



A NICE RIDE OUT

A study of three napping horses

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INTRODUCTION

Some of the worst times in my riding life have been spent sitting on horses who did not want to go forward, trying to convince them that they did. Depending on the horse the behaviour has varied. Many have frozen on the spot. Some have spun round and started charging for home. Some have gone backwards. Some have even had the cheek to buck when I hit them, which I used to do.

Knowing what I do now, I am ashamed that I hit them. But in my defence, I was hitting them for several reasons which made sense at the time:

- I had been taught to hit and praised for doing so
- Hitting sometimes appeared to solve the problem
- I was in a hurry (usually taking out a ride of paying clients)
- I could think of no other solution.

This project is my attempt to understand what causes horses to nap, and how we can change their behaviour for the better.

The project outline

I teach in a busy riding school on Saturdays, just outside Reading. We have about 50 horses, half of which are privately owned and half are used in the school. Many of them have issues with either going out for a ride alone, or leading a ride of other horses.

I chose three of the worst cases, and planned to work with them as often as possible for a year, to see if I could improve their behaviour. My plans included:

- join-up
- foundation exercises
- longlining—indoors and out
- backing up
- desensitizing to frightening objects
- riding out.

My goal was to improve the trust and respect between us to such a level that a 'simple' thing such as walking round a block together would no longer be a problem. I started work in November 2004 and finished in October this year, and did up to three trial rides out in April, July and October to get a sense of progress.

Napping and its causes

Napping means to refuse to go forward, but its causes hard to unravel. Without understanding my horses' motivation, I was very unlikely to solve the root cause. In 'From My Hands to Yours', Monty discusses napping in a different section from one on barn sour syndrome and separation anxiety, although the second two certainly cause the first.

I have noticed that horses are more often frightened of what might be dangerous than what is actually dangerous. This is the instinct that makes them run if a leaf rustles because it might be a wolf. If a rider hits them when they are deciding whether something is a threat or not, then the rider has proved that the horse is right—they are in trouble. Although a horse may allow himself to be bullied past one obstacle, each time he meets a new one he will resist harder. In the horse's mind, the rider is ordering him to commit suicide.

MY THREE NAPPING HORSES

Sky



Sky arrived at the stables in 2002 aged 4. About 15.3 liver chestnut, she is well bred and has beautiful paces. She was bought by an ambitious teenager and was also ridden by a serious dressage rider. Before long Sky was napping and was sold on to Kim, who wanted to be able to ride her without a stick. Sky is usually gentle, quite often alone. She does not naturally take the lead with other horses. She can be tricky to load. When I first started working with her, she refused to leave the 'safe' end of the indoor school, and on a hack spent so much time spooking it was impossible to travel forwards.

On a ride out, Sky was frightened of the universe. What was extraordinary was the things that did not frighten her. She did not even sniff at a bright blue tarpaulin and walked straight over. Behind another horse she is rock solid in traffic. She stood like a statue while I flapped a bright yellow umbrella as a last resort to try to send her away from me. So nearly everything she fears is potential danger rather than actual.

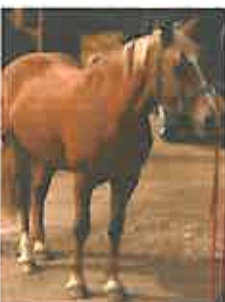
Keeleigh



Keeleigh joined the yard in about 2001, aged 6, 16.1, dark bay part thoroughbred. She soon made herself unpopular by napping, bucking and rearing, but she proved usable in the riding school where she is angelic at the back on hacks and rideable in the indoor school. Like Sky, she is prepared to work in an outline, and I have seen her being held with her nose tucked in for long periods of time.

Keeleigh marches up to other horses and terrorises them until they get out of her way. She also tends to be dominant towards humans, and wants to be in front of them all the time. Despite this, when the herd is cantering round, Keeleigh is a follower not a leader. She is good to load. When I started working with her, she had not been ridden in any outdoor lesson or led a hack for several years because she had thrown off so many people.

