Chapter 5
READING HORSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>Items with an asterisk (*) are sheets to write on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>Notes on Horse Natural History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>‘Read Me Chart’ Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Recognising an Anxious Extroverted Type of horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Recognising an Anxious Introverted Type of horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Recognising an Imaginative Extroverted Type of horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Recognising an Imaginative Introverted Type of horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>The Chameleon inside your horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*11-*12</td>
<td>Reading My Horse......charts to fill in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*13</td>
<td>What do I do after I’ve read my horse?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Theory Accelerator in Chapter 8 of Volume 2*

Reading the horse in this captured moment:
Head low, ears toward me paying attention, tail expressing her opinion, eye soft and watchful, looking back at me, mouth fairly relaxed, hind feet apart to keep herself balanced on three legs.
Notes on HORSE NATURAL HISTORY

Wild horses are born into a family group and maintain the ties. Young males move out to establish new friendships or live on the fringes of their original family. Often they form bachelor groups. Some will be able to collect mares and establish a herd for themselves. These bands of horses move throughout a *home range*—an area in which they can find all the food and water resources needed to sustain the herd throughout the seasons.

Wild horses, like people, form close life-long relationships with other horses in their group. Like us, within the group, they can have a special *best friend* If we spend enough time with him and learn to act more like a horse around a horse, the horse will accept us as another friend with whom a long-term relationship can be created.

Herd or group animals generally have intricate communication patterns and patterns of acceptable behaviour within the group. They have a set of rituals and protocols. This herd culture or *etiquette* helps ensure the herd’s survival. For a herd animal in the wild, separation from the group is, in many cases, a death sentence. The psychology of herd behaviour is deeply and genetically rooted. That is why keeping horses alone can be so damaging to their mental, emotional and physical well-being.

Living in a group allows some members to relax and sleep soundly while others keep a lookout for predators. Living in an extended family group means that there is always a lead mare with much experience of the environment. A lead mare knows the safe places and the places to avoid, who the local predators are, their habits and where they tend to hang out.

The herd stallion defends his group from other stallions and protects his mares and foals. Whenever there is injury or death to a trusted stallion or lead mare, other horses move up the *hierarchy* to fill the positions. We need to remember that life for horses in the wild is ever-changing. The seasons bring food scarcity or abundance, foals are born and die, predators strike and injuries happen. Lead mares and stallions get older and are challenged by younger and fitter individuals.

The underlying nature of horses (prey animals) is eternal vigilance and readiness to run at a moment’s notice. To counterbalance this stress, horses are also *curious* and can readily adapt to new things and situations once they have *convinced themselves* that they are not dangerous.

When we keep horses in our artificial human environment, we have removed the structures that underpin their perception of their welfare and safety. When we take a horse away from the security of whatever family he has known, it becomes our responsibility to rebuild his *confidence* in his new situation. But we have to do this from his horse culture viewpoint, not our human culture viewpoint.

Natural horsemanship endeavours to crawl into the horse’s skin and see the world from the horse’s perspective. It identifies the *Universal Horse Language* (UHL) that horses use with each other. It *teaches this language to people so that they can communicate with a horse as lightly as possible but as effectively as necessary in any situation.*

When we expose a horse to a new situation, it is crucial to allow the individual horse the time he needs to convince himself that it is safe to relax.
As we permit the horse this time, he will begin to respect our leadership and he will find it easier and easier to believe us when we have a conversation with him to let him know that, ‘This new thing isn’t harmful.’ Relaxation is everything. Only a relaxed horse can engage the learning part of his brain. The same is true for people.

Just as a tense and worried person will find it hard to learn, so a tense and worried horse will be thinking about his physical safety and the learning part of his brain is less engaged.

Putting pressure on a tense and worried horse will make him more tense and worried. Punishment does not work with prey animals.

I’ll repeat this little bit again: Putting pressure on a tense and worried horse will make him more tense and worried. Punishment does not work with prey animals. They perceive aggressive action by a human as a predator attempting to kill and eat them.

As humans, we have to first establish ourselves as a member of a horse’s herd or in-group. Then we can defend our space and claim territory in the same assertive manner used by any more dominant horse in the group. The horse will understand our actions as coming from a herd member, not a predator. This is a fine, critical distinction that passes many people by.

A further complication arises with many of our captive-bred horses. Often they have never had the opportunity to live in a herd situation and therefore have no experience of the natural etiquette within a herd. They have not learned correct horse culture from other well-adjusted adult horses. They can either be overly fearful and reactive or reliant on bullying tactics.

