

Donkey Society of Western Australia Inc

Understanding your donkey - donkey psychology

Donkeys are NOT stubborn, and if you assume that they are then you have lost them before you start. Many people have had contact with horses and try to use the same methods, but a horse is a flight animal so a nervous horse rears, bolts, bucks or shows his distress in an overt manner. In comparison a donkey cannot run very far or very fast, so his line of defense is to stand perfectly still and hope he won't be noticed. When your donkey won't move, it is probable that he is in as much distress as the nervous horse. The horse is soothed and trained through his fears while the donkey is often beaten for stubbornness, which only increases his anxiety.

The psychology of the donkey is far more interesting than that of many animals. There are two ways of describing his attitude. One is to consider him as you would a spouse, boss or partner. Many other animals are child like; it is a case of "I have explained why I want your bedroom tidy, you know how to do it, now you will stay there until you make it tidy!" The adult is in control. Try telling your spouse, partner or boss that they will do as they are told and tidy the office/workshop/kitchen; you will get nowhere. You have to work on an approach of coercion, bribes, subtle hints, all sorts of things that get the job done but don't start an argument. Start with understanding where they are coming from and realise that it is not a case of one method suits all occasions. A donkey is the same, he likes to be consulted and to think he has a say in the subject, even when he fully realises he is being manipulated.

Another way to understand him is to think of crosswords. A horse is a normal crossword; mostly fairly easy if your vocabulary is large enough although sometimes there are two answers which would fit equally well and you have to work out which one is correct. A donkey is a cryptic crossword; the answer is easy and extremely logical so you know you are right once you find it. The difficulty is working out the question to begin with.

One important bit of donkey psychology, and here it is the donkey being the psychologist, is that every time a donkey goes to a new home he 'forgets' everything he ever knew. He knows that the new owner is probably a novice so he tells all sorts of fibs. He will say his last owner used to beat him, and if you pick up a stick he is terrified; he will say he has never had a lead rope on before and doesn't know how to be led; he will say his previous owner always fed him oaten hay and he can't possibly eat meadow hay. He will say and do everything he can think of to take control and, especially with a novice owner, it usually works. Just watch his face when you tell him you are onto him, you know he can do whatever it is you want him to do, and you won't have any more of that nonsense. He will try to look offended that you could doubt him then he will chuckle and say, "Well it was worth a try wasn't it."