

A View from the Hoof

Equine Abandonment Syndrome, chased by fear

By

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For much of our lives we seem to endlessly pursue individuality within our social structures. We call this phenomenon *finding ourselves*. Becoming a part *from* all the while being a part *of* something bigger than we ourselves, no matter whom you are or what you do. Some people do well with diversity and choices, while others do not. This is a reality of the free thinking mind at work and if you want to see an example and do not wish to use yourself as the lab rat, it is easy to do. The next time you go to your neighborhood fast food joint, (if you do at all) and you are in line, sit back for a moment and enjoy the show. In a good cross section of the lunch time crowd you are likely to see those who can't seem to make up their minds, even though they have been to this place a million times and the menu has changed so very little. Then there are those who must investigate each scenario as if this meal will change their lives, and still others know exactly what they want, they get the same thing each time, or they have made a decision and will follow through with it. There are those who go to the same places for lunch every day and have the same thing, they like a routine. But routine for a forward thinking mind comes along with choices, the routine for the *in the moment point of view* of your horse, does not.

Unlike us, our horses do not *seek to find themselves*, being an individual is not a pursuit as much as it is a by-product of the ever developing Acquired Instinct. The basic instinct dictates a social structure, and your horse strives to both maintain, and for stallions, acquire this family unit. When your horse is taken or forced away from this unit in the wild, the Natural Herd Dynamic pushes them to seek another group or buddy with varying degrees of success. What isn't variable is the push to find not themselves, but each other. These moments between are dangerous, frightful, and press the limits of the emotional horse; if not mended in a reasonable amount of time, this whirlwind thrusts the horse into an emotional frenzy where the abandonment sensations equate to constantly being chased. Being chased by an enemy you can see, smell, or hear offers a course of action for escape; being chased by fear however, offers no quarter. This manifestation of relentless emotional uncertainty and stress is what I call Equine Abandonment Syndrome, or *EAS*.

As is the case with many equine related diseases and syndromes, the horse in the wild though not devoid of this phenomenon, suffers it in different ways because movement is their choice where the equine in the Artificial Environment has very little free choice of movement. The emotional

scars left on horses dealing with EAS can be deeply set, and the reasons they happen, often times, unnecessary. In many cases, the horror of isolation leads the horse down a path that ends in a depression that, once there, is forever a part of the basic instinct. What makes EAS so dangerous is that it is indeed one of the few instances where the innate *basic* instinct can be etched with another inscription, and once inflicted, has a profound effect on all that is the horse and that very important puzzle of life. Equine Abandonment Syndrome comes in essentially four stages; stage 1 being the least stressful, where stage 4 is the *etched* basic instinct. There are no governing set of circumstances that makes one type of horse more susceptible to EAS than another. Susceptibility has more to do with IHP and therefore tolerance levels to erratic or sudden social changes. High stress environments and high performance demands, a coefficient relationship, are the tools which elevate susceptibility within all horses. In large part, EAS in its more inhibitive stages is both a by-product and a risk of the artificial environment.

The first stage of EAS is actually a common part of equine life both in and out of the wild. If you think of your horse as a magnet being constantly pulled and attracted by a group, be that a group of one or a group of 6, you will have a closer understanding of his/her desire. The first stages of EAS is a very short lived situation and arises from that sudden, knee-jerk sensation of finding oneself alone, or in fact, suddenly realizing that you are. Because the duration for your horse is short lived, stage one is mostly harmless. Being taken from a barn filled with horses and normal barn action to an exercise area or turn out paddock away from, but still within the reach of one or all of these senses, is harmless no matter the *fit and fuss* your four legged friend seems to make. Essentially, stage one of abandonment is a removal from one of the comfort zones or safety blankets, and being forced to adopt another. So long as another can be readily found there is little to be worried about. The extreme case of this first stage can be witnessed when a foal is being weaned, especially on the part of the mare. It can be heart wrenching to watch and listen to, but with proper attention, this event can become less tragic for the mare; for the foal's EAS affects reach only as far as the next curiosity blowing across the field. In both cases, a smooth transition away from that sensation is dependent upon there being care and understanding on our part. You must remember that this particular aspect of the abandonment syndrome is not one that the horse in the NHD is generally equipped to handle; *we* force them away from each other, so *we* must provide for the fulfillment of that gap. But in the end, Stage One EAS is a common and generally harmless thing that is not so far distant from that which the horse will experience in a natural life in the wild. These things are in fact the *growing pains* of life from which the equine character is built upon. Changes and new experiences in selected moderation are what allow the horse to refine and nurture the acquired instinct dynamic. Care is simple; one need only make certain there is sand available to fill in the gaps much like your footprint being washed away and filled by a crashing wave.

