



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

## Endorsements

**November 2009**

I would like to add to Lewis's testimonials from a different perspective – that of observer. Lewis has been working with my daughter Jennifer and her gelding Finn for more than 2.5 years now (see her testimonial below – recently updated). I have closely watched him work with a variety of horses (and owners) and have never failed to be impressed – he really does what he says on his website.

Lewis was the first, and remains the only horse trainer I have met that never contradicts himself in either word or action. In addition, his instincts are so finely honed that he has dealt with/staved off problems before the rest of us have had time to think about them. He clearly conveys how to achieve this yourself, and never tires of the repetition that may be required because the client is set in their ways.

Although he suggests on his website that he doesn't deal well with people, nothing could be further from the truth! He is a firm, benevolent and understanding person, who tunes each session to the mood and needs of his equine and human clients. What's even better is that he manages this with unfailing good humour.

I have observed that many trainers insist upon riding the horse – indeed they seem to see it as a right (when the client is paying for this privilege!). Lewis will only ride your horse if he feels it's essential to demonstrate a point or if you ask him to do so.

So – maybe, having read all the testimonials, you're convinced that he's the 'real deal', but you're worried about his fees. Don't be! The last professional that my daughter used prior to finding Lewis charged £45 per 30 mins plus mileage. Lewis's costs are per session (plus mileage). Jennifer and Finn's first session was over 4 hours! As Finn was a young, fit horse, Lewis worked with him and then Jennifer for 3 hours – the rest was made up of conversation and finding out who Jennifer and Finn were and what they needed. Each session varies in length depending upon what factors present on the day.

Lewis will open your eyes to a whole new world. Don't have doubts – he will transform the life of both you and your horse.

Jo Wyles



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**30 September 2009 16hh Warmblood, Sorrel, Gelding**

“OUT OF ADVERSITY COMES ENLIGHTENMENT”

Which in my case meant having a horse I couldn't, or more to the point didn't know how to handle, then to be shown the right direction in which to move forward with him and be given the correct tools to start that journey. For that I am indeed indebted to Lewis.

If you understand what I mean by that; then perhaps you've already had help from Lewis but for those of you who haven't then this article, the start of my journey will hopefully be of interest and might even set you on a new path of your own, if that's what you're searching for.

This acknowledgement is long overdue as Lewis has been helping me and my horse Star on a regular basis over the last four years and I think he deserves more recognition for his natural horsemanship skills, along with his great depth of knowledge and understanding which he uses to great effect when working with people and their charges, bringing about real changes in their lives.

I can say that with conviction, having been lucky enough to watch Lewis in action on many occasions with different horses and seen the results of his training methods, definitely not a job for the faint hearted though, when you see some of the problem ones he has to deal with. He normally gets a large audience when visiting yards, as often it's the worst horses that are brought out, for him to deal with so they want to see the action, but most of his subjects soon respond to his quiet, non aggressive manner and by the end of the session have made real progress.

Not only that but with his guidance and using his techniques I have been able to achieve goals I never thought possible with my own horse and has allowed me to develop a bond with him, that comes from starting to understand your horse, rather than just expecting to ride it. So I presume the people who still bully and beat on their horses to get them to do what they want, don't really understand them and probably haven't seen true exponents of natural horsemanship like Lewis in action, otherwise why would they do it, (perhaps its blindness caused by ignorance).

It has been quite an eventful journey so far with my horse Star, a stocky warmblood, now 16h and just turned 8, who when he first arrived was very slow and easy to handle. I don't think it was long, a couple of weeks perhaps until he found his feet, quite literally, as he was often up on his back legs, with the front ones flailing in my direction plus the teeth, a constant and painful reminder of how quick he was. The battle had begun, him not wanting anybody close, trying to get away, using all the weapons in his armoury, while I struggled on a daily basis just to take him between stable and field, trying to avoid all the kicks and bites, or being dragged and pushed about. Some days were worse than others, but in general not a very pleasant experience, to say the least.

Not sure what had happened to him in the past, but he had obviously had a rough time with previous owners and Lewis thought this had caused him to shut down, exploding when handled to get away from everything he couldn't cope with. The only thing that seemed to motivate him was food, so once in the field he was fine, happy with the other horses and normally easy to catch, the problem then being having to hang on to him for the return leg to the stable. Once there he would relax a bit, although you still had to look out for his teeth and legs, especially when picking his feet out or going into the stable with him. So he was using all his techniques to survive whatever was trying to kill him and I was



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developing mine to avoid the blows, but I was still so slow as hardly a day went by without me picking up a fresh injury of some sort.

So what do you do, when you have a horse you can hardly handle and things aren't getting any better? Luckily someone had heard of Lewis Blackburn, from his articles in the *Essex Rider* and suggested he might be able to help, so after a chat with him over the phone about what the problem was, we arranged a date for him to come out and do some work with Star. This was going to be (not that I knew it at the time) a turning point in Star's development, (and mine for that matter) all I had to do now, was wait for the "cowboy" to turn up!

The morning of Lewis's visit arrived and I took Star out to the field as usual, having our normal arguments en-route, trying to keep his lead rope short so he couldn't bite me, but then I was in range of his front legs which he was quite useful with, or he might try to bolt off or dive into a patch of grass to eat, refusing to move or lift his head. I didn't know anything about Lewis or the techniques he might use, but he assured me he would be able to help. This intrigued me, wondering what he thought he could do and how he would handle Star, when no one else wanted to be anywhere near him, it should be interesting though I thought.

Lewis arrived on time in a tired looking car, stuffed full with horse paraphernalia, and I am sure it rose six inches when he alighted from the vehicle (not that implying he's a big chap), with a "howdy all" in his Texas drawl.

First impression was that he had presence, dressed up in tasselled chaps, a lived in leather coat covered in patches to repair the holes left by equine bites, plus leather boots and gloves, topped off a large western hat, every inch the American cowboy. (only minus the six shooters)

Whether Star was perplexed by the sight of Lewis or the Texas twang confused him, for he didn't bite half as much as he did with me, even keeping all four feet on the ground for most of the session! But that was Lewis, he just seemed to have a way with the horse, making it look so easy in the way he handled Star, where I struggled with him most of the time. As I watched on Lewis would explain what he was doing and why he was doing it in relation to the horse's understanding, all the time trying to think like a horse and be one step ahead.

What really impressed me about Lewis, was the calm and seemingly relaxed way he worked with Star, not reacting to the flying legs and nipping teeth, while keeping up a running commentary on the proceedings, years of handling horses had obviously sharpened his reflexes, helping him develop a sixth sense, for he managed to avoid most of the incoming rounds. His approach was to start with a very light pressure to initiate a response, be it through the rope halter, lead rope or direct to the body, using pressure/release pulses, always giving the horse time to assimilate his request and if need be to slowly increase the intensity of the pulses until he received said response, releasing any pressure the moment the horse tried, even if only a small try or not the one he was after.

There was no shouting at or hitting the horse (which I'm sure lots of people had done to him in the past) as Lewis worked patiently, trying to get through some of the mental blocks and emotional baggage he was carrying, redirecting Star's energy as opposed to fighting against him, trying to keep him out of his right brain (flight) mode.

It seemed a short session to me, but probably a long one for Lewis, needing such a high level of concentration and for Star with all the adrenalin used.

Afterwards in the debrief Lewis said Star had spent most of the time in his right brain, not wanting him anywhere near and obviously very dangerous to handle as would bottle everything up, likely to explode at any moment, not caring if injuring himself or others in his bid to get away. But Lewis added, there



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were brief moments when he got through to him and so was not a lost cause, but it would be a long slow process to try and undo some of the damage from his past as he was carrying a lot of baggage. There were no guarantees and we might have to live with some of his imbedded character traits but with patience, understanding and firm, yet benevolent leadership, there was hope to unlock the true horse within, although that one might turn out to be equally as challenging, ( boy was he not wrong there.)

It certainly would have been a safer and easier option to quit then, but Lewis was an inspiration, his demonstration had shown me there was hope and that progress could be made, even if only in small increments. So Lewis was booked for another session in a few weeks, giving me time to practice some of the techniques I had seen him use and I started in earnest that evening, but like any master of his trade, Lewis had made it look to easy as I struggled to get the results with Star he had achieved, obviously I needed more practice!

That first session with Lewis seems a long time ago now, well I suppose nearly four years, is a long time previous and he has been out many times since, always generous with his time in helping Star to gradually overcome his fears and me to improve my natural horsemanship abilities.

It has felt like an uphill slog at times, (well most of the time in the beginning) with lots of lows and few highs, but we have made progress, slowly building the foundation blocks in Star's development, helped on the way by other keen horse-people willing to use their skills and pass on their knowledge.

I never really had an agenda when it came to working with Star as he was so unpredictable, would just take it one day at a time, trying to use the methods Lewis had shown me, patiently waiting until his next visit so I could ask more questions and watch while he handled the horse to see if he thought any progress had been made. Results were slow in coming as he seemed to resist whatever I was trying to do with him at the time, but being patient and persistent things began to click into place, going from weeks of not doing something every day, to out of the blue giving me that little bit, meaning he had either a slow learning curve, or took great delight in being obstinate! (Left brained extrovert , Parelli horsenality) we've had lots of magical moments, like managing to sit on him for the first time, bareback!, (although he didn't allow me that privilege for long) first trot, again bareback, in the field although we were only meant to be walking and I'm sure I didn't ask him to! Or getting him to join up for the first time, even though he had been running, kicking and jumping about in the school previously, not lasting for long but still a special moment all the same.

