



SOME LIKE IT HOT: SELECTING YOUR HORSE BY TEMPERAMENT

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How often are we smitten by a horse's appearance or abilities - to the exclusion of all other factors? Armed with a list of wants and needs, we often do not go so far as to consider each horse's basic temperament. If the temperament of our horse doesn't compliment our own capabilities and comfort levels, riding will more than likely become far less enjoyable. To follow are some indicators of common temperament types and a guide to help you decide which type of horse may be best for you. As with all things equestrian, there are no hard and fast rules but a little insight never hurts! This process applies equally to ponies, so take the time to objectively assess both the nature and style of the child's riding, along with ability, when selecting the best-suited pony to turn them loose on. When in doubt, err on the side of caution...

We have all seen 'hot' horses in action. A 'hot' horse is one that is keenly aware of its surroundings, often tending to make them a little spooky out on rides, or tense when working amongst a group of other horses. A 'hot' horse is often also very sensitive to the rider. It is a fallacy that these horses require less exertion on the part of the rider than a cooler model as, in some cases, they actually require more. With a 'hot' horse there is very little opportunity for being just a passenger; the rider needs to keep focused on signals from the horse which, in some instances, means thinking pretty fast! If your heel accidentally bumps against the side of a 'hot' horse, you can expect a smart response.

Unfortunately, for an unbalanced rider who may have no idea their heel is unstable, it will quickly become obvious they are not prepared for the response either. A 'hot' horse will quickly become frustrated with a rider who is inadvertently asking for something they don't require, thereby perpetuating a cycle of difficult behaviour. On the other hand, a knowledgeable, competitive rider who desires the ready-set-go type of performer will enjoy a horse that is alert and responsive to the aids. Statistically, well performed jumpers, racehorses and endurance horses often have tendencies that lean toward the 'hot' side. Owning a 'hot' horse or one of the hot blood breeds is not for the faint of heart so, if you're a rider looking for a leisurely time, these are probably not the best choice for you. Similarly, if you are a novice rider, it may be preferable to obtain more experience before considering taking on a horse displaying 'hot' characteristics.

Always bear in mind that 'hot' temperaments are typically well represented within the hot blood breed types of which the two recognised breeds in New Zealand are Arabians and Thoroughbreds. This strong trait can be obvious through variations of these breeds also. The trademarks of a 'hot' horse are not a slight on a horse's quality or ability it is just a statement of fact - that what is described as 'difficult' by some is seen as 'passionate' by others.

The perfect 'kind' horse for a novice rider.

The 'cold' horse is at the other end of the temperament scale. Certainly, they can be a little on the lazy side at times but there's something to be said for a horse that enjoys life at a slower pace. 'Colder' horses are invaluable to riders who view their riding as a hobby. The novice rider may gain more confidence, in the main, from 'colder' horses. As a 'cold horse' offers a less hurried response to the riders aids, they are also more likely to forgive unnecessary or miscalculated cues. If a 'cold' horse is a little overwhelmed or lively at a show it's

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usually easier to assist them in settling down with a few minutes on the lunge line or working in under saddle. Often times this is all that is required for them to reconsider whether it's worth the effort to raise a sweat. Also, if you are the type who gets nervous during competition (and who doesn't if we are being honest about it!) the cold horse is less likely to react negatively to your emotions. At best, the cold horse that does react to nervous tension in the rider, will give you that extra pizzazz you need to compete successfully. Cold blood purebreds, such as Clydesdales, are not commonly seen in the mainstream competitive arena as the size and weight of these horses inhibits their performance. However, their gentle disposition and interactive style is considered very desirable when crossbred with their lighter bodied counterparts.

There are a million variables in between. No one type of horse temperament is preferable to another or considered essential for any discipline. It is far more important that the horse and rider be suited to each other, than to single out any one characteristic in your next horse. As part of this, we need to consider the role we play in our horse's behaviour by objectively assessing your own riding style. Some riders are 'hot' riders and will fire up even the quietest horse, either through their nerves or over-zealous riding, whilst others have the ability to sit quietly and not annoy a horse unduly. In these cases, it may well be that the opposite temperament of the horse to rider will compliment and make a better partnership than two kindred spirits locking horns together! If you have no end of problems with a hot temperament horse, try the other pole in personality to see if the result is better overall.

It can be difficult to predict the future ridden temperament of a young or unbroken horse so buying in that arena may be something of a lottery. You might be able to achieve some sort of guesstimated formula by analysing the parents and considering any other known lineage where possible. Obviously too, all horses are individuals, with no two alike and the argument of nature versus nurture is always prevalent. There are plenty of anecdotes about full brothers and sisters, to champion performance horses, who are not themselves success stories in the same discipline.

Bear in mind, some temperaments can be influenced either temporarily or long term by bad experiences, physical defects or inadequate schooling. This could be particularly true in cases where the horse exhibits a different temperament on the ground than that which it does under saddle. Environmental and physical factors can also contribute to temperament problems. A horse with a poorly thought out diet, perhaps taking in more calories than needed, may lead to difficulty concentrating on the rider's expectations and could display an enhanced flight response. An example of a physical defect, that can have a huge impact on the horse's temperament, is poor or failing eyesight. Ask yourself "is this the horse's typical temperament or are other factors causing this reaction?" but beware of making excuses for him just because you love his colour!

Riding should be a rewarding, pleasant experience. As well as ticking the boxes on performance ability, size, shape and colour it is important to choose the horse whose temperament thermostat is set just for you.