The further down the list we go, the further away we are from what is found in the Natural Herd Dynamic. The more we control the life of the horse, even out of love and kindness, the further we push them away from the world their basic instincts were designed for. In Stage Two of the

EAS phenomena we find ourselves still in an area where long term effects are mild to mostly non-existent, even if we stand at the precipice. We are here introduced to something many of us are acquainted with at least in name but for the horse it is lined with uncertainty; Equine Cabin Fever, or *ECF*. *ECF* can be most readily explained by saying it is protracted confinement away from most all outside stimulations. In this stage there may or may not be any other horse or horses, and very little *new* outside stimuli present. Long term stall confinements are the number one criteria that invite *ECF*, but they are not the only causes. *ECF* can manifest itself from long periods of time alone in a pasture or paddock, yet even here one must not forget; the tighter the space, the higher the stress. It is important to note that having two horses together that are not compatible in IHP can also bring forth a level of social restriction you may only see in a resulting circumstance, that being recalcitrance when handled or trained. There is a danger of pressing that horse another step down the line; which means that *ECF* will have more impact and more potential for manifesting into stage three when the confinement, social or physical, is tightened. There is a direct correlation between constriction of movement and the time it takes for the horse to start seeing double and feeling anxious; the classic signs of cabin fever come from staring at the same four walls even if you share that space, until you just can't stand it. The horse alone in the paddock can suffer the same affects of *ECF* as the horse in stall confinement, but length of time and degree of impact will be relative to consequence owing to the comfort of at least an open space around them. Thus the time it takes for *ECF* to show its face is dependent on the circumstances and also on the horse itself. The first two stages of Equine Abandonment Syndrome are managed in much the same ways that many other arising instances are, they are managed by the acquired instinct and IHP. (Individual Horse Personality) An accompanying paradox of stage two EAS, is that with protracted confinement, there is no warranty against going batty simply by assuming the horses in the stalls next to him, will ease his pain. That it may, but after a period of time, again dependent on the individual horse, the stress of confinement will cause the horse to look right through his neighbor and the sense of being alone becomes a self inflicted island where escape is the only motive and the consequence of that act has no bearing. In other words the method of captivity stays the same but the desire to escape, and that sense of being chased by something that is unseen, is perpetuated by fear. This is one of, though not the only pathway to the more inflicting stages of EAS, 3 and 4. An understanding of how your horse is viewing his situation will go far in the prevention of *ECF* moving further down that line. When long term confinement is a necessary evil for whatever reason, *ECF* cannot be avoided but it can be managed. Having created an artificial environment, it is our burden to provide within it.

In the latter stages of Equine Abandonment Syndrome we find a more sinister foe. Stage Three brings forth the onset of depression and the tendencies of disassociation. Oddly enough, the more the horse suffers from the late stages of the syndrome, the more ghostly the signs can be. This is because here the horse begins to feel as if he or she has exhausted any avenue that might offer an aversion of that pressing sense of fear. Chased by fear and achieving no comfort from an expanded circle of life, the horse trades the overt signs of panic for a more inward approach. In