Kira



Kira was bought at Reading Horse Sale mostly because of her flowing gold mane and long eyelashes. Probably born in about 1992, she is a 15 hh chestnut, slightly cobby, possibly with a little bit of Arab somewhere a long way back. People started to notice that although given to spooking, bucking and charging and with a dodgy accelerator and steering, Kira could jump. She went on loan to an ambitious teenager who is an exceptionally rough rider, but before long she was back in the school.

When Kira first joined the yard, she would often be alone, head down, a picture of dejection. Since then she has discovered the joys of love, and is often pair bonded with a gelding. She is one of the most ticklish horses I have ever met, and at one stage was quite aggressive to humans. She never leads the herd and is often last to follow. She is dreadful to load and frightened of most objects, real and imaginary. When I started working with her, she would sometimes lead a ride for a short period, but it was not long before she would turn into a statue. Alone, she would not leave the safety of the stables. Over the years she has become completely desensitized to all leg and hand signals.

<u>Attitudes and experiences in common</u>	Sky	Keeleigh	Kira
Ridden in an outline for long periods	*	*	
Difficult to load	*		*
Not a natural leader	*	*	*
Has been hit hard	*		*
Nervous of real and imaginary things	*	*	*
Difficult to rein back		*	*
No trust in humans		*	*
No respect for humans	*	*	*
Difficult to move out of your space	*	*	*
Difficult to send forward on longlines	*	*	*
Suffers from separation anxiety		*	*

From this it can be seen that at least two of the horses fit into every category.

Lifestyles

In the year that I was working with them, all three horses lived out. Sky was ridden by her owner Kim for about five hours a week. Kira and Keeleigh were both in the riding school. In a typical week they do about ten hours work, including lessons and following on hacks. This means that neither of them are ever away from other horses, and never take the initiative of leading a ride. I was trying change their habitual patterns of behaviour, and when progress was slow, I had to remind myself that they were still working ten hours in the school for every one or two hours they were with me. Every day they were being handled by people who have not been trained in basic leading techniques.

WHAT HAPPENED

A timetable of what happened when is found at the back—appendix 1.

Join-up

With all three horses, I started with join-up to make sure we were relatively on the same team. They had all joined up effectively a year or more previously, but they had all lost faith in the human race, and when I started this project they were not joined up at all.

1. Sky

Sky had become very resistant to being sent away, and I had to spend some time teaching her to get out of my space. Although there were some offerings of friendship, she quite clearly felt that she was the leader. In retrospect, I think my body language was not as clear as it should have been, and I was probably inviting her in from too far back. My feeling is that our final ride out together would have been better if she was fully joined up.

2. Keeleigh

Keeleigh was easy to join up with indoors, but outdoors, where I had to use a line, she was very resistant indeed. We had a breakthrough in the outdoor paddock in May. After she came in to me I felt a great outpouring of misery and frustration. It was as if it was the first time she felt I was worth confiding in (anthropomorphism, but it is true.) I stayed with her for ages just stroking her, and her head was lower than ever before.

3. Kira

I was reluctant to try a formal join-up with Kira, as she had been so good in the past but had since lost all trust in humans. I did try one in May, and she ignored me totally. After that I tried some short ones on a line, using hardly any sending away and lots of praise when she came in. By September I found that she was following up—no sending away at all, but as I walked in circles she came too.

Foundation exercises

1. Sky

Sky took a while to grasp the general idea of reacting to light pressure. She had got it into her head that all she had to do was shove and humans got out of her way. She learnt backing up much quicker than moving sideways. With retrospect I wish I had spent more time teaching her owner how to use the exercises effectively.

2. Keeleigh

Keeleigh learnt to back up quite fast, although rein back took much longer. She hated going sideways on either side of a pole. Her progress in the outdoor school was months behind her progress indoors, and the first time I took her outside, she reared straight up. She was so fearful in the corners of the outdoor school that I spent a lot of time just asking her to stand still. Then as she progressed I started asking her to go backwards and forwards into the scary corners, then eventually sideways into them. It was at this stage that she relaxed enough to become rideable out of doors.

