

Behaviour



**SARAH CLARK
BSC (HONS)
SEBC PTC**

is a qualified and registered Equine Behaviour Consultant. Find out more about her work at

www.helpwithhorsebehaviour.co.uk

Refusing to let others lead

Q I'm desperate to get out more with my ex-racer and I dream of taking her to the beach but, when she canters out in a group, she becomes very silly if she's not in the lead. What can I do?

Caitlin Rowley, Hull

A It sounds like your mare is demonstrating 'play behaviour', most likely in an attempt to change the situation. You're certainly not alone facing this challenge as horses, being highly

sociable prey animals, often feel safer staying with others.

What to do

Step one When cantering alone, practise half-halts or vary your canter stride (for example, five short, five longer). This will encourage your horse to become more attentive to your aids and is best practised in a school before you try it out on a hack.

Step two Choose a calming companion and try the same half-halt exercise in trot and, when comfortable, in canter. Try this with your friend riding behind you at first. If this goes okay, let them ride beside you for a few strides only.

Step three Ask your friend to slowly take the lead in canter but only when you're ready. Do this for just a few strides before both coming back to trot.

Step four Repeat step three, but gradually increase the distance between you and your friend as you become more confident, and increase the time you stay in canter. Use your half-halts and vary the stride to keep your horse's attention.

Why it works

Having this continual conversation will guide and reassure your horse. She'll be less inclined to make the decisions and learn that



Having a friend ride beside you – either in your school or paddock – can help your horse to learn that he doesn't always have to be in the lead

it's actually OK to be behind.

Sensitive horses can perceive tension in our own bodies. Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing and visualisation. Even talking or singing can help as it forces us to breathe.

Confidence comes from repeating something again and again. I hope you'll find practise makes your dream come true and you'll be off to the beach.



Beach riding is something we all dream of but it's important that you feel confident in charge of your horse before you go



In-hand exercises are a brilliant way to build trust and boost your relationship with your horse

Planting her feet

Q My mare refuses to go forward when I'm leading her on the ground. She lifts her head, backs away and throws a little rear. She also refuses to go anywhere near the wash bay. Can you help?

Harriet Ward, by email

A There could be an aspect of her environment that she's negatively associating with leaving the paddock or going near the wash bay.

Horses are highly sociable and have acute senses so they see, smell, hear and feel things differently to us.

Try to find out what the cause is. Does she not want to leave a friend? Maybe she doesn't like the feel of cold or jetted water or it could even be that the sight and sounds of the hose worry her.

Leading tips to try

- 1 Horses read our body language as they would with another horse. When you lead her, lead shoulder to shoulder as this puts you in the natural 'driving' position, just as another horse would.
- 2 Encourage her to go forward with slight rein pressure. The instant she moves, release the pressure and praise her.
- 3 Give her a favourite treat when she walks in the direction you want her to go. Then, only treat her again when you're slightly

closer to where you want to go. Anticipating something nice will make her feel good.

4 If it's safe for you to do so, the moment she plants her feet, immediately turn her in a small circle that's about 5m-10m (whatever is comfortable for her). If she persists, add another circle each time she plants her feet. Faced with harder work, she'll choose to walk forward instead. In-hand exercises build communication and trust, so practise often.

For professional S.E.B.C. advice, visit www.societyofequinebehaviourconsultants.org.uk