humans these darker stages of depression sadly can lead to a desire of suicide, physical or social. For the horse, survival itself becomes the most important goal, leaving behind the social dynamic that is largely seen as the *cause* or rather, the predator; you will see less and less of the horse you use to know. This downward spiral happens in steps. First the IHP rolls back, getting lost within the acquired instinct which also rolls back and is buried deep within, rarely showing itself, though still present. The horse may be recognizable physically, while rarely so or in *spurts*, emotionally. In this particular stage management of EAS becomes crucial, and an understanding of how the horse is seeing the world around him a top priority. The ways in which you rescue your horse from any long term emotional damage can best be affected if you use an *invitation* style to bring him back. In this deep depression the horse has himself abandoned the horse he once was, and the horse he could have, (and still can) become. For the horse this process is done naturally, and is governed in the exact same manner that the flight response is governed. The basic instinct has taken over 90% of the horses' interpretation of social life. Being alone and being depressed paves the way for a total disassociation from anything that isn't mandatory for survival; allowing for contact with only those things that permit the horse to sustain itself. In this critical time it is important to note that any interaction with the horse can be precarious on several emotional levels; normal communicative interpretations are often skewed. The horse isn't trying to be difficult or hurt you, but will choose distance over contact here more readily because of the disassociation tendency; corner him, and the survival mechanism can be unleashed with fury, again, for the sake of continued existence. On an emotional level, great care must be given to be intensely sensitive to the needs of the horse and the world he *thinks* he is living in, as well as the world he *is* living in. Rescuing the horse from himself without permanent damage, in short, without sending him into stage four, must be done in a delicate and very patient manner. Uncovering the acquired instinct and IHP is here still possible and must be done by playing to the horse's natural curiosity and inquisitive nature. This works because this is also an element of the basic instinct dynamic which for the horse is now the only reasonable element of life within the confines of deep depression. Uncertainty, stress and fear are not yet deeply etched into the horse, and as the horse is invited out and delivered, each step will uncover more and more of the hidden IHP. You can get your horse back or, get the horse back to himself again, in a manner of speaking. Care must be given to the ways in which you work the horse, or handle the horse in the future with all new things he or she is asked to learn. The assimilated imprinting dynamic works on two premises; one is the premise that blending to new environments and experiences equals survival without fear; the second however, is based on the premise that the past is remembered. This double edged sword is a necessity, for it goes back to allowing the horse to learn the difference from the leaf dancing up his flank pushed by the wind, and the cougar moving in the junipers astride his trail. Assimilated Imprinting is the avenue for learning and the agency housing associated memory, both are inherent keys to survival. Knowing how to use is to your advantage is the key to saving your horse from those permanent scars of stage 4.

The most extreme cases of Equine Abandonment Syndrome are those that reach into the depths of the basic instinct dynamic, and are their etched into the foundation stone. When depression

and disassociation are left to linger too long, they at length become accepted as a way of life, the secure path of survival, both protected and lived by. When this happens, a new way of being for the horse has evolved. Having had to survive on this kind of emotional level for an extreme period of time, and again we must remember that time is not a period of minutes gone by on *your* watch, your horse sees the ways he has adopted as nothing more than the way it is. In this *new way of life* your horse cannot be rescued from all of the affects of his depression, but he or she can indeed be, in a way, reinvented and brought back a long way from the oppression. As with the stage four horse, being introduced to life again by better circumstances coming his or her way requires a great deal of understanding and patience. Stage four horses have a basic instinct that is much more sensitive to change, for the etched fingers of the new survival requirements, though never as strong as the natural basic instinct, have been adopted and will be thrown into the fray making the interpretation of life somewhat of an aberration from what actually is. One sign of this can be when your horse needs to be re-introduced to the same thing over and over again before he can move on and learn something else, something new. This is a clear signal that the trigger mechanism is stuck, like a needle skipping on a scratched record, sometimes you have to nudge it along a bit to continue. If you think of your horse's memory as a vinyl record, then the needle would be you, the lines on the record would be the triggers and the memories are the sounds you hear. All must work in unison to gain an optimum performance. The horse will develop an amended acquired instinct dynamic because of these memories, yet here again, the assimilated imprint dynamic, the key in the pocket, can work with or override in part, these fingers from that scratched foundation. In this area of EAS you have little choice but to approach your horse as if it is indeed the first time you are meeting. You must be wary and notice the mood, see what his or her circle of life is showing at that moment. If you start off on the right hoof, your efforts of further advancing the stage four horse stands a better chance. The time it takes for stage four to arise and the time it takes for it to be remedied, if it can be at all, are relevant only to the condition and disposition of the horse. Just like we all know people who seem to want to help themselves, we also see people who just don't want anything to do with life unless it is miserable. The ability of the human to deliver the horse from these depths to a trainable, useable friend depends both on your ability to manipulate assimilated imprinting and your horse's desire to use it for something new. Proper AI work is very often a redirection of focus, made possible because of the associated learning standard within the equine reality.