Neck flexing and head lowering have been very valuable with Keeleigh, as to begin with it was a like a vertical iron bar. When I first took her out into a big field she whinnied frequently due to separation anxiety. The noise she made lessened as her opinion of me rose, and eventually disappeared.

3. Kira

Kira on a good day is brilliant at foundation exercises, because I started work with her back in 2002. Unfortunately, although she is lovely to handle from the ground, this does not extend to ridden work as she has been so desensitized in the riding school.

Longlining

From reading Kelly's books, I was aware that longlining could be the key to curing a napping horse's behaviour. I was hoping that once they longlined well in a big field, then on tracks, riding out would be easy. Unfortunately it was not this simple, although it is an invaluable tool.

1. Sky

Sky was the hardest to longline indoors. She had a problem area where she was sure that lions lived, and it took a long time to reduce her fear. However, she did improve slowly but surely, and as the longlining got better so did her ridden behaviour.

Out of doors she was calm but not always easy to control. Again her resistance gradually dropped, and I found her quite easy to ride in an open space. We are lucky in that our fields are bordered by busy roads, so horses have frequent exposure to traffic.



2. Keeleigh

In the indoor school she would sometimes rush forwards, perhaps bucking. I soon found that I could put her onto a tight circle as a mild punishment, and eventually she decided that if charging meant she would have to circle, she might just as well not bother.

Out of doors she was very extreme. It was about a month before I even tried putting her on two lines, because she was so difficult to handle on one. Every time she charged I put her on a small circle, and whatever happened I kept her working until she had done something right, even if this just meant walking a few paces.

The bigger the field the worse her behaviour. On one occasion she had been leaping round me like a dolphin and then got away. I caught her, walked at her and she backed away fast. Then I did a short join-up on a line, and she licked and chewed hard with her head right down, and I felt she was apologising. A few weeks later, in the same field, she charged for the gate again. I took one line in both hands and turned her. I have seldom seen such a surprised horse, and afterwards it was as if she said 'go on then, you drive', and plodded calmly round the field.



3. Kira

Kira can longline beautifully, but she often lacks enthusiasm. There were times I thought she would never do more than plod. But over the year she did improve, and towards the end I spent quite a long time longlining her on tracks. She tended to be spooky even then, and I often had to lead her past a problem.

Backing up

Reading Monty's books and listening to him at demonstrations, what comes across is that

without control of reverse you have no control of forwards. Sky's backing up was good, but her last ride out was in April, just before she left the yard. I had no time to try it with her when she was napping. Keeleigh was dreadful to rein back in the beginning, but during the year she improved, and managed a half mile reverse during a ride out. Kira's rein back was probably the best of all and on our last ride I felt in complete control of forwards and reverse. It was a good feeling.

Desensitizing

During the year I made sure that all three horses were comfortable over, under and between tarpaulins, loading, and being touched all over with a plastic bag. In all departments Sky was the most relaxed and Kira the most anxious, but she improved hugely as the year progressed. I introduced them to some marquees which had been put up in a paddock.



Riding out

Reports on my three formal rides out are described in appendix 2. I did some other hacking as we worked which is outlined below.

1. Sky

Sky spent more time being ridden by her owner than me, and she had mixed success. One ride was so good she nearly rang me. When riding with other horses, Sky tended to want to hide at the back. Kim's feeling was that she had improved 60% after working with me, which she was very pleased with, but they left in April so we had to stop work.

2. Keeleigh

I did not dare to ride Keeleigh out in the front until the end of July, which was more successful than I had expected. The next time I took her out, I had been to a Monty demonstration and heard him say 'back them up ten miles if you have to.' She refused to go forwards, so we reversed. After about half a mile she was beginning to lose the plot, so I went beside my friend instead. I did manage to ride in front for some of the way home.

Then we had a ride out that was brilliant, alone. I had meant to longline away from home then ride back. After 10 minutes she was so relaxed and obedient I thought I would get on. To my amazement she walked forward. We rode for about 45 minutes with only one major spook. Our final ride out was very satisfying.

