issues and soon he was walking, trotting, and cantering athletically carrying me in the saddle. We had our moments of sticky feet, but I simply flexed him, disengaged his hindquarters and bumped his outside

shoulder pushing him through a turn on the haunch. It works beautifully every time a horse gets stuck. Soon we were on the trail where he amazed me with his confidence and trust. By our second trail ride it was just the two of us where Star could explore the woods yet listened to my every cue from running up a hill to a complete stop the moment I asked; I was so very proud of him. All this was accomplished using just a halter and lead rope and in less than three months since his arrival.

Star whinnied to everyone as he departed with his owner to head home. A twinkle in his, Star was no longer a jaded angry ex-stallion, but a regal confident partner trusting in the human herd. My throat tightened and tears swelled as I waved goodbye.

Nationally recognized horse trainer Missy Wryn developed **Training the Whole Horse®** on the foundation of **Do No Harm**. Specializing in **Iron Free (bitless-spurless)** riding for both English and Western trail riding, Missy teaches safer communication and control while maintaining an affectionate relationship between horse and rider. Missy Wryn is also the founder of IRON FREE Riding, DO NO HARM Today plus inventor of the ALL-IN-ONE Rope Halter Bitless Bridle. Visit www.MissyWryn.com for more information.