So Lewis was right when he said Star wouldn't be a quick fix and that once over some of his fears might get harder to handle but without his help and guidance we wouldn't have achieved what we have or be where we are today. Which means now, I can take him to and from the field with little or no input on the rope halter and backs up with me real easy when I do, or give a little wiggle on the rope if I want him to move away from me, maintaining that herd leader position. He will do a lovely side-pass if I ask, by using a fly like touch with my finger tips, whilst sometimes just being focused is enough (telepathy?) and although still very food orientated, will normally ask for permission to graze when I'm leading him. Most horses should be capable of such manoeuvres I'm sure, but I didn't think Star would turn out so well behaved considering his antics at the start, which just goes to show what can be achieved when you learn how to become a good leader, not that you should forget what has gone on in the past, good or bad, as it is all a learning curve. I remember when Lewis first put his western saddle on Star and then strapped his floppy "Dude" in the seat, me watching as he turned into a bucking- bronco, thinking, "would I ever get to ride this horse or did I even want to try!". Yet now he will stand quietly while I tack him up, happy for me to ride him, (most of the time, still has his moments) whether in the saddle or



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bareback normally just using his rope halter when we go in the school or for a quiet plod by ourselves around the perimeter of the paddocks, trying to keep everything slow as we practice lots of turns, stops, starts, side passes and back ups, trying to forge a solid partnership, using as light cues as possible but being firm when needed. We do have a bit of a problem when trying to negotiate around cones, poles or other such objects though, as he will take great delight in picking them up and carrying them about, much to the mirth of anyone watching, but we don't get all serious, better to let him have some fun, which means I can relax more and enjoy his company, not like before when I was often tense and on edge waiting for the next explosion, so I don't care if we are not up to speed yet, to me that's progress. In those early days I was often told that I was mad to carry on with Star, yet if they could see him now I'm sure they would think he was a different horse or might wonder how the transformation came about. It was simply by using "love, language, leadership", to be open minded enough and willing to learn, whilst being prepared to listen to your horse. It won't happen overnight, as I've discovered, the more you learn, the more you realize you don't know, and how much there is still to find out, but if you can find a good teacher then it will certainly speed that process along and open up a whole new world for you and your horse. There is still lots to achieve with Star and no doubt many bridges to cross, (obstacles to play with) but I didn't think we would get this far, (despite Lewis's optimism) and who knows what the future holds for us both?

Perhaps it has taken a long while to help Star get over some of his emotional and mental problems and perhaps you or your horse have bigger issues going on, but if you are looking for help in dealing with them, like I was, then I really believe that Lewis is the person, who could truly make a difference. I probably haven't done Lewis justice in describing what he does with horses, (and their owners) as it's hard to put into words so you really need to experience it first hand to see how he understands them. But I can honestly say that for me, meeting Lewis has been a life changing experience and been such a privilege to have been tutored by him, without which I wouldn't have the horse I do today (in fact, probably wouldn't have a horse full stop) and I am sure you will feel the same way, if ever you or your horse gets a chance to meet him.

With thanks from us both Lewis.  
(Star and Fredrick)

### **Sefton 17hh, Bay, Clydesdale**

I first spoke to Lewis in January this year and after listening to my long list of issues he assured me he could help. So a few days later this tall cowboy from Texas with an engaging smile turned up at our yard.

I have owned Sefton for just over three years. He's a 13 year old 17h bay heavy weight hunter type and we think he might be Clydesdale cross. When I first got him we had a number of problems including bucking, bolting, being pretty uncontrollable at pleasure rides and dumping me when jumping. He was on part livery at a very traditional large yard. After about six months and a change in bit, diet and regular checks from the osteopath the situation partially improved.



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However, I was not completely satisfied. I didn't feel we were making any real progress and did not believe we had a partnership. I couldn't feel I could trust him and I am sure that Sefton did not trust me. We existed. I had always been interested in alternative methods and read books by Mark Rashid, Michael Peace, Monty Roberts and Kelly Marks. I tried to apply their theories to the conventional environment that Sefton and I lived in.

Finally an opportunity came up to change to a smaller yard in the area, which I felt would really suit Sefton and me. The Yard Manager and I then embarked on this journey together of testing our conventional views with alternatives. Meantime I was still having lessons with a BHS instructor. Increasingly Sefton was becoming less co-operative in his lessons and we had got to a point where cantering in the school became impossible for me due to my fear of Sefton bucking. At her wits ends, my instructor suggested that I might benefit from hypno-therapy to resolve the problem. I realised that at this point I was at an impasse. Mine and Sefton's issues around trust and leadership needed tackling head-on.

Since meeting Lewis, Sefton and I have completely changed our outlook. That is not say that we don't have our good days and our bad days, and he does test my role. However, we are communicating! Lewis listened to all I had to say. From the above you can see I had a lot to say! However, it is about acknowledging that the past does impact on the present, but it is in our gift to modify present and future behaviour. Being a big horse I had wrongly assumed he was tough, insensitive, not the most intelligent and basically a bit of a brute, who got his own way through bullying.

Through my work with Lewis I recognise that Sefton is actually very sensitive, responsive to my moods, is not confident, very intelligent and has been a reluctant leader. What we have learnt together through ground work, lunging and riding is that I am becoming the firm yet benevolent leader that Sefton needs. I am continuing to build Sefton's confidence and trust in me, and at the same time for him to gain more confidence in himself.

Applying this model of leadership and communication started on the ground through a range of different techniques to get Sefton listening to me and what I am asking him to do. Similarly he is communicating with me and I am listening to what he is saying. He does have a lot of baggage and is gradually replacing his response of acting first, questioning later with more patience and studied behaviour. For an example I can now brush round his girth area without the threat of being bitten.

Groundwork is a fundamental part of our routine and is something that I apply and reinforce everyday. It provides the foundation of all other aspects and utilises a *pressure release / request* model, where the action or Sefton's response is achieved on the release.

We went back to the basics of my riding, trying to replace all the traditional methods that I had been taught with much more effective direction. Lewis teaches a subtlety and lightness that I never could have imagined. In the past, Sefton couldn't "be held" in a double bridle yet now I can achieve a stop, rein-back, change of direction or bend with the most subtle of pressure on as little as a happy mouth mullen eggbutt snaffle.



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Another key point is that Lewis teaches a range of practical strategies which become second nature for dealing with a difficult situation. Much of this is about redirecting the horse's innate desire to run from potential danger. It is about moving the horse so that his needs are addressed, yet in a controlled manner and a way that he acknowledges you, moving from his right brain (instinctive side) to his left brain (more pragmatic side). An early example of this was after my first or second lesson we were riding up from the ménage and another horse that was being led from a nearby field broke free and bolted past us. Sefton's immediate reaction was to run after him and my initial thought was to start pulling with both reins, tipping me onto the forehand. Lewis kindly started shouting to push my legs forwards (securing my position) and to turn Sefton through pressure release onto a circle so he could see me, and then gain control via an indirect rein (disengaging his hind quarters, in that case). Sefton started listening to me and because I felt secure in my seat I had more confidence to deal with the situation. I have applied similar techniques out hacking and have laughed at situations where previously I would have been petrified.

Another issue that Lewis has worked on is impulsion, pointing out that constant nagging with my leg has been counterproductive by not requiring Sefton to carry his half of our partnership. Through exercises and practice this has greatly improved and Sefton is now responsive to my requests.

Lewis is kind, generous and incredibly supportive. I trust his advice and guidance and know it is creating a strong bond of trust between Sefton and me. He has helped to reassess situations and rather than believing that Sefton's actions are malicious I have come to realise that often a response is due to fear or a lack of understanding. Lewis has given me the confidence to test other aspects of my approach to welfare and horse care. I have chosen to take Sefton down a barefoot route and further modified his diet to a Lucerne based, non cereal feed.

Through Lewis' teaching I am gaining the relationship that I was looking for with Sefton. We now have the basic building blocks in place but I wouldn't be without my regular lessons to re-evaluate where we are and to reinforce the softness and happiness that we have achieved. Writing this now makes me realise how far Sefton and I have come on our journey and none of this would have been possible without Lewis' intervention and tutorage.

Liz June 2008

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### **PEPPER - 15hh, 10 year old, Thoroughbred, Mare (ex-racehorse)**

At the time I stumbled across Lewis's advertisement in the Essex Rider, I was having to seriously consider returning my ex-racehorse to the re-homing centre I had got her from, as her behaviour had become so unmanageable and she was dangerous to ride. I desperately wanted to keep her, but was running out of ideas, having already worked patiently with her for 18 months. My horse had had a lot of physical problems and seemingly had found her previous experiences in her racing career as mostly negative. Her reactions to the most ordinary of things could be extreme. During these moments of over-reaction, she would be in a panic stricken state and would do anything to escape the situation, unaware of her surroundings, danger etc. I considered myself to be a reasonably confident rider and



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very capable handler but was finding myself unable to cope. To be truthful, I was also quite frustrated as I had always been extremely kind and patient with her and had never hit her or even raised my voice to her, so couldn't understand why she behaved the way she did. She was napping, rearing, bucking like mad and generally difficult. I couldn't tie her up, couldn't shoe her, couldn't keep her stabled, she'd panic if turned out in the field alone, but was aggressive if out with others, she would panic if horses were going in a different direction to her and so on.