3. Kira

Kira has an ability to plod, with her head down, which was thoroughly depressing. I spent a

lot of time alone with her, with a backpack containing longlines and motivational small feed, which I gave her at the furthest point from home. First I noticed that the ride home was actually quite pleasant. Then I noticed that most of the ride was quite pleasant, and she even began to listen to my legs.

On our last ride out she walked quietly up the road away from home, which is something that I thought she would never do. Although Keeleigh is more dramatic than Kira, it was Kira who was the most satisfying to ride in the end.

CONCLUSION

How to create a napping horse

- Make sure your horse is always given food and comfort the moment he comes home
- Always ride him directly back to the stable
- Establish a habit of following
- If he hesitates for any reason, hit him hard, as quickly as possible
- Handle your horse in such a way that he knows he is the boss
- Make sure your tack is uncomfortable, specially the saddle and bit
- Never have fun on rides
- Ride 'on the bit', without allowing rests, as often as possible—use a stick to reinforce this
- The moment your horse worries you, take him home (preferably on foot)
- Never dismount if your horse is frightened of an obstacle
- Never sit quietly and allow time to pass
- Never teach rein back.

How to cure a napping horse

- Create trust and respect between you
- Use longlining to strengthen the 'go forward' message
- Reward good behaviour. This can be by:
 - * stroking and praise
 - * food (but not by hand)
 - * dismounting
- Use negative reinforcement when necessary. This can be:
 - * wip wop rope
 - * bumping legs (not painful. Alternately often works better than together)
 - * small circles
 - * backing up
- Make sure your horse is as good at walking backwards as he is forwards, and give him the choice of which way to proceed
- Check all tack is as comfortable as possible. A Dually is much better for schooling than a bridle
- Never ride directly to home. Walk for at least 100 yards.
- Be aware of your horse's feelings. If he is frightened, stay still until the adrenalin has dropped.
- Be prepared to lead him past exceptionally frightening things.
- In extreme cases, try blocking out his sightline behind by taping a mask or using sheepskin on cheekpieces.

A nice ride out?

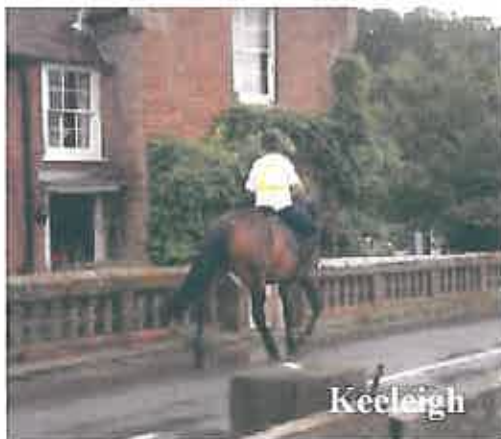
Having spent a year working with three napping horses, and observing many others, I have only just begun my learning curve. Whenever you work with a napping horse, it is your responsibility to convince him that you are a leader worthy of both trust and respect. In the case of a horse with extreme separation anxiety, like Kira, you are aiming to make her accept you as a substitute horse. I have noticed that the more a horse is a natural leader in the herd, the less likely he is to nap.

Although I made numerous mistakes during the year, I never hurt any of the horses, and they seemed to forgive me for my incompetence. As the year progressed, it was deeply satisfying that Keeleigh and Kira would both come to me in the field. I had lots of reports of their behaviour improving in the riding school, and both horses increased in popularity. By August, Keeleigh was safe for clients to ride in the outdoor paddock. With hindsight there are several ways I could have speeded up progress and I would certainly have done desensitization and loading earlier on.

The two final rides I had on Keeleigh and Kira were amazing, because of the improvement from unrideable to very enjoyable. Neither are perfect, although Kira is nearly, but with both of them I can genuinely say 'we had a nice ride out.'

Finally, in the words of the Dalai Lama, I would like to quote:

'the way to change minds is with affection, not anger.'



