



Ask the experts

BONDING: Sarah says...



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Being left out in the field with no company can be upsetting for many horses



Attachment issues

Q My four-year-old gelding is very attached to the horses he lives with. He cries when others leave the field or if I take him away. How can I make him less dependent?
Fiona Chipping, Northampton

Sarah says... When your gelding calls out he could be showing confident territorial behaviour or some anxiety about leaving a field buddy. As herd animals, horses are highly sociable, which means that his behaviour is perfectly natural.

The good news is there's a lot you can do to help him and also deepen the bond you share with him at the same time.

From what you've said, it sounds as though your horse is whinnying. This is a

loud, long call that begins high and ends in a low frequency. All calls are social behaviour and the whinny roughly translates as "I'm here, where are you?"

As with people, every horse is different. Some are naturally self-confident, while some get assurance from being with others. As a herd animal, just being within sight of others can give a horse security.

When they're with us instead, we can give horses the confidence they need by using positive handling techniques.

How to increase confidence

- Find out which particular field-mate your horse is keen to stay with. If it's safe and practical to do so, bring them in at the same time to decrease any

anxiety your horse is feeling.

- Give your horse confidence by leading him shoulder to shoulder. When you're turning a corner, put yourself on the outside. This means you're positioned with your own shoulder in line with his.
- By leading him positively forwards this way, you're putting yourself in a natural driving position, just like another confident horse would. Essentially, you're mimicking the horse's natural body language, which can really help in training and relationship building.
- When you're leading, make plenty of walk-halt and halt-walk transitions, wiggly lines and changes of direction to make things interesting and keep your horse's focus on you.

PHOTO: TIERFOTOAGENTUR/ALAMY

Who's in control?

Q I know there's an ongoing debate about whether you should be your horse's friend or his leader. What works best — especially if you've a horse who mucks about and spooks a lot!
Kristy Scott, Berkshire

Sarah says... This is a very good question! I believe we can be both a friend and a leader to our horses, depending on the situation and the horse. I don't think a friend and a leader should be thought of as being polar opposites.

Let's for a moment consider the horse in his natural setting, grazing in a herd. Some horses will have a tendency to be confident and take more of a leader role, while others find security in having a confident buddy and take a back seat from making decisions.

In any horse pairing, one horse is always more confident and the other submissive (or less confident). This is natural equine etiquette and is an essential part of ensuring the safety and survival of all herd members.

Follow the leader

When we take the part of leader, it offers security to our horse, which in turn makes him feel more relaxed.

It's interesting you say your horse "mucks about and spooks". This sort of behaviour can indicate that the horse feels he is the more confident member of your partnership. He may feel that he's responsible for keeping everyone safe, attempting to make the decisions, and so on.

By kindly showing your confidence, your horse will begin to look to you for security and guidance instead. He will feel more relaxed, so spooking and attempting to take the lead will lessen, as he will know you've got his back.

Try some kind and positive relationship bonding touches that signal to your horse you're confident and he can look to you for assurance. For a demo video, go to bit.ly/2vNfazr.

