



Frank Bell Horse Whisperer

Horse Spooks at Everything!

Hi.

I acquired a 5 year old TB mare from a rescue about 4 weeks ago and she has problems I did not know about when I took her. After moving her to a new barn, I found out she had been adopted out about 1 ½ years ago (after supposedly failing as a racehorse although she was never raced) and was returned because of her nervous disposition. She has no confidence and spooks at anything and everything. She spooks at jump standards, buckets, halters lying on the ground, hay racks, cats, riding helmets and even the sounds of a horse snorting 50 yards away or if I breathe heavily or clear my throat while on her, she'll spook. She'll spook if someone walks around the corner of the barn and suddenly comes into view. She leaps sideways when she spooks and may buck or spin around. She will then dance sideways every time you approach the object she spooked at.

She also will rear in the crossties if you do something she does not like, such as mane pulling. I quit pulling her mane for this reason, but she still pulls back if she is displeased and will rear if you snap the lead rope and tell her to stand in a firm tone of voice. She hates a rough or loud tone of voice. I have tried working with her on the ground, leading her up to and over things that scare her in the ring, but even after several days of doing this, she does not seem to retain any memory of these objects after the lesson is over and will spook the next day if she goes near them. Occasionally, the presence of other horses in the ring or on the trail with her seems to give her confidence. She is not being overfed (she eats Legends feed) and she is turned out all night in a large field with other mares. I love her disposition most of the time (I took her for this reason), but just don't know what to do about the behavioral problems. I wasn't expecting her to be like this when I took her on trial, and I only have her on trial until the end of November. I really want to figure something out for her. She's already been returned once and I don't think it's going to help her any to go back a second time.

Do you think there is any hope for this horse? Is it possible to help her? I can't tell if it is all a confidence problem with her, or if she is playing some things up (like the rearing episodes in the ties). People who have advised me on this horse either tell me forget it and return her because horses like her never change, or she is just young and silly and I should keep working with her. I'd like to take the latter approach but I feel like we need a better game plan to be able to really help her overcome her spooking and shying. That does not seem like normal horse silliness to me and I have had and ridden a lot of green and silly horses.



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ANY advice or help or direction would be greatly appreciated. My time with her is short and I really want to give her every chance to come around.

Sincerely,
Andrea Chandler

Dear Andrea:

By the sounds of it you have some experience and really have tried to help this horse. I have a [Spooking & Shying](#) video that can be very helpful to the cases that have potential to improve. Your situation sounds extreme and by the sounds of it I wonder if there is much chance of making a big change. You can always help horses, always, and improve their confidence but let's face it, some are just past the point and will always be dangerous.

If you still want to try helping this TB, I would suggest two of my works, the first is my foundation video, [Discover the Horse You Never Knew](#). This is a set of exercises I use on all horses before mounting and it is helping thousands. So regardless of whether you keep the horse or not, you should learn these exercises to promote you and every horse you ride's safety! The second video, [Spooking & Shying](#), has helped thousands of horses as well. I take a very spooky Arab off the track and help him deal with life. It's excellent and actual footage of his transformation.

It can always get better, but the really bad ones never become totally solid. Remember also that it has a lot to do with your confidence and riding ability. The horse picks right up on your fear or lack of confidence. If you aren't riding in confidence, then you're riding in fear. Riding in confidence is about having a safety out, a safe place to go when it all falls apart and that is what my entire program is about. When the horse understands that there is a place we can go to regroup, then everyone feels better. It's called the **one-rein stop** and is the basis for my program and my foundation video. It's not about jerking the head around, but instead creating a safe, loving place first, on the ground, then in the saddle. Read the three [Western Horseman articles](#) on my site.

I'll send along my greeting letter as well. I admire your desire to help this gal. Nothing feels better when it works. It's what I do and why I do it.

Safe riding,