Appendix 1

Timetable

Horse Month	Sky	Total Sessions	Keeleigh	Total Sessions	Kira	Total Sessions
November-04	3 Jups Fex/LL.	5	2 Jups/ R in Fex/LL	8		
December-04	Fex/LL	2	Jup fex/LL in and out	3		
January-05	Fex/LL in	1	Fex/LL in and out R in Tarp	4	Mini Jups Fex/LL, ride in, tarp	4
February-05	Fex/LL tarp	2	Tarp & plat Fex/LL in and out	5	Fex/LL in and out	2
March-05	4 Jups Fex/LL in	8	Fex in & out LL in/ Jup	5	Fex/LL & ride in & out	3
April-05	Fex/LL out Hack 1	2	Fex/LL out Fex big	4	Fex/LL ride big & out Hack 1	7
May-05			2 Jups, Fex in, out & big R in	6	Jup, Fex/ LL, ride big & out. 3 hacks	6
June-05			Fex/LL out & big. Ride out!	6	Fex/LL, ride in big. hacks	4
July-05			Fex/LL big and out. Hack 1	5	Fex/LL ride in & big, Hack 2	8
August-05	Summer Holidays					
September-05			Under & over Tarp. LL big & out & trax. Ride big	8	Under & over tarp & plat. LL & ride out, LL & trax	7
October-05			PB, Load, LL/ ride out, big & trax Hack 2	9	PB, load LL/ ride big & trax. Hack 3	5

Overall Sessions:	Sky:	18	Keeleigh:	63	Kira:	46
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Key:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Jup - Join up | R - Riding |
| Plat - Platform | Fex - Foundation Exercises |
| Trax - Lanes and tracks | LL - Long lining |
| Big - Big field | Tarp - Tarpauline |
| Out - Outdoor paddock | PB - Plastic bag |

Appendix 2 overleaf describes the formal rides out in detail.

Appendix 2—Formal Rides Out

Hack 1—Sky April 5th (alone)

She did walk away from the farm and up the road, although with a lot of stops and spooks. I would not have got far without a wip wop. A couple of times I had to dismount to lead her past something scary. She was much easier on the way home, although the spooking did not completely stop. Her owner says she has had some rides which were much better than this, and Sky was partly surprised because I am not her usual rider.

* * *

Hack 1—Kira April 29th (alone)

Had to lead her most of the way away from home. Walked on when facing home, but even then needed a lead once or twice. Difficult for both of us.

Hack 2—Kira July 29th (with Rainbow and Keeleigh)

Not a good trial, as I was taking out two clients who wanted a gallop. Because of the time pressure, sitting and waiting was not an option. Found myself getting frustrated, and had to swop with Rainbow's rider for us to get anywhere. Did ride her home, but she would not take the lead. This was our lowest spot together, but out of it came the idea of the motivational feed, and the decision not to escort clients until we were ready.

Hack 3—Kira Oct 19th (alone)

Had to lead her past marquees in the garden. Remounted, and rode easily up the road for the first time ever. Did stop at top of track. Reversed three times, then she decided she would walk on. She had been looking at a pile of firewood with a flapping plastic sheet over it, which I had not even seen. Dismounted to walk past truck manoeuvring in builder's yard. Otherwise perfect. Lovely to ride, head high (in Dually), walking on, light, responsive, obedient, no spooking at traffic.

* * *

Hack 1—Keeleigh July 21st (with Patch)

Followed Patch up the hill. When we reached bridleway, at right angles to home, happily took the lead and walked well. In 40 minutes stopped with head high 3 times. Patch gave us a lead each time (for safety). Much better result than I expected.

Hack 2—Keeleigh Oct 21st (alone)

Left the yard all right, but quite quickly had to dismount to lead her beyond farm. Too slippery for a discussion on the road. Took her to layby and remounted. Tried rein back, but road was treacherous. She took her front feet slightly off the ground, so I circled her. Wip wop not effective. Decided to lead her up road for safety. Once we reached bridleway, mounted and rode home without a hitch (about 40 minutes). No stopping or spooking, completely relaxed, working with me not against me.