

There's No App For That

By Barbra Ann King

Our world is overwhelmed with ever-evolving technology. I used to joke that one day my phone would do my dishes, but I bet there is already an app out there that can start my dishwasher. We are always looking for answers in all the wrong places and expecting instant results. We have a tendency to do the same when it comes to understanding our horses.

Here's an example of what I mean. A fellow bought a horse that was well broke, healthy and seasoned. He let the horse settle into his new surroundings for a week or so, then took his new horse to local team penning competitions and did well. After a few weeks, his horse went "ballistic" on



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him as he was tacking him up. The fellow figured the horse didn't like being tied up and because he had another incident earlier with the horse misbehaving under saddle, he decided to "can" him.

When I asked the fellow, he had many justifications for why his horse had to be killed. None of these scenarios mentioned anything about his saddle irritating the horse's back. This fellow is also a big man but he refused to think that this answer was correct because the horse had done so well earlier on.

I'm sad to say that many, many horses are destroyed regularly because owners are unwilling to see the real answer to the problem. If we take a look at this example, the horse's prior owner was using a different saddle on him, one that probably fit him better. I would bet that the prior owner also used a different bit and there's a good chance he/she was smaller than the fellow who bought him.

Secondly, when a saddle doesn't fit well, problems don't always appear immediately. Similar to our shoes hurting when they are too small for us or too stiff, blisters will develop until we can no longer tolerate them.

When a 250lb man sits on a horse that has an ill-fitting saddle, pain will show up. Here are some ways a horse will ask for help, and there may be more depending on how the horse chooses to express himself:

- Difficult to catch
- Fidget during grooming
- Move around while being tacked up
- Refuse to be tied
- Refuse to let you clean their feet
- Move around when you try to get on

Most people have a saddle that fits them very well and that they find very comfortable. They will use this saddle on every horse they ride. If it "seems" to not quite fit properly, they usually add an extra saddle pad. To these people, I recommend getting a treeless saddle. Not only will it be the most comfortable saddle you ever sit in, it will also fit many different horses without causing them pain and discomfort. I would go as far as saying that in this case, it might have saved this horse's life.

The fellow in my example could have done a saddle check to see if that was the issue. If it was the saddle, all he needed to do is let the horse's back heal by giving him a break for a few weeks or use an equine sports massage therapist, the latter being the better option. Then, find a proper fitting saddle for him and his horse.

This is a simple solution and although it may seem obvious to some of you, it always surprises me at how people look for easy answers in all the wrong places, such as:

- the previous owner did something;
- the trainer scared him;
- the horse went sour;
- the horse doesn't like his pasture mates, prefers to be alone;
- the horse doesn't like men;
- the horse doesn't like _____. (You name it! I've heard it all!)

I've often said that the horse's biggest



Horses always bring a smile

problem is being too compliant and kind. They take in so much discomfort, quietly trying to do their best for their rider. In the long run, they pay the price dearly because when they "voice their opinion," they are forced to shut up and move on and no one listens to them.

We live in a world dominated by technology. We are used to having answers at our fingertips. Horses' reactions are mainly fear-based or pain-related. There is no need to feng shui their pasture, change the color of their halters, get a softer blanket or call all previous owners to find out what happened. Take responsibility and investigate what is causing the pain and/or fear, and allow your horse some response time. They need time to heal, trust and readjust.

There is no app for a quick fix solution when it comes to horses.

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