

Have a question about your horse's health, care or training? Our experts offer solutions for a range of equine-management problems. Write to EQUUS Consultants, 656 Quince Orchard Road, #600, Gaithersburg, MD 20878; E-mail: EQletters@EquiNetwork.com. Send photos when helpful.

TRAINING A terror on the trail

Q *I adopted a Quarter Horse foal from a rescue, and he is now 19 months old. He is very smart and behaves well most of the time, but when I pony him on the trail he can become a different horse. Some days he does just fine, but at other times he goes berserk—he bucks, rears and tries to bite my other horse, Rocky. How can I get him to calmly walk on the trail?*

Kristina Jauch
Anthem, Arizona

A Without being able to observe the situation, I can only share my thoughts based on what you have written. When a horse shows resistance, it's usually out of fear or disrespect, or sometimes a combination of both. Before we discuss what might be the cause of your horse's behavior, let's address some additional factors that might also be significant:

- **Young horses tend to act like babies.** Going out into the world and down a trail with a 19-month-old horse (even one with some training) is very much like taking a 19-month-old child to the grocery store. In both cases you never know how they will behave, and each time could be totally different. If they learn to be obstinate or exhibit undesirable behavior at a young age, your ability to teach them to "behave" in that environment may be quite limited.

- **Unless you have personally raised a foal from birth, you can't truly know what prior experience has shaped a horse's life and demeanor.** Foals learn to respect a leader by first respecting their mothers. They learn to socialize and adapt to an established pecking or-

der by growing up in a herd with other horses. Because your gelding came from a rescue, we don't know how people or other horses influenced his early life. It's quite possible he was motherless, lived without a functioning herd, and had little, if any, human training.

- **A horse's number one motivating force is survival.** He will always choose a leader who is wiser and more experienced because it makes him feel safer and increases his

chances of survival. If a person has established herself as the leader, a horse will trust and respect her decisions and happily

HOMEWORK FIRST:

Before taking your horse out on the trail, establish an acceptable level of trust, respect and good behavior.

PAULA DA SILVA/ARND BRONKHORST PHOTOGRAPHY



comply with any request. On the other hand, if a horse doesn't feel like his handler is adequate to be a leader, he will assume the role himself and make his own decisions.

It sounds like your baby does not accept you as his leader. If he chooses to behave, he will. But if on any given day he decides he doesn't feel like going down the trail, he will definitely let you know. Leadership among a herd is always established on the ground; it is how horses naturally earn trust and respect among each other. The same method applies to people and horses—if you focus on groundwork to establish yourself as his leader, you will strengthen your place above him in the hierarchy.

A number of today's training programs include simple and effective groundwork exercises. I would suggest that you work on establishing your leadership on the ground in a controlled environment. Do not take your horse back to the trail until you believe you have established an acceptable level of trust, respect and behavior that is safe in your arena.

When you do return to the trail, your training might be safer and more effective if you walk on foot and lead him at first. Go a little way, and if he is comfortable, calm and relaxed, then reward his good behavior by taking him home. He will quickly learn that the easiest and quickest way to get back home is to be a good boy. Repeat this and go a little farther each time.

Once you have been consistently successful, you can pony him with your other horse, Rocky. Always remember, your gelding is a young horse who is emotionally immature and has a limited attention span, and he needs time to learn how to behave with mutual confidence, trust and respect.

Tim Hayes

*Natural horsemanship trainer
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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS



Tim Hayes is a natural horsemanship clinician based in East Hampton, New York, with affiliates in the New England and Mid-Atlantic states.

He conducts clinics, classes and private sessions for both English and Western riders throughout the United States and Canada. Hayes is currently a visiting instructor at the University of Connecticut and The University of Vermont. His website is www.hayesisforhorses.com.