Anyway, I called Lewis one evening and we discussed my horse for over an hour. By the end of the conversation Lewis assured me that he would be able to resolve all of the problems we had discussed in just a few sessions. Bearing in mind how reasonable the fees were, I felt I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Knowing how difficult my horse's behaviour could be, to think someone could come along and transform her into a quiet little horse seemed unbelievable, but I already felt like a weight had been lifted as someone was going to help me help my horse. I read some of the endorsements and longed that I too would be able to report similar miracles.

Lewis arrived a few days later to meet us. Initially she was terrified (as she is of all men) but after a few minutes I could see her little mind working. She knew something was different about this person. Lewis changed some aspects of my tack – making it far more comfortable for her and then did some ground work with her using the rope halter. He then showed me how to do the same and then repeated some of these exercises with me riding her. Lewis showed me all sort of tricks to deal with her antics – all of which I have found work 100% of the time. As I'm writing this, it's hard to remember exactly what Lewis did and even harder to understand why it should have such a profound effect on the horse – but it does and that's all you need to remember.

I continued with my training exercises for the next 2 weeks until Lewis returned and we spent more time with ridden difficulties. Again, I practiced the training exercises most days until the 3rd session. After which I had only one more session before it was quite clear that we didn't need him anymore. Since that time, my horse has become the most perfect horse I could ever wish for. I can honestly say that she hasn't put a foot wrong in the last 6 months.

She has grown in confidence and trust and subsequently so have I and so this trust and confidence is constantly growing and being reinforced by each other. I now have a thoroughbred that I can ride out on the buckle of the reins (or even without a bridle - just a rope halter) that will pass anything, go at exactly the speed I want her to and is a complete joy to own.

Lewis's training is as much more about retraining the owner, than it is the horse. His methods need only be practised for a few minutes a day (if that), and are extremely effective at bringing about permanent change. I found Lewis to be punctual, an extremely gifted horseman – and he made training enjoyable - taking a lot of stress out of the situation and injecting a bit of much needed humour!

If you are looking to resolve difficulties with your horse, I would urge you to contact Lewis. The only hurdle I have left to overcome is trailer loading and I'm looking forward to working with Lewis again in the next few weeks to resolve this problem.

Jo (January 2007)

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**Chadwell Farm Stud**



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I have always been a big believer in natural horsemanship, but had never really had the bravery to attempt it on the horses at my stud. I attended demos etc, but they always made it look so easy and once I was faced with one of my own horses in the round pen I was clueless!

My first meeting with Lewis was after a lengthy conversation with him regarding a TB yearling filly I had here called Twiggy. She was foaled and brought up here, and despite regular handling, she had started to become aggressive. Everyday simple jobs would turn out to be a fight, having her feet done was just dangerous and my vet used the old adage 'chestnut mare syndrome' once to often. She was very difficult to catch in her box and had to have her head collar and a lead rope on permanently. A lady I know had been having sessions with Lewis, so I figured it was really the only thing I could do to help Twiggy have a future.

Lewis' first session with Twiggy was fascinating. At first she didn't trust him, but after some time and awful lot of patience and horsemanship on Lewis's part, her whole persona started to visibly change. Lewis explained to me that Twiggy wasn't nasty, she was autistic and had great difficulty remembering things. He assured me that we could work with her but it would have to be repeated everyday in small section.

From that first session myself and my staff were hooked. Lewis visited my stud every 2 weeks to work with Twiggy and left us excersises to do everyday with her to help her learn. By the end of the 2nd session he had taken her headcollar off, bitted her and was in the round pen. It was truly amazing. Over the next few months Twiggy really changed, we could catch her in the field, remove her headcollar without incidents.

She improved so much that shes now in training at a small yard who uses similar methods to Lewis and shes thriving.

Since then I have kept up the sessions with Lewis and have learnt so much. He has helped one of my staff learn to ride on an ex racehorse, another one to ride her horse whom she had given up on due to its behaviour. Over the past 12 months Lewis has worked with 27 of the horses I have here and it's been amazing. Just learning and bringing out and understanding their quirks and natural characters is wonderful. I love using Lewis' way of lunging even if I was sceptical at first! I now have confidence in myself to do the groundwork with the horses here, and if I ever get lost I can always phone Lewis for help and advice. Im looking forward to continuing learning from Lewis for the foreseeable future.

Zoe Arrowsmith

Chadwell Farm Stud  
July 2007

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**Arim & Accolade , TWO HAFLINGER GELDINGS RISING SIX.**



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Nearly three years ago - when we were both old enough to know better – we decided to fulfil a dream of owning a horse. What breed and what age we wondered and where would we find this special horse. We were told to get an older sensible one, not a rescue and not a youngster. Then fate took a hand. We had always admired the Haflinger and discovered by chance that a local farmer bred them. The breeder admitted he only had youngsters but we decided to look anyway. The rest as they say is history. We bought the first chap who was three and had been backed and lightly ridden. What about company we thought? By chance his half brother was also for sale so after our vet had done his examination we were the proud owners of two lively ponies without much of a clue as what to do next.

We had been to a couple of natural horsemanship clinics, read books and watched videos about natural horsemanship and had horsemanship help from a friend and a family member. I had ridden as a child and we had both had lessons at a riding school (expensive and did not learn a thing) some lunge lessons from a local instructor (rather like a wall of death and didn't learn much there either). I had worked with horses as a teen, had two accidents which left me hospitalised and been runaway with. We decided to leave riding them for a year, have them re backed when they were older and do ground works and get to know them. We tried Parelli; one got scared and confused with the pressure the other obstinate so that absolutely nothing would move him and he was still able to bully me. We took them to a natural horse training clinic over two days; there were several horses and riders with mixed abilities and we were totally out of our depth. We learnt then that training can be expensive and you don't always get what you think you have paid for. About this time I was thinking I am way too old for this, don't like the intimidation, I should have got an older sensible mount suitable for my years and was pretty depressed with other folks' negative comments on my efforts which made me feel pretty foolish. Then a chance remark by a friend brought Lewis into our lives.

I had already emailed Lewis having seen his website and he had tactfully not made any comment about them being sent away for rebacking. I understand a bit more now why. We agreed a time for his visit and he duly came out to us. I looked at this big guy from Texas wearing a Stetson and chaps, at our ponies and wondered, with some misgivings how this would all work out. Having had orthodox tuition in the past, been yelled at and various other negative experiences, I was surprised that he did not get us to mount up to see what our riding was like. But lo, he spent time with the ponies on the ground seeing what they understood and what we did, talking and explaining how we would work with them, that I would be safe and he would teach us how and that many riders he worked with got their confidence back. I have to say I felt a bit cheated. Where was the riding instruction, the control the formula to make it all right and what were we going to do to make them behave and get the magic results that I saw other folks get with their horses?

Perhaps the best way to describe Lewis' way of teaching is organic. He works with the horse as an individual and always has the utmost care and respect for them. He takes the time to work with them and us so that they understand and so do we. There has never been any loss of patience on his part, and he must have it tried to the limit sometimes with all the questions. If something doesn't work or the horse does not understand he will find another way, if that doesn't work out he will think of something else. The pony once described as like a land rover with your foot to the floor is changing into a responsive ride that is starting to collect and is quick to understand what he is asked. We understand now that he has a huge ego and likes to be asked nicely. He gets stubborn and difficult if he is not. The



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other chap worries but if the cues are clear and consistent he is happy to oblige and tries hard to do what you ask. We have learnt to lunge in the correct way, they are able to move to the softest touch with their ground work and we know how to do leadership skills from the ground and in the saddle. It is a long journey we are making but we are off the lunge and when we are ready we will ride out and enjoy the partnership that we have. There is no rush and it doesn't matter what other folks think about what we should or should not be doing by now. It takes the time it takes unquote. It is true that I am still nervous (sorry Lewis but I am mature and habits die hard) but I believe in time I will be able to do good turns, redirect the energy if I need brakes, maybe jump a little and hack out. There will be more challenges ahead I am sure – as teenagers the naps are many and varied but we will work through them as we have done before and not get frustrated as Lewis has said on many occasion.

We have been working with Lewis for about a year and half now as he instructs both us and the boys. In all that he has never failed us or the ponies; he has helped in so many ways that it is hard to remember them all. We are very fortunate to have a horseman like him to work with us. He could help just about anyone at any level. As my partner often tells me "Lewis is the real deal". He sure is right about that.

Christine and Julian,  
Accolade and Arim  
March 08

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## **Finn (16.1, Arab-Morgan-QHse, choc/bay)**

I found Lewis by googling natural horsemanship trainers and finding a link to his site at a place I had already looked around. I noticed he was based in Essex and decided God was liking me that day! Since my first lesson with him I haven't looked back.

My horse Finn is a 9yr old whose breeding is anyone's guess! I think of him as an Arab x TB, however he has warm blood traits and looks a bit quarter horse ish, aside from being too tall at 16.1hh. He also has a habit of standing just like a Morgan. He also displays rig like behavior and muscles up more like a stallion than a gelding. He's fairly dominant! He came from Ireland as a 6yr old and I bought him the week he arrived in the country. He was very mal nourished and somewhat withdrawn, but had a beautiful face and kind eyes. I laid him off after riding for a month as he needed at least two months rest to put weight on. He had been difficult to bridle and fidgety to groom from the start, but ok to ride. Well I missed a lot of obvious signs that he wasn't happy with me! To cut a long story short, I took a very bad fall and was lucky to escape serious injury. Finn was very stressed by my sudden fear of him and he decided he had to look after himself, and three different yards and their staff couldn't convince him otherwise. He was never dangerous, just very difficult. I tried Monty Roberts ways which I could see put far too much pressure on my sensitive guy, and although it helped to 'handle' him on the ground I couldn't ride him often, and when I did he was about as uninterested as you can get! By this point I'd ditched ordinary saddles and gone for treeless which helped a lot, and ditched the bit and gone for a Dr Cook, which he also seemed to be pleased about. Still he didn't trust me if something scared him, which happened a lot!