The classic signs of late stage 3 and all of stage 4 EAS are those manifested within disassociation; this aversion to social existence in stage 4, and the shying away from being social in stage 3, are antagonists to the basic instinct. Over time these are subsequently adopted as basic instinct amendments, in a manner of speaking. Unable to circumvent and alleviate the high levels of stress, the AI process diverts the antagonists inward to a default position alongside the basic instinct dynamic. The normally social and communicative equine that begins to feel removed from any herd dynamic also begins to feel an overwhelming sense of fear, stress and anxiety. It is because the search to find the cause of this anxiety and fear is enduring, that over a period of time the dynamics of AI and *associated learning*, which stem from the basic instinct, take over

kicking in the *default* position with it, generating potentially detrimental associated memories. Cause and effect is how the horse understands his world, he is not a forward thinking animal who can consider outside and unseen influences as causes without effects. Therefore, as this stress begins to grow, even the slightest uncertainty and surprise will have an elevated affect. The horse may seem very jumpy with any sudden movement or display seemingly over-reactionary responses to the slightest stimuli; not so small for an animal struggling to survive. Allowed to continue your horse will begin to associate these minor things with their affects; in turn causing assimilated imprinting to interpret any outside influence that isn't directly linked with survival, as something to be wary of or even feared. Stress builds rapidly and snowballs to a point where the horse views nearly all forms of communication beyond what he or she initiates, as the elements of that fear. Putting your horse directly into a social environment with other horses can cause problems; the ways in which these horses are communicating with one another could well be on different levels owing to differential view points. This will give him that sense of being chased about by the inability to create enough distance between himself and the *adversary*, which in turn develops into the very jittery, jumpy and nervous horse afraid of everything. Equine Abandonment Syndrome does not cause the horse to forget how to socialize; it makes the horse averse to it. This abrasive aspect of EAS changes the way in which the horse communicates with the world around him, and thus it changes the way in which a communication with him is initiated. Re-socializing the horse struggling with this is accomplished by and dependent upon an understanding of the world he or she is viewing, with every part of their lives considered. Keeping in mind the horse's struggle for survival goes on day and night, every aspect of life has to be taken into account when seeking causes and effects.

Equine Abandonment Syndrome comes in various forms, from various stimuli and circumstances. The behavior and stress issues that are outwardly manifested are very often the earliest stages of the onset of EAS. This makes EAS dangerous in that as the stages advance, the overt signs of its existence decline. Often time's signals erupt without their origin being fully recognized and thus brushed off as behavioral. When psychological effects are seen overtly, as in depression, erratic behavior and dissociative tendencies, sadly they are often followed by physical issues. The physical health of the horse is compromised greatly by EAS, and stage two ECF is a great inhibitor to the equine that is convalescing. Stress management in such cases is extremely important, and it should be understood that because we ask the horse to inhabit *our* world, daily assistance with issues are often needed. Behavior management is nothing more than managing the inherent stress of an artificial world before it is allowed to manifest into a driving force away from the normal tolerance level; the point at which the dissemination of that stress is required to fill in the pieces taken from the puzzle. In his own way, the horse is just as emotional as any other socially living creature, and an understanding of these dynamics goes a long way in equine psychotherapy, which aids the horse in his quest to just be happy. When encountering a horse that see's nearly all outside influences upon his life as ghostly enemies to his existence, try walking a mile or two from a different vantage point, try taking, a view from the hoof.