



Horse Breather

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Regaining confidence and trust – Chippy's story

For the last few weeks I've been enjoying a weekly ride on a wonderful 12.2hh mare called Chippy (being small has its uses when it comes to riding small ponies). Chippy was rescued from an allotment when she was 7 years old. She was used to pull a heavy cart along a busy 3 lane dual carriageway and was skin and bone.

She was so terrified of humans that at first she was kept in a stable with a 12' rope left attached to her head collar so that Wendy could pick up the end and work gradually along it in order to get close to her. She was too scared to take titbits from the hand and was so frightened by good natured attention from children that she would, in last resort, kick or bite.

Seven years on she is vastly improved, living out with a herd and having the occasional breathing session and occasional ride, but as she still finds children pretty frightening, she doesn't get out much. Using Equine Breathing I hoped to

- a) improve her health and fitness (she was a headshaker), and
- b) to overcome bad memories so that she can start having fun and enjoy being ridden, eventually by children.

I rode weekly and in between Chippy would have occasional Equine Breathing, and the odd ride. Before my first ride her breathing was very bad. She was clearly getting upset at the thought of being ridden. She was loose in the yard and I went over to her. It was clear she wanted to run off so I went carefully and she snaked her head away and pulled a face. I was able to move very slowly to her neck, she was not happy but allowed it. I put my hand under her cheek to hold her face and started Equine Breathing and she accepted it. I could see the white hairs in a bridle line over her whole face - scars that remain even after 7 years.

Wendy was amazed that I had got up to her and could breathe her with no head collar. Her breathing calmed immediately and she only did one snort in about 20 minutes. It was lovely, she relaxed right down and even fell asleep and didn't mind a field mate all grooming and licking her.

Chippy was a head shaker until she started Equine Breathing. Although she no longer tossed her head on a ride, she was tense and rushed. To address this I repeatedly got off and did Equine Breathing as we walked along for a few minutes, got back on and rode until the tension returned then got off and walk breathed again and so on. When I first started she kept snorting, indicating that her body was resisting the increased carbon dioxide, so I kept it gentle. Gradually over about 3 sessions she stopped snorting.

At first she barged ahead, dragging me along, but slowly she ceased doing this and now walks calmly with a longer stride. Wendy was incredulous because on the first day she walked over 2 manhole covers without any urging from me. Apparently she has always refused to walk over them before. I walked over about 8 more to see and she was absolutely fine.



beautiful Chippy

A great opportunity arose a couple of rides later by which time Chippy was generally much more relaxed. We came upon a large agricultural trailer that had hit the bank and broken its wheel. It was loaded high and tilting ominously. I have to admit it was quite scary!

Chippy was terrified so I got off and spent some time Equine Breathing our way round the trailer, forwards and backwards, even squeezing through the tiny gap between it and the bank, over the scuffed soil. I was then able to remount and ride serenely past. The next ride Chippy went round it without blinking an eyelid.

On this ride, pleased with her progress, I slapped my thigh a few times while riding. We immediately lost our new relaxed pace - she leapt forward and jogged. I hopped off and walk breathed her and slapped my thigh which sent her into paroxysms. Her head went up and she tried to run backwards away from me. I continued to breathe her and she calmed a bit but by this time we had arrived home so I left it there.

On the next ride we tried again. This time she walked along beside me being walk breathed and stayed calm while I slapped myself all over (yes I know...). She wasn't able to retain her cool when I slapped my thigh while riding, but I think it will come next session.

After several sessions Wendy said Chippy had become easier to catch, even coming up to Wendy voluntarily at times in the field. Hopefully after a few more sessions the damaging memories will have gone and Chippy will have regained her confidence and trust to fully enjoy her loving home. Chippy may be small and lacking show pony looks but she brought me immense joy and I hope soon children will have similar experiences with this beautiful pony.

til next time
Breathe easy
Clare

The contents of this ezine are not a substitute for veterinary advice. If the reader has any concerns they should seek independent professional advice from a vet.