Be confident when you ride and your horse will look to you for direction





Ask the experts

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Language of love

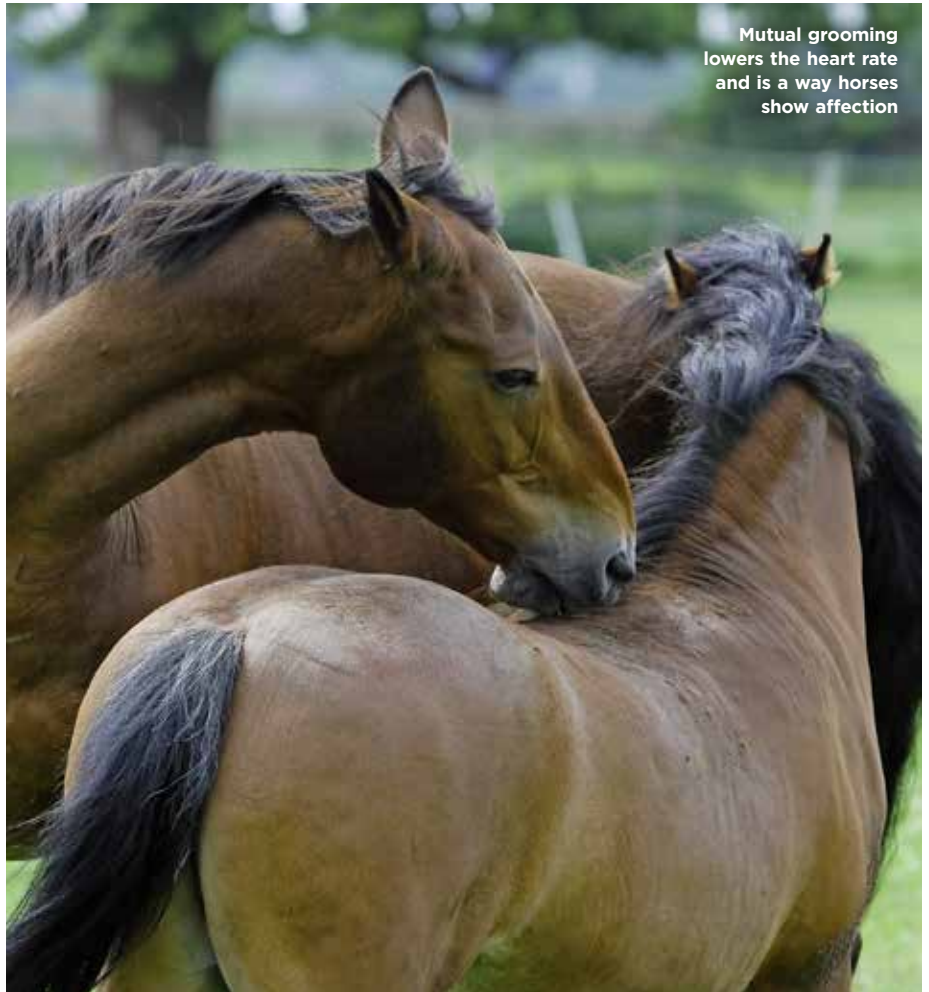
Q How do horses show affection, apart from whinnying and calling to each other?

Hannah Ark, Cumbria

Sarah says... As sociable animals, horses spend a large proportion of their time communicating with each other, mainly through their body language. Generally, by allowing horses as much freedom, forage and friendship as we possibly can, it satisfies their inbuilt needs and makes them feel happier and more settled.

Horses enjoy being in close proximity to one another, bringing their heads and muzzles close and scratching, leaning against and resting on each other. A pair of horses will also show their established bond by mutual grooming. This is where they scratch each other along their top lines with their muzzles, sometimes using teeth to satisfy really itchy spots, and massage each other.

The way horses are vocal tells us much about their relationships. A squeal, which sounds like a sharp scream, means "I don't like that" or "you are not the boss". Or you may hear a nicker when horses greet each other (and often their owner). This is a low, vibrating sound that encourages contact and roughly translates as "you can come close".



Mutual grooming lowers the heart rate and is a way horses show affection



Advice from Clare Barfoot of Spillers®, proud sponsors of Ask the Experts

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Cutting the calories

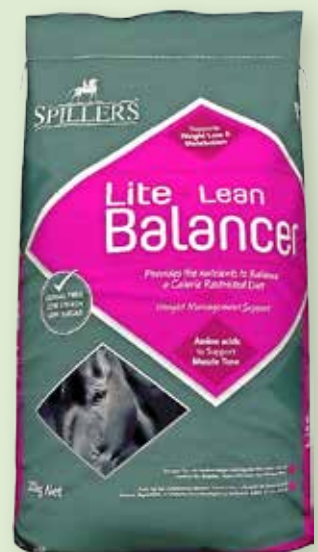
Vicky Taunton wants to know whether a 'lite' balancer can help her rather round cob mare Maddie.

Despite the grass shortage this summer, Maddie has continued to pile on the pounds, not least because Vicky hasn't been able to ride after breaking her wrist. Vicky is absolutely right to want to take control of Maddie's weight, especially before any autumn flush of grass, but I'm afraid a 'lite' balancer isn't a magic diet pill. If only it were that easy!

Quite simply, if Maddie is continuing to gain weight, she is receiving more calories than she is burning. Vicky should restrict Maddie's grazing time and could consider introducing a grazing muzzle if the grass sward is long enough to poke through the

muzzle holes. Nutrition support in the form of around 500g of a specialist balancer a day will help support Maddie's restricted diet, giving her the vitamins and minerals she needs, but without extra calories. Ideally Vicky should choose one that's high in amino acids to help maintain Maddie's muscle tone and topline and also contains added ingredients to help support a healthy metabolism.

SPILLERS® Lite + Lean Balancer is specially formulated with a broad spectrum of vitamins and minerals to balance a calorie-restricted diet. It's high in amino acids, including extra lysine, methionine and threonine that are often lacking in hay to help support lean muscle and topline.



It also contains cinnamon, FOS and magnesium to support weight loss and a healthy metabolism, and is suitable for those prone to laminitis too. 🐾