Just as it helps us to learn horse herd etiquette, as in Horse Herd Harmonics (Chapter 3), it is often the first time that some horses have been shown the polite way to behave in company, and allowed the time and space to work it out and practice it.

Putting the time into the Horse Herd Harmonics in order to build a bond with a new horse, or strengthen the bond with our horse, is probably the most valuable time we can spend.

Learning to read the horse allows you to pick the best approach to each challenge that arises. A bond allows two-way trust and confidence to grow.

Greeting. This is how horses who know each other greet each other. It is a herd member recognition ritual. Herd members greet each other nose to nose and then they carry on going about their own business. It is similar to the way we would smile and say, ‘Hello,’ to an acquaintance or a work-mate as we pass them at work or on the street.
### The 'READ ME' Charts — The Overview Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxious Type</th>
<th>Imaginative Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tends to lack confidence. Worry about safety is always near the surface.</td>
<td>Tends to be confident most of the time. Strives to assert his dominance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Anxious Extrovert
- **Reactive mode:** Needs to move his feet because he is worried and his brain has switched to 'flight' and he can't think.
- **Thinking mode:** Tends to be keen to do what you want once he understands the cue. Quick responses. Easily loses confidence and it takes a while to get it back.

#### Imaginative Extrovert
- **Reactive mode:** Dominates a situation with willful exuberant behaviour. Needs to move due to high energy. Predictably dangerous.
- **Thinking mode:** Playful, curious, lots of energy that needs to be channelled in positive directions with imaginative things to do to keep his attention.

#### Anxious Introvert
- **Reactive mode:** Fear of a situation may make him go inside himself to hide. In extreme situations may suddenly explode out of this unpredictably dangerous.
- **Thinking mode:** Helped by giving cues slowly and lots of repetition to learn something new. May crowd you if confidence wanes.

#### Imaginative Introvert
- **Reactive mode:** Resists by not moving or maybe bucking. Ears back a lot. Doesn't like to be told what to do. May turn aggressive if pushed.
- **Thinking mode:** Usually prefers to exert as little energy as possible. Checks daily to see who is boss. Often responds well to food incentives.

### Colour Code Your Horse of the Moment

Colour in the boxes below and the matching quadrant labels in the chart above. Some students find visualising a colour for their horse's behaviour a good way to remind themselves what might be the best thing to do next.

- **Red Alert** — “I'm outta here.” (anxious extrovert)
- **Blue Mood** — “I'm a bit worried about this.” (anxious introvert)
- **Electric Yellow** — “Yahoo, where's the party?” (imaginative extrovert)
- **Green** — “Yeah, whatever, where's the grass?” (imaginative introvert)
## The 'READ ME!' chart expanded

### Recognising an Anxious Extroverted Type of Horse

**Essentially**, these horses often feel the need to move their feet because they have **safety** issues and their default behaviour is to run. They are often on the verge of **flight mode**.

- Remember, a horse can show these characteristics in a continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mildly</th>
<th>strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Things to look for:
Most horses will show a few of these characteristics clearly; not necessarily all of them.

- Always Alert
- Bolts
- Bracey
- Can’t stand still
- Defensive
- Emotional
- Escapes
- Forward at all costs
- High head
- Impulsive
- Moves quickly
- Nervous
- Opposition reflex common
- Over-reactive
- Panics easily
- Reactive
- Rears
- Restless
- Runs through you
- Shoulders you
- Snorty
- Spooky
- Unconfident much of the time

#### What a horse of this type mainly needs is to feel SAFE.
- Recognise thresholds and use lots of **retreat**
- Let him access a safe place where he can regain **calmness**
- Interrupt patterns that gain no benefit
- Have a strong **focus** on what you want
- **Consistency**
- Replace his fear with something positive to do. Give him a **job** such as any easy task he knows already to **focus** his mind
- Use a longer rope to give more **drift** so he has more room to move

#### What horses like this might find hard:
- Being calm
- Moving/disengaging hindquarters
- Facing you; can’t look at you with two eyes
- Backing up; want to go forward at all costs
- **Confidence** games, as they are often so worried
- Moving sideways
- Standing still; hate having their forward movement blocked
- Coming back to you from a circle

#### Once you have their confidence, this type of horse can be:
- **energetic**
- **athletic**
- **perceptive**
- **sensitive**
- and they can develop **stamina**

### NOTE
Horses may be predominantly one of these four ‘types’ but when teaching something new, in new environments and/or handled by different people, horses can switch between all four types as well as be in either **reactive mode** or **thinking mode** at any one time, so one has to **read the horse** all the time, and act as appropriately as possible.

