

I sat in the saddle with chills on the back of my neck. My heart was pounding. The thrill I felt is one few people in North America have experienced. I had just ridden a Crioula. No, this is not some exotic animal, it's a horse. Not just any horse but the South American version of our Quarter Horse. I suppose you could say they are cousins since they both came from the horses of the Conquistadors. This is the working horse of the gauchos of The Pampas of South America. But the icing on the cake is **this horse is a stallion**. A well trained and beautiful stallion, powerful, spirited and a true joy to ride; this is what riding can be. But is it for everyone? More specifically are stallions for everyone. I think of the many dangerous behaviors a stallion can exhibit and my answer is, perhaps not.

I am a behaviorist. I work with horses and people to solve the problems that develop between them. I see bolting horses, spooking horses, bucking and rearing horses and all of these behaviors can be rehabilitated. I see horse owners who want the best for their horses and yet their search for answers more often than not leads to confusion in the person and the horse. I say all of this because as dangerous as this confusion can be for the average horse owner it is more so for the person who owns a stallion.

The stallion is by its very nature and biology different from other horses. Within their individual breeds they are generally bigger, stronger, faster and more powerful and their psychological makeup is such that the average horse owner may not be equipped to deal with them. I know many of you are saying to yourself that your stallion is gentle and easy to train and ride. I acknowledge this can be true. But I also acknowledge that you and your skills and the nature of your stallion's physical and psychological makeup may be much different than that of the average person.

It truly is exciting to see stallions perform in shows and other equine competitions. But it is also disturbing to see this excitement cause people with average or limited horse knowledge and skills go out and buy a stallion. These same inexperienced owners are also not set-up to house a stallion. They lock their stallions away, keeping them from any socialization and then wonder how their wonderful stallion turned into a many eating monster.

But is this behavior the fault of the stallion? NO! It is the owners fault, it is the inexperience of the horse owner that causes the horse to act out and misbehave. I own stallions myself. All my stallions are housed and kept with mares. They have access to their band of mares and I keep them in pastures that are made to handle separate stallion bands. All my stallions are well behaved, they know their place, they know when it's time to breed, and when it's not. They understand that screaming, biting and generally misbehaving will not be tolerated. This isn't because I intimidate them or abuse them in any way. It is simply because I have trained them to be what I expect them to be. Conflict-Free.

When a stallion is not allowed to socialize properly they begin to act out of conflict. Their natural instincts tell them to be with other horses, but the inexperienced owner

doesn't allow this, thus the horse acts out. The owner sees the power, speed, size or perhaps the breeding behavior and they become uncomfortable and isolate the stallion.

So what is the answer?

The average horse owner who wants to own a stallion should first seek professional help when purchasing a stallion. They should not go to a trainer who has what I call the '*I'll show him who's boss*' attitude.' They should go to someone who understands the psychology and physiology of the stallion such as the service that my National Equine Behavior Center provides which offers horse owners help in purchasing their first stallion or any new horse. It helps the owner know what to look for when they observe the stallion or other horse. How do they interact with the herd? How do they interact with the current owner? How do they act on lead or under saddle when being ridden? Do their responses seem dull or do go forward or stop cues cause bad behavior. The owner then needs to know how to do an evaluation of these behaviors, current level of training, physical condition etc... this is also covered in the service I offer and should be offered by any other professional you contact. After you have observed and evaluated, you should decide whether you have the ability to provide for and train the horse you are thinking about purchasing. If the answer is not a firm yes then you should not purchase the horse but look elsewhere. If you feel you can fulfill the needs and training of this horse then a plan should be developed that outlines your goals and how best to accomplish them. Be realistic in setting these goals. You should take into account how much time you can devote to the horse. You should consider how long your work sessions should be. But above all you must consider how much patience you can show in the work you are about to begin. Horses require patient, repetitious training to consolidate the cues you are teaching. Also, the new owner must understand fully the nature of stallions and that sometimes aggression is a choice they make. These owners must be able to handle the horse and have a way of deleting the behaviors that may be exhibited by the horse. You should then act on your plan with patience and the knowledge that this plan will be rewarded with a wonderful horse and rider relationship.

I want everyone to know the joy of owning and riding stallions. But I also want these horses to be cared for in the most natural way available and for the owner to be safe. Does this article mean that everyone could own a stallion? No, I truly believe that stallion ownership is only for those who are willing to take the time and make the investment in training that these horses need.

Those of us who do own stallions know the joy and the bond that develops. Working with and bonding with a stallion is not for everyone. My admonition to each of you who loves horses the way I do is to BE SAFE and HAVE FUN!

If you feel you need more information you may contact me at www.connectivehorsemanship.com or at 1-800-359-4090