

Let's Go For a Ride

By Pete Dillingham

Have you ever heard of a wild horse running into the arms of a human and saying, "Let go for a ride"? Undomesticated horses tend to show mild curiosity about man's world or try to flee to the next county. Our predator-prey instincts are responsible for that. Historically, the horse was the main course on our dinner table, and was frequently misused and abused.

Traditionally, many "bronco-busters" use mechanical devices like snubbing posts, blindfolds, ropes and severe bits to get control of a horse. Eventually a critter will respond, but out of fear and with resentment. In a human's world we occasionally see resentful employees ruled by fear. Fortunately, most good businesses have a willing and cheerful staff. We need to develop horses with that same positive attitude a good employee has. "So how the heck" you say "can we get a horse to go to work with a smile on its muzzle?" The trick is to provide a motive (other than fear) to get a horse to want to be your partner.

"Misty" had been by herself much her life. As a foal, she was pampered and doted over like every new born, but soon her novelty wore off. The next several months the foal frolicked and ran under the watchful tutorship of her mother. All that changed when the old mare was sold and the child-horse was left with insecurity and a shortage of role models. Occasionally humans were there, but her encounters with them were sporadic.

When I first saw Misty, she was standing in the shade of a tree at the far end of her pasture. As I approached the two year old, I could see a mane and tail clothed in burrs, a lack-luster coat, and hooves that needed trimming. She watched my approach with a distant concern and then started to move away. I stopped and the filly paused to graze. When I moved toward her again, I was able to get closer. Eventually I could put my hands on her, scratch her itchy spots, and lull her into a state of comfort. Within a couple of days, Misty became comfortable with people picking up her feet, being lead around by a halter, and was accepting of normal barn yard routines.

The Natural Horsemanship program uses the "Friendly Game" to establish a communication system with a steed. This technique teaches a student how to use love to motivate a horse. The same approach was used with Misty and became a staircase to building trust, discovering comfort, learning responsibilities, and fostering a bond with humans.

Today Misty lives in a loving environment. She is healthy, curious, and affectionateand when someone shows her a saddle, she might even say, "Let's go for a ride".