

David Genadek

To: Elizabeth Graves
Subject: RE: Rocky Question

Hi, Liz! How are you? We are doing fine. Our horses survived tennis ball-sized hail last night! This is the place where our horses are kept.

Anyways, on Sunday, we went out to work our horses. started in the barn to do her massage on T. I started in the round pen with ground work, saddling, etc. Our plan was to meet in the larger riding arena so we both could ride together. This arena is about 100 yds from the barn. I took Rocky out there but forgot to close the gate. Well, he decided the wind was scary and he was too far from anything safe and took off in a dead run back to the barn at full speed. I did stay on! (one-rein stop never occurred to me) I just let it go, chalking it up to immaturity and insecurity. My horse-riding friends are saying I should have punished him/ kicked his butt, etc. This is the same session that mentioned that T was even spooky in. How should I have handled Rocky's disobedience in light of the circumstances?

Oh, and the sight of Rocky flying to the barn at full speed with me on him was all it took. bought me a helmet.

Liz's reply:

Good Morning,

Holy big hail stones!!!

Glad all are Ok, watch the horses though as those sized hail stones will bruise your horses pretty badly and one does not know it as one cannot see the bruises under skin and hair. Hopefully they were all able to get under shelter. I hate hail, nasty , noisy damaging stuff for sure.

Yes I talked to the other day and she shared about the spook.

Wind and horses are never a good thing except on those seasoned horses wired really cold emotionally.

Another thing they seem susceptible to is barometric pressure coming from weather changes.

I don't agree with your friends that would be abusing your horse for what he does not understand and is a natural response to him.

First horses are a prey animal so flight is their first instinct to react in self-preservation, dogs being a predator they fight instead.

It's normal and understood well by those that have studied horse behavior. It is what they are and what they do, each horse is different in just how and how much they react in fearful situations. Young inexperienced horses of course react more and with proper developed relationship through trust and good experiences with their riders these fears can and will melt away in time and with age.

If handled with a punishment your horse will become non trusting in and even more fearful of you and it's surrounding, hence making a re-hab horse.

So with this, know that when he spooked and ran , he did not respond to rein and/or whoa he did not even now you were on him, he was fleeing in terror and nothing you could have done would have stopped it once it got that far. A 1 rein stop is an option but you also could have pulled him off his feet and made it come out worse. That is one of those things that one takes a chance in doing but it is certainly an option, a last one for me. That's way we say even if you put in a bit with 12 inch shanks and a mouth piece made of barb wire it will not stop a horse in a bolt from fear.

It's the relationship and experience of the horse and rider that will.

Also, if you grabbed with your legs when this happened it said he was right to be afraid and escalated it further.

So , you have a green young horse, probably in the best health he has ever been in in his life. He is now conscious and not numb.

You had a windy day where his senses could not take in all the noises around him and you combined that with a green rider just learning what horses are. You have just begun to learning to use your own body and emotions to communicate with your horse.

Young horse at new home, remember it takes one year for a horse to really settle into a new place. They will always be more on guard till that year or 4 seasons has past. They are migratory herbivores that establish territory and he has not yet done that.

Although a good confident teacher and handler can help them be confident and settle in faster, for some horses the more they move the more accepting they become of changes. Unfortunately, with bad experiences and mis-handling the opposite can be true and the horse can become nervous, more unsettled and dangerous.

It's all in what we do to make them be Ok with new situations. It will not be the last time this happens, so it's up to you to help him.

At this point you should be sure you have another seasoned horse with you when you go on a ride as he will look to his own species for support because as he knows and feels your inexperience too.

As I said take it slow with him, small pieces at a time, walk him around from the ground in new places first and be reassuring with him so he connects with you and is better when you are up riding. If it does not feel right don't get on, do ground work and work on relationship instead.

The old saying Green and green makes black and blue is a very true statement meaning, green horse, green rider. It can all be avoided if you do things right, slow and do everything thinking of the horse's needs first. Not what you want to do, but what the green horse needs. As I've stated before, you have to think like a horse when teaching horses as they cannot think like you.

Now you know why I wear helmets, we are not always in control and things happen in the blink of an eye no matter how good a horse or horseman one is. We can work that flight instinct out of our horses but we can not punish it out.

Hope this helps.

Liz