# Lewis Blackburn

## *Natural Savvy Training....*

Enter Lewis.....The first session he stayed for 4 hours and charged me about the same as I'd been paying for two 45min lessons with other trainers. Finn immediately responded to the leadership & join up work Lewis did with him in the round pen, after getting to know him in his stable. At last someone was being the leader Finn was looking for and he loved it! He was cheeky and happy and engaging with Lewis, and basically playing. Lewis explained everything he did and why and what result it was having which is so very refreshing! After an hour of ground work, and a quick bite of grass for Finn and drinks for us all, I was on board! Something I never expected as Finn hadn't been ridden for almost a whole year! Lewis was complementary about all my tack, and he showed me the magic cure all bit! A straight bar Mullen mouth loose ring happy mouth snaffle with a chin strap (not a curb strap)! Great for horses to chew when stressed and my horse can't get enough of it! The secure seat with a lowered center of gravity and the yielding and disengaging to a halt Lewis showed me in case of trouble sent my confidence soaring, especially since he was attached to us by rope! I smiled for an entire week, every lesson since has been better than the one before. We're coming on in leaps and bounds. After another yard change (and hopefully the last for a while) Lewis picked up that Finn seemed to shut down on his left side and ignore everything on that side. He spent a whole lesson carefully examining the strength of this blocking with different stimulus every 5mins or so, and whilst working. He discovered that a floater in his eye a vet had told me was no problem, caused reduced peripheral vision, and made things blurry on that side in general. When the right eye caught something the left eye had blocked out, Finn would explode! This explained about 90% of everything Finn had ever done!

Lewis has showed me how to be firm and polite about my riding and handling, to always ask something of a horse using release of pressure as reward, not demand it. Finn now looks to me for reassurance all of the time. I even noticed when his sight on the left is not so good, he actually nudges me over to that side (when doing ground work) and uses me as a surrogate eye, which makes me very proud! I'm still riding on a loose line at this stage but I'm confident about it, which in anyone else's hands I previously wouldn't have been. Lewis has had a few goes on Finn to show me what he's been having me do and it's fun to watch how sensitive Finn is to his slightest command. Last lesson Lewis tried the start of a real cowboy spin on him and he took it in his stride!

I think the biggest difference Lewis makes to a rider/horse partnership is instilling trust between the two. He's never negative with either student and encourages me to praise Finn when I ask for something the wrong way and Finn gives me what I was asking for instead of what I meant to ask for, as its rider error not horse! I constantly get praise from Lewis for the horse I've got, for his lightness and sensitivity, for the suppleness I taught him, for his willingness to try and work his socks off, and for my horse's big heart. He says Finn will take care of me once he knows I'm able to take care of him. This might not sound big but for someone whose been told their horse is a monster and dangerous by almost everyone else and been told to sell him by every trainer, it means the world!

I will be posting more praise in the future, when I trot, and canter, and ride free range and when mine and Finn's first hack goes swimmingly etc!!

**(Addendum September 2008)**



# Lewis Blackburn

## *Natural Savvy Training....*

Well I tried riding Finn on my own, well without Lewis, for the first time on Sunday and really, there isn't enough praise in the world for my wonderful horse. Not wishing to give Lewis a big head but it's all due to him and his gentle, engaging methods and insistence on telling me how good my horse is EVERY time he sees us which sends my confidence sky high! So, here's what I wrote to Lewis the instant I had time to get to my computer on Monday.." I rode Finn for 45mins yesterday and he was a perfect angel! We did lots of weaving in and out of the triangle of cones, lots of circles and zigzags between the letters at the top end of the school, riding through and backing into and out of the L as well as going over the poles in the L in pretty tight maneuvers. Also we got great neck reining! Finn gave me almost a complete side pass when I was just trying to neck rein him out on a circle as he'd drifted in towards my dad and he just effortlessly went sideways out to the fence!

I was tickled pink! So we did a lot of neck reining to the fence and then did a few back out towards the middle of the ring and then back out to the fence. It probably wasn't stylish looking or completely correct as Finn's neck was a bit bent to the inside as was his bum! But he definitely went sideways whilst going forward, was probably like the English leg yield but the fact that he was giving it with hardly any effort from me made me so proud I had tears well up whilst I was riding along! Also once I was up there I didn't want to get off! Finn was so focused on me and me on him that he didn't look around at anything and there were walkers and dogs out of sight but not out of earshot and we still went down that end of the ring without incident! Hooray! Next step is trying without my dad on the end of the rope! Finn was so perfect my dad hadn't really needed to be there on the end of the 22ft line."

As well as my wonderful Sunday, Lewis now has me trotting Finn in my lessons and it's just sooo much fun! My horse is forward going but steady (which he never used to be either when asking for trot!) and I'm relaxed and comfortable. I never realised Finn had such a loose, free flowing trot that it's not mandatory to bounce yourself half out of the saddle to keep in sync with! So far it's only a few strides at a time in each direction but I'd almost given up hope of ever being brave enough to trot again! Progress is now happening every time I see my precious boy so watch this space.....! I really cannot over emphasise what finding Lewis has done for my relationship with my horse, who now comes from the other side of a large field to be caught every time he sees me instead of hiding in a hedge trying to look inconspicuous!

### **(Addendum September 2009)**

I had another lesson with Lewis today, after a three month gap due to an out of commission arena. Finn acted as if he'd been ridden everyday and as an old hand at all this riding stuff! The most magical part, and something I honestly doubt I ever would've felt without Lewis' (aka Blackie)help, when out of the blue, and of his own accord, Finn started to round and collect himself through neck and back too, the whole nine yards!! His neck got shorter and his chin got closer to me and he felt light as a feather! It was as if there wasn't a horse on the end of the reins (and that's not usually how it feels!) He even kept it when there was slack in the reins as I was too enchanted with it and I didn't dare shorten them or do anything else in case he stopped doing it! He also clearly came up in his back and it felt like riding a cloud, I have never felt anything like it in any horse I've ridden and I was so thrilled to bits, I'm still smiling ear to ear six hours later! I could feel the power in his movement, rather than just feeling him



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

dragging himself along at a plod! I could also feel the swing of his hips rather than the choppy/discordant feel of his back feet coming under and probably being partially blocked by me and his own back. I know it was nothing to do with what I was doing, unless it was that I was so busy talking to Lewis that I wasn't thinking too hard about what I was doing (which is usually how I get into trouble - over thinking too much and not feeling) so I was relaxed and flowing in whatever I was doing! Hooray! That's one thing I never thought Finn would do, let alone give me on his own! He's trying his socks off all the time now and it's a lovely feeling.

Thanks for everything Lewis! You're a fabulous find!

Jennifer and Finn

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## **Diamond Dancer, ID x TB, 16.1hh and weighs over 600kg**

Diamond Dancer I bought Dancer 6 years ago as a 6 year old, with the aim of bringing her on to event her. She is ID x TB, 16.1hh and weighs over 600kg! I realised there was no way we were going to achieve that dream quickly, or possibly even ever at all, since she was extremely unbalanced and was an absolute nightmare to ride. I had bought her more for her confirmation and attitude than for what she was able to do at the time, as a project to bring on. I now realise that we were meant to find each other, as we have both taught each other so much!

Since then, I have embarked on a revolutionary journey, which has changed me as a person as much as it has changed Dancer as a horse! I came so close to selling this mare, on a number of occasions, after many personal "guru's" in my life over those years had labelled her 'dangerous and difficult', told me NOT to hack her under any circumstances if I valued my own life at all! When such people whom you trust, and have grown up learning all you know from, say such things to you, its impossible not to begin to believe them. I became so fearful of her, although I never actually fully admitted this to myself, which enabled me to keep persevering with her, but her behaviour when ridden was not getting any better. The only reason I did not sell her back then, was because I firmly believed I could not as no one in their right minds would want her!

I had begun to install some basic manners with her in the stable by a year later, such as moving back when I went in, and respecting my space to some degree. She was quite happy to remember these things when she was calm and quiet and nothing was out of the normal routine. I should add at this point, that she is not and never has been a malicious or nasty horse in any way. She is very kind and has never bitten or kicked or shown any deliberately nasty act towards any human being in all the time I have owned her. But when she became stressed (a very frequent occurrence back then!) it was a totally different story. Again, no malicious nastiness, but manners from the ground were completely non existent, and she would barge through you, jump ontop of you, attempt to take off, and take you skiing behind her. If you applied any pressure to her head to try to control her, she would simply lift you off



# Lewis Blackburn

## *Natural Savvy Training....*

the floor (I only weigh 9 stone) and you would fly through the air and come back down to earth quite a number of metres further on!

Under saddle, it was the same – apply any rein pressure, and she would open her mouth to evade the bit, throw her head up to loosen the contact, and then plough straight through the bridle, getting faster and faster. She was completely on her forehand with her hindquarters trailing out behind her, trotting as fast as she could in little paddling pony sized strides. If you applied inside leg to go round a corner, she would speed up even more, and you would feel like you were going to go over sideways, so instinctively would apply pressure on the rein to slow down. She would throw her head, and get faster still, and so the cycle would go on!