Not making **assumptions** is good.
**CHAPTER 5  READING HORSES**

**The 'READ ME!' chart expanded**

**Recognising an Anxious Introverted Type of Horse**

_Essentially_, these horses are seeking mental and emotional _comfort._ They tend to _go quiet_ and hide inside themselves when they become fearful about a given situation. In extreme cases they may suddenly erupt out of their _quiet place_ which is obviously dangerous.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mildly</th>
<th>strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember, a horse can show these characteristics in a continuum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Things to look for:**

Most horses will show a few of these characteristics clearly; not all of them.

- Can't think
- Defensive
- Distrustful
- Emotional
- Extreme cases: Cataleptic with staring eyes, head down, unresponsive, unusual breathing and freezing can be followed by exploding
- Fearful
- Hesitant
- Kicks due to fear
- May not like to be touched
- Nervous
- Quiet
- Reactive
- Shy nature
- Spooky
- Tense a lot of the time
- Timid
- Unconfident
- Unpredictable

---

**What a horse of this type mainly needs is COMFORT.**

- Go slowly, don’t push
- Ask for small steps
- Give lots of dwell time
- Look for blinking, secret lip-licking
- Use lots of retreat
- Be consistent
- Do enough repetition
- Drive from withers to put nose on things to build confidence
- Spend lots of _down time_ together

**Once you have their confidence,** this type of horse is usually:

- sensitive
- submissive
- obedient
- reliable
- forgiving
- and often forms a strong bond with a person they trust.

**What horses like this might find hard:**

- trusting people
- moving or disengaging hindquarters
- facing you
- being sent away from you
- interacting at liberty

---

**NOTE:** Horses may be predominantly one of these four _types_ but when teaching something new, in new environments and/or handled by different people, horses can switch between all four types as well as be in either _reactive mode_ or _thinking mode_ at any one time, so one has to _read the horse_ all the time, and act as appropriately as possible.

_Not making assumptions is good._
CHAPTER 5    READING HORSES

The 'READ ME!' chart expanded

Recognising an Imaginative Extroverted Type of Horse

Essentially, these horses like to PLAY. They need to move their feet a lot because they are energetic, playful, exuberant and curious. They like to be busy and their plan is often to see if they can push their way up the hierarchy ladder.

| Remember, a horse can show these characteristics in a continuum |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| mildly               | strongly             |

Things to look for:
Most horses will show a few of these characteristics clearly; not all of them.

- Biting tendency
- Charismatic
- Dominant
- Energetic
- Exuberant
- Friendly
- Mischievous
- Mouthy
- Playful
- Pushy
- Smart
- Tendency to strike with front feet
- Willful

Once you have their confidence, this type of horse is usually:

- curious
- smart
- a fast learner
- playful
- willing
- exuberant

What a horse of this type mainly needs is creative movement and PLAY opportunities.

- Tasks using a variety of objects and obstacles
- Lots of play
- New things to learn; variety
- Consistent cues but variety in tasks
- New environments to explore
- A work plan that keeps up with their ability and energy

What horses like this might find hard:

- Obedience; they get distracted by wanting to have fun in their own way
- Moving the forequarters
- Backing up
- Use of touch energy
- All parts of Rounders — the circling moves
- Aggressive people
- Wimpy people
- Boring work

NOTE: Horses may be predominantly one of these four 'types' but when teaching something new, in new environments and/or handled by different people, horses can switch between all four types as well as be in either reactive mode or thinking mode at any one time, so one has to read the horse all the time, and act as appropriately as possible.

Not making assumptions is good.
Essentially, these horses enjoy lives as pasture potatoes and prefer not to expend too much energy. They resist by not moving and are often on the lookout to rise up in the hierarchy whenever an opportunity presents itself. We often think of high/strong spirited horses as horses that like to move and have lots of energy. However, imaginative introverts are extremely strong spirited mentally, and put much thought into how they can best conserve energy. They would be survivors in the wild when food is scarce.

Remember, a horse can show these characteristics in a continuum mildly strongly

Things to look for:
Most horses will show a few of these characteristics clearly; not all of them.

