



Frank Bell Horse Whisperer

Reprimanding a Pony

Dear Frank,

I hope you can help. We have recently bought a lovely 13.3hh pony for our daughter. He has 3 lovely paces and a neat jump but unfortunately, when she needs to tell him off with her crop, he instantly bucks, it's not a malicious buck but it is every single time. She has only been riding a year, but she is very competent and is competing and jumping 1 metre fences. My main concern is that I do not want her to be put off. Can you help.

I have a horsey background and have taken my AI course in the UK, however I have been out of the horse world for over 15 years and really want to get this right for her.

Thanks for reading.
Tracy Williams

Dear Tracy,

He's not so happy about being whacked when out of line. There are endless ways to let a horse know they're doing something wrong besides hitting them. I always begin by letting the horse know they're getting out of bounds by using a verbal cue first. I use a progressively louder shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh sound that becomes quite annoying and is immediately followed by physical, perhaps a slight upward bump with one rein, that, as well, could become quite annoying. What happens when this technique is used properly, which means having good timing, is the moment the horse hears the shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh noise, he knows something more serious is coming and either stops the behavior or pays the price. Suddenly whacking the horse out of nowhere just makes the pony mad and he bucks. Wouldn't you?

Give him a chance to correct his behavior with the shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, then reprimand if or when necessary and make it progressively more uncomfortable until the behavior ends. Then quit immediately and praise the horse with soothing words and stroking the neck/withers, thereby creating a comfortable white zone and an obvious and uncomfortable black zone. With good timing most horses figure this out quickly.

Safe riding,