Hacking was horrendous, she would be continuously trying to turn round, and once you had got her to go forward in a more or less straight line, a blade of grass would move in the wrong way, and she would drop and spin through 180 degrees without an ounce of warning; totally unseating you. At best you would have lost both stirrups and be hanging off the side, at worst – sitting on the floor with a lovely view of her backside disappearing over the horizon. She did this once and the force of her hitting my sister and her pony as she spun, knocked my sister clean from her pony, and both Dancer and the pony galloped home. Other than knocking my sisters confidence so much that she has never sat on another horse since, luckily there were no serious injuries during this awful period of time.

2 years ago all this stress eventually produced mouth problems and back problems, so I soon found I did not have a horse who was willing to have me on her back at all. After many vet visits, and dentist bills etc., I began to research into buying a new saddle. We could not find a treed one to fit her shape, and she was very obviously still upset at having a saddle on her back. We had at least established by this point, that it was no longer injury/pain related, but more likely had become a psychological issue where she associated the old pain with any saddle.

My research continued, and I eventually came across what used to be Ansur treeless saddles – took a leap of faith and bought one, after riding bareback for 4 months. Immediately, I began to see a difference. She was instantly happier.

I then came across Dr Cooks Bitless Bridles and bought one of those, which allowed her to work happily into a contact for the first time. And so we continued for quite a while. But something still was not right, hacking was better, flatwork was many times better, and the bond had begun to form between us. She was generally more respectful on a day to day basis, but there was still something missing. I could not put my finger on it, but when working on the ground in difficult, stressful situations, I still did not trust her and it was quite obvious she did not fully trust me. When hacking, she would still drop and spin; I had just got better at sitting it, but it was still not a particularly enjoyable experience, and the idea of doing x country on her, scared me to death!

This is when I came across Lewis! They say, when the student is ready, the teacher will appear, and this was certainly true in this case. After a long conversation one night, Lewis was absolutely adamant he could help us.



# Lewis Blackburn

## *Natural Savvy Training....*

The first session, he brought a rope halter into the field where she was grazing, and began working with her immediately, to which she responded immediately. He made her move her feet, forwards, backwards, sideways, disengaging the quarters; explaining in huge detail everything he was doing and why he was doing it. It made perfect sense to me from the outset – you have to be their leader in order for them to trust you fully, which increases incrementally over time, the more situations you deal with as a 2 part herd. By moving their feet and thanking them kindly when they acquiesce your requests, you become their main focus and their leader. One of Lewis' catch phrases is "The key to a horse is to move it's feet".

This in turn, enables them to build trust in you as their leader, to believe you are not going to put them in a situation which is going to put their lives at risk, and if something is scary, then this gives them the confidence to listen to you first and look to you for guidance. If you say its ok, then it is, and they can stoically deal with their stress during that situation. It's showing the horse a way of dealing with the stress of day to day life, by giving it someone to follow, believe in and trust, as they would naturally when part of a herd. The horses they adhere to are ones higher in the hierarchy than them; their leader. Dancer is a lead mare, so I had to take on the behaviour of the next one up in the hierarchy to her; the stallion. She would be the one who would spook first, to warn the rest of the herd of a potential danger – hence why she is so much spookier than other horses. So I had to be a very strong character in her world in order to achieve 'stallion' status and therefore leadership.

Another aspect he explained was how important it is to allow them to release this stoically held stress, as they would in a herd environment on a horse lower down the hierarchy. In much the same way as people need to offload the stress of day to day life, and if they don't, then eventually they will blow a gasket over the smallest of thing, which simply pushes them over the edge!! Horses are similar, and if they continually hold onto their stress, eventually it just bubbles over! We have all seen horses completely loose it – this is their way of saying they just cant cope any more. Lewis showed me techniques to take her stress levels up, and then bring them back down again – all in a safe and controlled way, allowing her to release her stoically held stress, meaning the likelihood of her completely loosing it reduces dramatically, and all the while I am developing my leadership skills with her.

She thoroughly enjoyed the session, as did I, and Lewis must have got bored with all the questions I had!

The second session focussed on the same techniques but from the saddle with a rope hackamore and a bit bridle over the top. Even just after one session, it was apparent that Dancer was listening to me more, and had more trust than previously. The equipment Lewis advocated and what he taught us in those sessions has proved exactly what we needed to fit the last piece of the puzzle in place in our relationship – 6 months on, we can happily hack, school and even jump now! I'm a dressage fanatic at heart, and I have been out competing and getting placed in the top 3 every time, in all the traditional British tack.

But moreover, we now can neck rein, stop, backup, leg yield, shoulder in, half pass etc all from the rope hackamore in an enclosed space or out in the open country whilst hacking. And we both thoroughly enjoy and have an awful lot of fun doing so many different things with all different kinds of equipment;



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

western, english – makes no difference to us now, and even sometimes with no tack at all! This is our new goal – tack free!!

So in conclusion - she is most definitely not difficult, she was just totally misunderstood, and hand on heart, I can say she is one of the most beautiful animals I have ever had the pleasure of working with now I understand her and can talk to her in her own language. She is without doubt the most expressive horse on our yard now, and I am sure this is because she knows I understand what she is saying to me!

This journey has had profound effects on not only our relationship together, but all my human relationships too. I am extremely honoured to have had this opportunity to work with and learn from such incredible individuals as Lewis – those trainers who teach us as people to listen and understand our horses naturally, but more importantly – to learn from these beautiful creatures themselves! After all – it is us who must learn to communicate with our equine friends and NOT the other way round!

Every time she sees me now, she is literally falling over herself to get to me, huge excitement and comes charging over whinnying her head off!

The difference in her and I and our relationship together is simply tear jerking to any spectators and especially me. When I compare it to where we started out all those years ago, the only regret I have is I wish I had embarked upon it sooner.

Thank you Lewis, for your patience, understanding and knowledge, and for empowering me to build the relationship I now have with Dancer. I cant recommend you enough!!

Johanna

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## **Connie Connemara , Grey, Mare, 7 yrs, 14.1 hh, Bedford , England**

A few months ago while on holiday I read a book about Monty Robert's life and thought how wonderful it would be to find somebody in this Country who was accessible and affordable to help my children and I with the problems we had with our 7 year old Connemara . Our problems were that Connie would spook at fences, hedges, etc. and generally lacked confidence. As the school we used was surrounded by hedges, it became a frightening experience for myself, my son and my daughter every time we rode her.

I then came across an advert for Lewis Blackburn, in which he explained that he could help build confidence in both horses and riders, which is what both our pony myself and both my children were lacking!

When Lewis came to the yard he spent time getting to know Connie before working with her, it was wonderful to watch her mind working and be explained to about what and how she was generally thinking and how quickly she was responding. Lewis did all sorts of ground work with Connie and gave homework for me to do with her. Lots of ground work to begin improving communications between Connie and us and which is helping with quicker responses to our leg aids and much more. He also taught me single rein riding methods and safe methods of controlling her whenever she gets frightened.



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

Lewis lunged Connie, teaching me how to do so using pressure release methods, via rope halter (which he made) and a single line - safely for Connie and myself and got her thinking and agreeing to move instead of running from a whip to lunge. He also worked with her close to hedges, where at first she was very afraid and kicked out at Lewis, however he knew where to stand and how to deal with her quietly and with confidence, with out being in the firing line and helped her get past her fears very quickly with no overt pressure or coercion! The wonderful thing is that Lewis used no whips nor did he hurt her in convincing her to face her fears. The whole time Lewis explained why he did everything he did to better communicate with Connie which gave me and my children so much better of an understanding and confidence in dealing with her.

Connie was afraid to walk in to a trailer, so during one of the sessions, Lewis worked with Connie so that she could and did voluntary walk into the trailer and stand quietly untied and he never pushed, pulled or whipped her in doing so. It was amazing to watch!

We also have a Shetland pony who is adorable but can be very strong when leading. Lewis has helped us to tackle our Shetland's leading problems and he now walks along without dragging us behind ! Our Connemara has gained so much confidence and is so much happier, we are now living our dream and able to hack out on her in confidence. I can now hack out alone which was never an option before. Recently, while on a hack with friends as we rode past thick hedges out flew some birds, both my friends horses jumped and Connie behaved as if nothing had happened. We are all so proud of her and of course our Shetland pony. Lewis has changed our quality of life which has become one hundred times better. I have recommended Lewis to ten "horsey" friends and will go on doing so. They have all had vast improvements as a result of Lewis's work. I personally think everybody with a horse has something to gain from Lewis's skills. I have an awful lot to thank him for.

Jo Taylor,

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## **Peanuts - Rescued – 10 yr old, TB, Bay, 16 hh, Mare Bishop's Stortford, Essex**

Dear Lewis, I am writing this letter on behalf of my horse Peanuts. I bought her because I was so moved by the pitiful state she was in at the Riding Centre where she was used and owned. There was not an ounce of spare flesh on her bones and her eyes haunted me with the depth of her despair. The proprietor proudly told me Quote "she was used for novices to learn to ride on, she was "bomb proof" in fact needed a "crop" to get her to move at all". Unquote When I got her home, people, friends, vets, blacksmiths all were appalled at the terrible condition she was in. But I was determined to bring her back to health with tender loving care and this was where my problems began.

She was so terrified about being in the stable; she tried to smash her way out - with me being "squashed" between her and the wall/door. She would not let you put a bridle or saddle on and when I did get eventually get one on, she reared up and bolted uncontrollably away.



