

## Spooky Stuff

**Teach your horse to handle fearful circumstances with confidence.**

*By Dale Rudin*

Since coming to live in a world designed by people, horses have had to learn how to accept the sights and sounds of strange things. Plastic bags, rattling metal roofs and blowing paper can be cause for alarm. The instincts of a prey animal, such as a horse, recommend a hasty retreat when faced with unfamiliar things. A horse perceives an unknown danger as a threat against his life.

Since a 1,000 pound + animal can cause damage to himself and others, it's important to try to lessen his reaction to fear. To minimize this reaction takes patience and time, but a horse can learn how to handle fearful circumstances with confidence. It's a matter of teaching the horse how to feel more powerful than what he is afraid of.

For example, if he sees a tarp blowing in the wind, he should be asked to stand quietly and look at it from a distance where he feels safe. He will eventually realize that the tarp is not an active threat, and he should be willing to move closer to it at a pace he finds comfortable. In time, he will be able to approach the object of his fear and understand that though it is scary, it is not life threatening.

In our world, horses will frequently encounter unsettling situations. The attitude and confidence level of the handler plays a large role in how a horse learns to respond. If he learns that there are options to reacting with fear, he will gain courage and be capable of handling any situation with ease and grace.

The author has trained various breeds and competed in western performance events in Southern California. Her philosophy emphasizes a willing attitude while developing a high level of physical performance.