- Argumentative
- Bucking tendency
- Clever
- Defiant
- Disinterested
- Dominant
- Dull
- Easily bored
- Food-orientated
- Lazy
- Likes to stop
- Pushy
- Stubborn
- Tendency to charge or confront
- Unresponsive
- Unmotivated to go if it is not his own idea

Once you have their confidence and acceptance as a leader, this type of horse is usually:
- clever
- curious
- calm
- confident
- consistent
- dependable
- tolerant

What a horse of this type mainly needs is MOTIVATION.

- Purpose that he can see
- Destination at which he can stop
- Incentives (food, rest, scratches)
- Reverse psychology to keep him from taking over
- Move on to add new things to the repertoire as soon as he is ready
- Take the time (i.e., repeated short sessions) needed to learn something well, but definitely don’t drill it

What horses like this might find hard:

- Motivation to do much at all
- Moving the forequarters
- Coming to you
- Responding to touch energy (some horses just don’t like being touched a lot)
- Moving at all!
- All parts of Rounders — the circling moves
- Maintaining gait and direction, especially in an arena situation
- Interaction at liberty

NOTE: Horses may be predominantly one of these four types but when teaching something new, in new environments and/or handled by different people, horses can switch between all four types as well as be in either reactive mode or thinking mode at any one time, so one has to read the horse all the time, and act as appropriately as possible.

Not making assumptions is good.
The Chameleon Inside Your Horse

It is not unusual for people to present different aspects of themselves in different situations. We may be forthright and in charge at work, but become completely mellow at home with our family. We may behave quite differently when meeting new people as compared to how we behave with old friends. If we feel threatened, we may get belligerent or we may withdraw.

It is therefore not hard to understand that horses do the same. Their natural herd culture ensures that they develop strong kinship and friendship ties. When we bring them into our world they will do the same with us, if we prove ourselves worthy of their trust.

I highlight this point because building a positive relationship with a horse is similar to building a new relationship with another person. If the first contact seems positive, we set up more encounters to get to know each other better. As time goes by, the relationship is sustained with continued positive interactions. Alternatively, the relationship dwindles away if we stop giving it our time and attention.

If we work with other people we have to do our best to get along with them. Sometimes this is hard. Just as we often can’t choose our workmates, so horses can’t choose their person. If the horse is lucky, there will be one or more people at his job who are sympathetic to his emotional, mental and physical needs. If he is unlucky, he will be forced into some sort of straightjacket. To keep his job he will have to seem to comply. If he doesn’t comply enough, he will be moved on.

Allowed sufficient time and positive experiences, a horse will usually build a willing relationship with a person. Even if the experiences are not so positive, a horse will habituate to consistent experiences. He has to, in order to survive.

For some reason, many people think that the positive willingness a horse shows with a trusted handler or owner should transfer to any other person. This doesn’t really make sense. Such an expectation is the same as going to bed and finding that your husband has substituted another man in his place. Some people may find this quite exhilarating, but others would be totally freaked out. (I suppose it depends on the confidence of the woman and the aptitude of her husband’s stand-in.)

What I’m trying to say is that if we hand our horse, who trusts us, over to another person to handle or ride, we are suddenly thrusting the horse into a totally new situation. If the other person is adept at reading horses and willing to adjust his behaviour to what the horse requires, it can be a good experience. If, however, the person new to the horse is just working to their own agenda and speaks a different language than we use with our horse, we are putting the horse into a very awkward situation.

Our horse will also behave differently depending on where we are and what we are asking him to do. Situations horses are routinely faced with include:

- taken to a new place by a trusted person or an unknown person
- travelling in a known vehicle or an unknown vehicle
- put in with unknown horses
- put into isolation as in a stall
- taken to a show or rally or clinic among lots of other stressed horses
- taken onto unknown trails
- left behind when his horse friends go out
CHAPTER 5     READING HORSES

There are many other situations. You could list the ones most relevant for your horse.

Our quiet, dependable horse at home can easily become an extreme anxious extrovert in a new situation.

If we remain aware of this, it will be easier to retain our emotional neutrality and respond in a way most appropriate for the horse of the moment.

Giving the horse time and multiple opportunities to get used to a new situation is usually the fairest and safest thing to do.

Anxious type horses tend to be more timid but also more compliant once they understand our signals. Once they feel comfortable, they are usually happy to follow your suggestions rather than challenge them.