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

I became frightened, she became very dangerous, so I did the only thing I knew how and that was to give her time, space and a lot of gentle handling. This lasted throughout the Winter, until in the Spring, I was confronted by the fact that I needed to find a way of bringing her back into work and bring out the kind, loving, Mare I knew was hidden in the heart and sole of her being. I was painfully aware that my fear, combined with her trauma would not be of any use and I was strongly advised to either put her in the sales or have her shot. This was when you came into our lives. You communicated with her in a language which she understood. She started to trust you and leaning to comply with your "requests" then slowly began to restructure her behavior. She no longer felt that all humans were going to hurt her. You also felt that she had pain in her skeletal /muscular system and recommended a Bowen Technician to give her treatment, which has turned out to do a World of good for her. The rearing has virtually become a thing of the past, she accepts me on her back for riding now, she has a bloom in her coat and her eyes are full of trust and calm. She is making progress that I expect to last using the exercises that you have shown me to carry on with.

All this is due to your skills and patience. You have never once intimidated her nor forced your message with brutality or cruelty. You have saved her life whilst giving me hours of constructive advice and tuition; thus transforming me from a nervous wreck into someone who is prepared to look forward into the future with confidence and to continue learning to be a better communicator with Peanuts and my other horse or any other horse I meet.

With your exceptional skills and horsemanship you should go from strength to strength in your training business in our Country. People like you are the voice of equines across the Country and we humans (as well as our horses) can only benefit from the experiences you bring into our lives.

Many thanks

Pat and Peanuts.

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## **Cloud, Irish Draft/ TB, Grey, Mare, 11 Years, 15.33 hh**

Dear Lewis,

I am writing this letter to say a big thank you for all the foundation and remedial work you put into Cloud and myself.

You have transformed my Mare from being extremely difficult to manage, whenever I rode out in company and especially whenever we participated in Pleasure rides, into a beautiful, respectful and trusting Mare who is an absolute pleasure to ride now. We have just completed a 15 mile Sponsored ride (Bluebell) with a large number of riders (over 400) going past at different paces and Cloud was an absolute Angle. It is all down to your skill and abilities as a Teacher /Trainer.

You have given me a confidence that I thought I had lost twenty years ago and I have no hesitation in endorsing your skills and patience to all I know and to those I have yet to meet.

Many thank

Patricia Linney (and Rose Cloud)



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

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## **Charlie, 4 year old Arab, Sorrel, 14.2 hh Hertfordshire, England**

Dear Lewis, Just to let you know how successful your work with Charlie and myself has been. Buying an unbroken 4 year old Arab was quite a challenge, and i did receive many negative vibes from fellow horse owners with regards to Arab's temperament and behaviour.

With your method of training, you have helped me to re-think the way i handle Charlie. I have developed a much greater understanding of him, which has resulted in him becoming very responsive to me.

I find your patient and respectful approach has worked wonders. You have managed to help us build up so much confidence and trust with each other, giving me a very kind and well mannered horse (even for an Arab).

The part of your training i have really benefited from is my interaction with you and Charlie. The fact that you pass on your skills allowing me to continue with the work. You have taught me to ask Charlie rather than tell him. It has been an amazing experience.

P.S. Thank you for answering all those questions i bombarded you with!. Kind regards

Karen

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## **Billy, 9 year old, Welsh Cob Section D light bay Gelding, 14.2 hh, Hertfordshire , England**

Hi Lewis it is Sam with Billy, I thought I would just write and tell you that I was amazed at what you did with Billy yesterday! I put the things you told me into practice today both whilst riding and it was the most enjoyable ride I have had in a long time, he was so responsive to my aids and he seemed to be so much calmer, it was nice to be riding as one rather than fighting each other the whole ride. Thanks again Lewis, see you on the 31st. Sam and Billy x

Samantha Wright

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## **Phoebe, a 4 year old, Mare, Grey, Connemara , 15 hh Bedfordshire , England**

Hi Lewis

1. The quality of the remedial work done in getting past Phoebe's main problems and the resulting progress.

First class..2. About getting Phoebe to begin thinking more left brained and making it easier to return her to left brain thinking from instinctive reaction when needed.

We have had no explosions since you have been.

3. Also a short comment about the way Phoebe was handled without intimidation or causing any pain for her.



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

You handling of her I could not fault.

4. It would be good to include the Ferrier results / comments.

Yes this would be good. She has been a dream to trim since that day. His quote was "Had I changed Phoebe for a new edition " as she stood so quite.

Everything you did with Phoebe I cannot fault and was first class horsemanship.

Best regards,

Pat Barringer

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## **Hamish, 12hh, 4 year old, Grey, Connemara , Gelding**

Essex Dear Lewis,

"I watched the patient, caring and fun manner in which you worked on Hamish and could see how thoughtful and consistent your approach to him was.

You make the session fun for owner and horse. You are generous in the information you impart, clearly wanting to achieve the best results possible. I would recommend you to anyone who had an interest in developing their horse's abilities and handling." With very best wishes

John Cronjaeger

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## **For Two Horses in Essex 8 year old, 15.2 hh, dark bay, Cob/Warm blood, Mare and 8 year old, 15.1 hh, light bay, Trakener/Thoroughbred, Mare**

I started Natural Horsemanship in the summer of 2004 at a weekend clinic and was pleased with the understanding this opened up with my horse. But how to continue without the intensive tuition offered by a clinic? I did not have the skills at that time to make progress.

I was introduced to Lewis who helped me to consolidate what I had learnt at the starter clinic but, more importantly, apply it to the needs of my horses. We also identified the "issues" with each of my 2 horses and worked at resolving them together. The horses are very different: 1 a classic cob and the other a classic XTB type. Lewis was able to respond to each with quietness, kindness and, importantly, in a flexible way to fit in with the systems I am using. I can continue with my programmes and keep up with the group having been a bit overwhelmed at the beginning..Lewis treats the horses as partners and with respect. Much time is spent getting the solid basics and the safety aspects are never ignored. Lewis also explains to the owner what he is doing all the time in the session and our times together have been non stop dialogues between the 3 of us.

Because Lewis is not stuck in any programme he can "slot in" with you, even if you are not following natural horsemanship. The expert help in teaching feel, giving/yielding to pressure is beneficial in any



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

discipline and the commensurate confidence and pleasure in just being with your horse is thereby increased.

Obviously, this is my personal view and experience only.

ALEX

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## **Freddie, in Essex 6 year old, 16.2 hh, Dark Bay , Thoroughbred / Warm Blood, Gelding**

Hi Lewis,

At last, I've managed to get pen to paper, thank you for the reply, I have looked at the acknowledgements, and thought I would put it down another way. As a qualified riding instructor, it was with interest and a little skepticism about the Natural Horsemanship, although I am always open to different versions of horsemanship, that I called you in. So with My horse, that I've Bred, who had had a lot of back problems and was trying to get above his station, I accepted your assistance. I have broken in quite a few horses and they have all turned out ok. But with Freddie he is a different kettle of fish.

We have been training weekly with Lewis since Dec 04 and I have carried on working him six day's a week, not physically but mentally, this seems to be working, he is a very intelligent horse and likes to be used, but before he was always mucking about or shying, rearing ,bucking, since Dec he has become more relaxed and if he shies, instead of being difficult to handle from then on, I can bring him back to his left hand brain, the soporific side, and we can carry on with what we were doing.

At the moment we are rebacking Freddie with a dummy, the size of Lewis (but lighter). The first time, well I think we could have sold him as a rodeo horse, but by the second time, he had improved 50% and continues to improve from one week to another. I have also found that he now has real respect for me, and it is surprising what a drop of the rope and a finger to him, gets so much response from him, its lovely. Photo's included.

Regards Jill Perry.

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## **Tansey's**

Dear Lewis

I just wanted to say thank you so much for your help in getting Tansey's confidence back in travelling in a trailer. As you know she wouldn't go into a lorry, (which I didn't mind), but she did have to travel in a trailer. Due to a third persons interference she was terrified but after two visits from you she was walking through and after six visits she was travelling.

I ride western and now have a better understanding of western training.

Once she comes back and settles down after our move, I hope to have you back for more training with her.



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

Thank you so much

Barbara & Tansey

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## **January 2006 "William" Connemara/Shire, 15.1hh, Grey, 9 years old (large bone)**

Hi Lewis

Big Will was purchased three years ago, although it was a bit more of a rescue. He was 40% under his proper body weight and infested with mange. He was brought home and given tlc and fed. It then quickly became apparent that he had only ever been trained with abuse. You could not lead him, shoe or clip him, as, being a rather heavily built lad, he uses his strength to bolt off.

He hacked beautifully, but any schooling led to more napping and bolting.

I perservered for 2 years and did rather well, even competing in dressage, but the bolting issue remained when he became stressed.

We have worked with you for about 6 months and I now have a horse that can lunge, be lead and loads into the lorry without crushing several people (or other lorries!) At shows, although he can still get stressed, he can now be tied to the lorry, and you can lead him around without being dragged.

The use of the reins we have learned from you, allows me to turn him if he bolts, or even better, allows me to knock him off balance before he goes.

The western way of giving: less aids, not more, suits us perfectly, and prevents him becoming stressed with overlapping instructions. I have a lot more confidence with him now, and I have a much happier, relaxed horse.

thank you Lewis

Kris

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## **12yr old T/B Mare 16.1 h Ellie Feb 2006**

Dear Lewis

This is a letter of thanks for the wonderful advice and support you have given me.

I am a very nervous rider and felt completely out of my depth with my new mare. Returning back to riding after 23yrs and struggling with everything.

