

Should he stay or should he go?

“My new horse is extremely nappy. On a ride he stops, rears and spins round. He’s good in every other way but it’s starting to frighten me. I thought having my own horse was going to be fun. Do you have any advice for me – I don’t know what to do.”

‘Part Company’

One bit of advice I was given years ago was “You’ll spend as much time and money on the wrong horse as you will the right one. It’s just the right one gives back what you put in.” This is so true. I honestly believe there is no such thing as a bad horse – just a bad partnership. This horse may not be your ideal partner but he could be someone else’s. You won’t be admitting defeat, you’ll be doing what’s best for both of you.

NEVER feel that you must battle on. If you’re frightened to ride, having sleepless nights and generally questioning why you bought him don’t be embarrassed to admit he’s not for you. Your own horse must be a pleasure. It’s your hobby which you should enjoy and look forward to. There will be many people who’ll tell you they have and their horse is now ok but this is a personal choice. Some people enjoy the challenge. Others don’t. NEITHER option is wrong.

If you do decide to sell make sure you’re honest. Tell the whole story warts and all so the next person knows exactly what they’re taking on. Even if you sell him at a loss you’ll be able to move on and find something that suits you better. If you bought your horse from a dealer they should take him back. I’m not clear on the legalities and they may only swap him but it’s absolutely worth finding out.

‘Compromise’

If you do want to tackle the problem you need to work out when and if possible why he does what he does. Does he do it with other horses? Or is it only when he’s in the lead or on his own? Does he do it with any rider or just you? Can you always ride out with others and make sure you’re behind?

Most riders would like to be able to put the tack on and go for a ride as and when they want to though. If that’s you then you need to decide if you can live with not being able to or whether this horse is worth spending more money on to get him retrained.

‘Keep Trying’

This may well be new horse nerves – he may be feeling worried in his new surroundings and it could be that when he settles he’ll stop doing it. If he’s doing it because he’s nervous then feeling that *you’re* nervous only adds to his! If he’s doing it because he’s naughty then he needs to learn he can’t get away with it – and sooner rather than later. Either way you need to find help – and experienced help.

You have several options. First you can send him to a yard that thinks they can sort him out for you. They’ll work on him initially and then you can go and ride out with experienced riders who will teach you how to handle him. Bear in mind that he may still try it on when he comes home but it might be what he needs and it might give you the confidence you need.

In my experience the best approach is to find someone who’ll come to your yard and take him out on his own and ride him through it in places that you will want to take him. Make sure it’s a professional rider not a friend that ‘will give it a go’. This is a situation that needs experienced handling. Once they’ve got him going better they can go with you and show you how to tackle the problem if it arises. *And* if in months to come it happens again they’re only a phone call away.

‘Tips and Tack’

A nappy horse has decided he’s the boss in the relationship. He needs to learn he’s not! That doesn’t mean you have to be aggressive – just positive. In the school ride through loads of walk to trot and halt to trot transitions. Ride three loop serpentines and quick changes of rein just to move him exactly where you want him to go and at your own speed. He may not be nappy in the school but he must understand that in all aspects of his new life you’re the one that makes the rules and tells him what you’re going to do.

Take a look at your tack too. A snaffle with cheeks will be more effective than a ‘strong’ bit as it puts pressure on the sides of his mouth. If he tries to spin round it will give you greater control. Make sure your rein contact is even and pay particular attention to the rein nearest the kerb/hedge. (Horses will usually spin into the road not the hedge.)

Forward movement is the most important thing out hacking. If he stops dead it’s vital to get him moving again – even if that is in a tight circle. Often a nappy horse can be encouraged to keep going forward if you trot and canter as much as possible. The braver they and you get the more you can walk but initially to tackle things at full steam ahead will help to keep his mind on other things.

‘Get in Touch’

This question was asked five times in the past two weeks by different riders. I’ve tried to offer as many ideas as possible. If you have any further questions or would like help with your horse don’t hesitate to contact me on lorraine@schoolyourhorse.com or you can now upload a video on the forum under “Show and Tell”.

<http://www.schoolyourhorse.com/forum/?mingleforumaction=viewforum&f=17.0>

It doesn’t have to be a perfect film – prop your mobile on the ménage fence and hit play – you’d be amazed what can be seen from a few minutes of film.

Whatever you decide to do with your horse make sure you both enjoy it! Lorraine