Imaginative type horses tend to be bold rather than timid and may argue about what they are going to do next. They like to challenge our position as leader, but it is not out of meanness or being bad. It is simply part of their bold, imaginative make-up. In a herd they tend to be leaders, either passively if they are introvert types or quite aggressively if they are extrovert types.

| Above and beyond all the factors already mentioned, is another factor that runs alongside them. This is the social factor continuum. |
| Strongly social horses love to interact, be close and do mutual grooming. |
| If they are social in the herd they will be the same around people with whom they have formed a trusting relationship. |
| Strongly aloof horses don’t seem to have the same need to cling and be close. They don’t tend to ask for rubs or scratches. |

Very aloof horses are often super-sensitive and it is easy to use signals that are too strong for them. Even when they are habituated to interaction with humans, they often don’t like to be groomed. They may tolerate it with good grace, but they don’t seek it out.

If we have an aloof horse, it is important to accept this as part of his character and not feel personally affronted because he is not touch-feely when we really would like to pet him like a cuddly toy.

I spend time with two distinctly imaginative introverts. One is strongly social (he can get quite pushy and annoying) and the other is strongly aloof. I’ve had to learn to respect this part of their nature and develop plans to incorporate it.

The tendency toward being social or being more aloof is probably a combination of inborn characteristics and the influence of early environment. If a horse’s early environment did not allow for close interaction with friendly people he may appear aloof at first but change to become more social as he learns to trust you. Other horses will always tend to keep a distance.

This chapter is about observing and recording what we notice. It gives us a terminology to use when thinking and talking about our horses. The sliding scales or continuums remind us that the horse’s behaviour in a particular situation is always a combination of his innate character, past experiences and the influences of the environments to which he is exposed.
NAME OF HORSE: ____________________________

Use the four READ ME Charts (pp5-8) to characterise your horse as he looks to you today. Use the table below to fill in those features that you read in your horse when he is at home. The next page gets you to record his behaviours when he is taken to a new place or handled by a person unknown to him.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxious Extrovert tendencies</th>
<th>Anxious Introvert tendencies</th>
<th>Imaginative Extrovert tendencies</th>
<th>Imaginative Introvert tendencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mildly</td>
<td>mildly</td>
<td>mildly</td>
<td>mildly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Social Factor Continuum is the fifth element that we need to consider when deciding how to best be with our horse. Horses on the very social end of the spectrum love to be touched and rubbed and enjoy being near us. Aloof type horses, on the other hand, are more distant and don’t seem to have a desire for lots of touchy-feely contact.

Where do you think your horse presently sits on the Social Factor Continuum below?

very ALOOF ← ------------------------------- → Very SOCIAL

Other Observations

___________________________
___________________________
___________________________
**CHAPTER 5 ** READING HORSES

**READING MY HORSE ........**

Characteristics of my horse AWAY FROM HOME on Date __________

Name of Horse: _______________________________

Use the four *Read Me Charts* (pp5-8) to characterise your horse as he presently looks to you when he is taken away from home or handled by a person unknown to him. Chapter 9 contains pro-formas of these pages to use when you think it is time to re-evaluate your horse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxious Extrovert tendencies</th>
<th>Anxious Introvert tendencies</th>
<th>Imaginative Extrovert tendencies</th>
<th>Imaginative Introvert tendencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mildly</td>
<td>mildly</td>
<td>mildly</td>
<td>mildly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Observations

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
CHAPTER 5     READING HORSES

What do I do after I’ve ‘read’ my horse???

The **expanded READ ME Charts** (pp5-8) also provide information about ways to deal positively with the behaviour of the four main types of horse personalities. Once you’ve identified the quadrant(s) which best fit your horse most of the time, you can learn to tailor your responses to **the horse that show up at any one moment**.

Into the boxes below, write the sorts of **things you can do** to become a leader for the horse when he displays either his ‘**thinking mode**’ or his ‘**reactive mode**’ in any of the quadrants. It could help to make a big poster of this to hang in your tack area for quick reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Anxious Extrovert</strong> needs me to:</th>
<th><strong>Imaginative Extrovert</strong> needs me to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When in <strong>thinking mode</strong>:</td>
<td>When in <strong>thinking mode</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When in <strong>reactive mode</strong>:</td>
<td>When in <strong>reactive mode</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Anxious Introvert</strong> needs me to:</th>
<th><strong>Imaginative Introvert</strong> needs me to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When in <strong>thinking mode</strong>:</td>
<td>When in <strong>thinking mode</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When in <strong>reactive mode</strong>:</td>
<td>When in <strong>reactive mode</strong>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>