I have tried everything including hypno therapy to no avail.

You have taught me skills which have helped me to bond with my girl and have helped me to gain confidence in the saddle. I still have a way to go but with your help I am now on the right road. You have taught me practical skills which I can understand and back up support



# Lewis Blackburn

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second to none.

My mare is now lame and I have had to make trips to the vets and having never boxed a horse before there was another obstacle for me to get over. With your support , always on hand with a phone call and an e-mail , I have managed to deal with this. Ellie is still lame and you have taken the time to research her condition and offer support and send me articles offering advice and examples of other horses with the same condition and how the owners have coped and dealt with the condition.

But the one thing, which stands out beyond all others, is the kindness shown in everything you do. You have more patience than anyone I have ever met. You treat horses with such respect and I recommend your services to anyone wanting a better relationship with their horse or anyone with a problem who needs help.

Thank you.  
Lisa South Essex UK

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## **Guy, TBX, 15hh, 18 years old, Black**

Dear Lewis,

Please find below a brief summary of all your efforts with Guy. I am afraid that my words do not do proper justice to your work, but suffice to say that Hannah and I are extremely grateful for what you have taught us.

Even after all this time, every lesson with you is informative and fun, - despite the atrocious weather you keep bringing with you!

Many thanks, Heather

**Guy, TBX, 15hh, 18 years old, Black.**

My daughter aged 13 and I had owned Guy for about nine months when we first came across Lewis. Whilst 'perfect' in many ways, Guy had a few little problems, which had become more significant the longer we owned him. We initially asked Lewis to help us with the largest of Guy's problems, - his fear of vets and particularly injections. Guy was undergoing a course of two-weekly vaccinations to prevent a sarcoid returning, and I had reached a position where I felt that it was becoming too traumatic and dangerous to carry on with the injections. As soon as Guy saw the vet, he started to run, and I was having increasing difficulty to hold onto him.

Guy also had a fear of men, so his first session with Lewis was of great interest to me. The initial encounter was much as I had expected, with Guy's body language showing all the natural signs of fear. However within five minutes, Lewis had gained Guy's trust and respect, using his natural techniques based on two-way communication.



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

Over the next few months, Lewis helped Guy through his fortnightly injections, and perhaps more importantly helped us understand life from Guy's perspective and how to communicate with him. With Lewis's help, Guy has noticeably improved in many ways, - for example he is much more relaxed with the vet, he allows us to apply sun-cream to his muzzle, he doesn't panic with the horse dentist, he is easier to catch in the field, .

More recently, Lewis has been instructing Hannah in Western riding techniques, and Hannah feels that she has learnt more in these few months than she has in several years of conventional riding lessons. The single thing that has impressed me most throughout all the time that we have spent with Lewis, is that no matter how obstinate and uncooperative Guy has been on occasions, Lewis has never shown any signs of anger, - his approach has always been one of persistent persuasion until he has achieved his goal.

Finally, and very importantly, I recognise that it was not really Guy that needed lessons, but my daughter and me. The techniques that Lewis has shown us are not only appropriate for Guy, but will stand us in good stead with any horse that we have dealings with. Guy has improved because the way that we handle him has improved, and the lessons from Lewis were only as successful as the extent to which we applied them.

February 2006

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## **Mouse, TB, 16 hh, 7 yrs, former Racehorse**

(I do hope you don't mind me putting this on the forum Lewis?!)

Well, I've just managed to collect my thoughts together well enough to be able to update you all on the visit from the Lewis.

It was absolutely fabulous and has given me so much to work with before he comes back again. I recorded it as well so I can re-watch it all and refresh myself when needed.

Lewis worked with Mouse for 2 and a half hours solid. She was pretty shattered by the end of it but it was well worth it.

He basically did lots of leadership work, which she responded really well to. Most importantly (to me) he was able to show me how to calm her down when she goes right brained (instinctive) when in hand and also when being ridden, so it has given me a lot of confidence.

He established that Mouse will respond to the slightest bit of pressure (always a good thing) and demonstrated this by lunging her without uttering a word (obviously no whip was present either). He also managed to get her to slow and halt just with his body position and eyes.

We even got her comfortable with her bit! He corrected me on the common misconception that there should be creases at the side of the mouth to establish correct bit position. He advised that this simply



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

doesn't apply as all horses have different shaped mouths. He showed me how to fit the bit properly by seating it directly in the middle of the gap between the front and back sets of teeth. This meant dropping Mouse's bit by two holes either side. It worked a treat and she didn't fiddle or resist the bit at all! I took the noseband off today as well and she looked so pretty without a load of leather around her face!

Again he reiterated what I believe in - bits are for communication - NOT control. He said that if you are using the bit to control the horse you have issues you need to sort out from the ground first. Nothing new there then!

It really was a fabulous day. He worked with two other horses as well as Mouse and was at the yard until almost 7.30PM. He had one short break and one apple all day! He really loves his work and is not a showy type of person. He even managed to get a horse who was TERRIFIED of clippers (even the sight of them from afar) to allow them to be rubbed over his body. His owner was amazed and, like me, has lots of things to work with before Lewis returns next month.

I've been doing the exercises with Mouse since Saturday and she is doing great! She picks things up pretty quickly so she's a real joy to work with. She's not too keen on the rope halter that I bought (it took me half an hour to catch her with it yesterday and she wouldn't come near me when I had it in her stable today!) but Lewis advises that she will start to see the reason for it more clearly as time goes by and become more accustomed to it and its use.

I would highly recommend Lewis! I could ramble on and on.....

I feel so much more confident and inspired now I know that she's not a 'nutter' as some people like to make her out to be. Everything she does can be worked around and I'm looking forward to a stronger and more positive relationship with her.

JOANNA GREEN

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## **TB/Cleveland Bay - Bedford, UK - 16.2hh, 10 yrs , Gelding, Feb 2006**

What a pleasure it has been being reintroduced to my horse Sylvester by Lewis Blackburn using natural horsemanship techniques.

Sly has always been an interesting ride but felt my confidence slip, as his manners, stropiness and strong head at the canter/gallop were beginning to impact on us both and I didn't know how to handle it! I have been working with Lewis for a few months and have really gained a far better understanding of not only Sly but also horses in general and what their behaviour really means rather than just being naughty!

Seeing Lewis work with Sylvester on his first session was just amazing and I could see straight away that I had a lot to learn but that it could be done. Sly has been given time to understand the requests put to him and to decide for himself that it is easier to get on with it, he has been given time to learn, allowing him to keep his dignity, he is aware of who is boss without being coerced.



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

One rein stops - a revelation which should be taught to ALL riders, when things are getting frightening I now have a solution and one rather bemused horse.

Nobody had been able to show me a way of lungeing him without him rearing, cantering at speed and general charging about - he was terrified of the whip. Lewis started by using the groundwork exercises, which are fundamental to everything he does. I now have a horse who moves out into a circle, changes direction, changes pace by hand signals only - therefore no whip, therefore no terrified horse - therefore I handle him with confidence - talk about a virtuous circle.

I have found the whole concept completely absorbing, fascinating and an ongoing learning process of benefit to both myself, and Sly, and Sly well he just loves Lewis.

Many thanks.  
Louise and Sylvester

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## **March 2006 DeeJ Arab x Welsh Section D, 14 yr old, Palomino**

Hello All We have just had a visit from Lewis, all the way up to North Norfolk My only complaint is that I just didn't book enough time with him!

Six months ago we bought a pony which was later described as "hates humans, has no respect for them, will kill your daughter or at least, put her in a wheelchair". Not very confidence building. Since then, we moved DeeJ from his previous residence and more or less left him alone, asking nothing of him but just turning up at the field to feed, groom, water, poo pick and chat with him. We spent time reading about Natural Horsemanship methods and were very pleased when Lewis agreed to hike up to North Norfolk so we could see it in action.

I was quite interested to see how DeeJ would react to Lewis - when the owner of the field went to put a halter on DeeJ to take him for photos (we weren't there but had said he could borrow DeeJ) he found he couldn't! DeeJ would have none of it. Lewis had no such trouble, DeeJ went off with him quite happily, having only known him two minutes!

I am new to the horse world and the only "training" I have seen (outside of my own field) consists of nothing more than intimidation and ruling by fear (not something I agree with). So I was pretty impressed at seeing the rope halter and the way it instantly rewards the horse for yielding to pressure. Even more impressive was the way Lewis behaved with DeeJ, he speaks softly and appears to have an unlimited supply of patience! DeeJ became very relaxed with Lewis and picked up pretty quickly what he needed to do -fascinating to watch!.

Lewis has shown us the leadership exercises and today even I had a go with some degree of success. He also showed Rebecca how to sit in the saddle so that she won't ever be bucked off! So why don't the



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

riding schools teach that? Thanks, Lewis, I feel filled with a renewed confidence now that we have some exercises to practice, it does make a huge difference to see a REAL professional at work!

Paula Norfolk

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## **Mouse (a 16hh TB mare), Nr. Brighton, England**

"Lewis, I felt it timely to write to you and let you know how much of a benefit you have been to my relationship with my horse. In case you wish to use this on your site, I felt it wise to give a bit of background info. on Mouse.

