

## To Geld or Not to Geld

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YEARS AGO, I HAD A CLIENT WITH A 2-YEAR-old colt that she wanted to keep as a breeding stallion. The colt was argumentative and constantly challenged anyone handling him. I got along with him fine, but he was more horse than she could handle. The only time she was even brave enough to pet him was when I was holding him in his stall. She finally decided that gelding him was the best course of action.

When a colt is gelded, he does not go from being a stallion to a gelding overnight. Although he is a little sore when he walks, his mind is still pretty much in the same place it was before the vet arrived.

The day after the colt was castrated, I saw my client pull up to see her horse. I started from the barn so I could do the holding thing. By the time I got there, she was already in his stall, petting and loving on him, telling him how much nicer he was now that he was not a stallion any more.

People trust geldings. They have it in their minds that geldings are always safer, more reliable horses than stallions or mares. Now any time you generalize, you can always find exceptions. But by and large, geldings are easier to handle because they do not have their mind on sex every few seconds the way stallions do. They do not have hormonal swings affecting their mood or territorial issues like mares.

So geldings, in general, are easier to handle because they have fewer distractions than horses of other genders. That makes it easier for less-skilled riders to work with them. Unlike stallions and mares, they are neutral about who is in charge. That also makes them safer for less-experienced riders. About the only thing geldings argue about is who gets fed first.

Geldings seem easier to train because it is easier for their handlers to keep their attention. Since people view geldings as safer, and they tend to view safer as better, they have a more relaxed attitude around geldings. A gelding feels that relaxed attitude and it helps him relax and be more trainable.

The age a colt is gelded makes a big difference in whether he acts like a gelding or a stallion. If you want a gelding mind, you need to castrate as soon as both testicles descend. There is a lot of discussion about

how less testosterone will influence the colt's growth but that is not something that really adds to the value of the horse, just to what he weighs.

If a horse is castrated while he is still young, before he develops any breeding behaviours, he will act like a gelding. If he fully matures before he is castrated, and particularly if he is used for breeding before he is castrated, he will not act like a gelding. He is a "stag".

People tend to get along with stags better than stallions because they believe that geldings are safer than stallions. However, a stag's behaviour patterns will often be identical to those of any stallion. A stag is a horse that acts like a stallion but does not have any money in the bank.

Geldings are just nice, consistent guys that can be among the most fun horses you will ever ride and play games with.

The horse's gender does not make a bit of difference, however, in how you approach training. No matter which gender you prefer, you need to start with groundwork to build a vocabulary of consistent, horse-logical pressures to communicate with the horse. The horse needs to work its way, step by step, up the training tree to build solid foundation for whatever games the two of you would eventually like to play. Geldings might make the job a little easier, but being a good ol' boy does not excuse either them or their handlers from any homework.

- BY RON MEREDITH



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