I bought Mouse (a 16hh TB mare) when she was 4 years old. She'd come out of racing the year before and had then gone straight on to heavy schooling/competition work. Basically, she had never been given the opportunity to be a horse and this was evident in her behaviour in all aspects - be that in the field, in her stable, in hand, and particularly when ridden. Many of the ridden problems were down to ill-fitting tack. I changed this and she seemed to improve immensely. However, even though I felt as though we'd made huge progress, there were still times when I felt out of control with Mouse and that her over-riding anxieties were presenting us with ongoing problems. These times included on the roads when she would suddenly lose all sense of reason and spatial awareness. I could tell you many a story about Mouse and how we were caught up in some very scary moments!

Anyhow, it came to a point where I felt I needed help and I happened to come across your name. You then came and seemed to work wonders with Mouse who we have now established to be a very headstrong horse who expresses herself very clearly. You managed to instil in me a confidence that I never thought I would achieve. I was not only handling her in a more effective way but my riding also improved. I now never feel out of control.

We are now working on the loading and you have already made improvements in this area after just one session. Mouse has a real fear of loading as she believes she will be taken to the vets. I feel this is the case as she will always happily jog onto the lorry on the way home from the vets! You managed to get her to accept standing on the ramp and comfortably put her head in the lorry without throwing her head around or backing off in a hurry. I have now been practicing myself and, whilst I know this will be a long journey, I see light at the end of the tunnel.

Your never ending support has enabled me to believe in myself and see my horse in a totally different light. You are always there for me at all hours of the day (well, within reason obviously!). I don't quite know where I would be if I hadn't have 'found' you and got to grips with Mouse and her ego!

Thank you so much and I truly hope that more people will put their faith in your abilities as the journey will be so worthwhile. Your patience and modesty is humbling and I thank you for that as well".

Jo x

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**SPARKY -- 14.1 hh, Traditional Gypsy Cob, Black and White,**



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

Our story so far... Having bought a traditional gypsy cob from a dealer I decided to contact the previous owners. They were very candid with their information and advised me that the cob was in fact a bolter. Having had a very difficult time with a previous horse and having little confidence left as a result, this was a very big worry to me. Sparky was very nappy and this would manifest itself in his bogging off to the gate whenever he chose. I had no control.

I decided that despite this new information I really wanted to try to make a relationship with this horse as he seemed such a nice boy. That's when I contacted Lewis and told him my sorry tale. He visited us after I had had the pony for about 2 weeks.

We began working from the ground, building a new foundation and better communication. I followed up with the exercises Lewis recommended and at first Sparky seemed confused !! We persevered and had Lewis make periodic trips to us so we have now gone from strength to strength. I now have working strategies that help me in case I get into a situation I can't handle. I have regained confidence in myself and have gained confidence in my wonderful horse. On only the third visit from Lewis I was cantering. I have learned to redirect Sparky's movements, rather than pulling on him to stop him when he gets worried or excited and have gained speed control with only a loose rein.

I even got a 62% score in our second dressage test.... I never ever thought I would feel like this again about riding. This is after only 3 months of owning the horse. It is a real transformation. We will continue our good work for some time to come.

Best wishes Lorraine

---

**Scarlet & Jamaica Hanoverian x TB Mares Dec 2006**

Dear Lewis,

Just to thank to so much for your wonderful first visit. It was so reassuring. Scarlet whom is afraid of strangers especially men responded to you so well and tried so hard to please. Struggling with a young abused horse for the past eighteen months has had some amazing highs but some bad lows. It has been at times lonely as people are very quick to tell you, you are "too slow" or "too soft". We have been trying so hard to understand and work with our horse. For you to be able to work with us using the same principles and give us support and advice, to help us move forward, has been heart warming.

We can now progress with Scarlets schooling knowing we are doing the best for our horse, and we are producing a balanced well mannered animal. We have completed the exercises you set us almost every day. Scarlet has been willing to do them. Jamaica has needed more encouragement. However, a carrot at the end of training has seen her whiz through, she has been very entertaining!

We are looking forward to our next visit from you, thank you again.  
Kindest regards

Julie and Sally Reeve

---



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

## **N.E. Lincolnshire Froggy, 9 year old TB, Gelding, 15.2 hh, Bay**

Dear Lewis,

just a few short words of thanks for helping me, my partner David and our TB gelding, Froggy, through a very difficult time.

Froggy's spooking and generally tense behaviour under saddle had really damaged my confidence to a point where I was really not enjoying riding him anymore. You came, listened and understood our problems. Most notably you gave David and I an understanding of Froggy's perception of the world.

With time and patience you taught us skills to develop our communication with Froggy both in-hand and under saddle. The experience was a positive one and provided the break through we all needed.

Thank you for your help and patience – from all of us !!

Jayne, David and Froggy.

Regards Dr Jayne Harris MRSC CChem Csci

Connemara , Grey, Mare, 7 yrs, 14.1 hh A few months ago while on holiday I read a book about Monty Robert's life and thought how wonderful it would be to find somebody in this Country who was accessible and affordable to help my children and I with the problems we had with our 7 year old Connemara . Our problems were that Connie would spook at fences, hedges, etc. and generally lacked confidence. As the school we used was surrounded by hedges it became a frightening experience for myself, my son and my daughter every time we rode her.

I then came across an advert for Lewis Blackburn, in which he explained that he could help build confidence in both horses and riders, which is what both our pony myself and both my children were lacking!

When Lewis came to the yard he spent time getting to know Connie before working with her, it was wonderful to watch her mind working and be explained to about what and how she was generally thinking and how quickly she was responding. Lewis did all sorts of ground work with Connie and gave homework for me to do with her. Lots of ground work to begin improving communications between Connie and us and which is helping with quicker responses to our leg aids and much more. He also taught me single rein riding methods and safe methods of controlling her whenever she gets frightened.

Lewis lunged Connie, teaching me how to do so using pressure release methods, via rope halter (which he made) and a single line - safely for Connie and myself and got her thinking and agreeing to move instead of running from a whip to lunge. He also worked with her close to hedges, where at first she was very afraid and kicked out at Lewis, however he knew where to stand and how to deal with her quietly and with confidence, with out being in the firing line and helped her get past her fears very quickly with no overt pressure or coercion! The wonderful thing is that Lewis used no whips nor did he hurt her in convincing her to face her fears. The whole time Lewis explained why he did everything he did to better communicate with Connie which gave me and my children so much better of an understanding and confidence in dealing with her.



# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

Connie was afraid to walk in to a trailer, so during one of the sessions, Lewis worked with Connie so that she could and did voluntarily walk into the trailer and stand quietly untied and he never pushed, pulled or whipped her in doing so. It was amazing to watch!

We also have a Shetland pony who is adorable but can be very strong when leading. Lewis has helped us to tackle our Shetland's leading problems and he now walks along without dragging us behind !

Our Connemara has gained so much confidence and is so much happier, we are now living our dream and able to hack out on her in confidence. I can now hack out alone which was never an option before. Recently, while on a hack with friends as we rode past thick hedges out flew some birds, both my friends horses jumped and Connie behaved as if nothing had happened. We are all so proud of her and of course our Shetland pony.

Lewis has changed our quality of life which has become one hundred times better. I have recommended Lewis to ten "horsey" friends and will go on doing so. They have all had vast improvements as a result of Lewis's work. I personally think everybody with a horse has something to gain from Lewis's skills. I have an awful lot to thank him for.

Jo Taylor, Bedford , England

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## **William. 15hh Chestnut ( sorrel ) Connemara x TB 19 yrs**

I have been working with Blackie for just over a year now, and couldn't recommend him highly enough. Blackie took the time and the trouble to really get to know me and William, my horse, as individuals, to discover what makes each of us tick, and to find out what methods would work best for each of us to start thinking as a team.

He has helped me to understand William so much better, and as a result, my relationship with Wills has improved, and therefore his trust in me.

William is now nearly 19 years old had a chequered past, and had spent four years at a riding school before I was lucky enough to buy him. His confidence was pretty much at rock bottom, and therefore we had no trust in each other. Blackie recognised Wills as the highly intelligent, cheeky chap that he is, and showed me how to help William regain trust in his rider.

Because of my work commitments, I have actually only been able to work with Blackie on 8 occasions over the last year, but the improvement has been steady and Wills and I now ride out alone on occasion – something I NEVER thought we'd be able to do.

Blackie has shown me that to have a constantly evolving relationship with one's horse is truly a magical thing, and that no horse , or rider, is too old, (or too fat! ) to benefit from time spent with his knowledge, wit and wisdom.

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# Lewis Blackburn

*Natural Savvy Training....*

Lewis Blackburn .....AKA "Blackie".....I'm a fan!

Please do not hesitate to contact me on the above email should you wish to discuss my endorsement of Blackie further.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Matthews

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Oscar – (15.3hh, Chestnut gelding, TB X Welsh, 15 years old)

I first called upon Lewis when I was having problems with my horse, Oscar, about 2 years ago. I've owned him for about 9 years now but when I went away to University I put him out on loan. I got him back when I finished and that's where the problems started. I'd had very little contact with horses over those years and I had lost my confidence.

He would walk all over me and I had a hard time doing almost anything with him. I had trouble getting him in from the field, he'd just stop and refuse to walk on. I couldn't get him in his stable and he would drag me all over the place. I couldn't tie him up. I could never ride out by myself as he would nap. He'd bite me occasionally and rub his head against me all the time. The list was endless and I wasn't having much fun! I knew he was being disrespectful but all the methods that I had been taught in the past about being forceful just didn't work and using a whip would just make things worse!

I emailed Lewis and gave him all the details of my situation. I was so relieved when he said he'd be able to help. He always explains the reason behind everything that he does and it makes so much sense. He showed me some things I could do to reinstate myself as the leader, a firm benevolent leader. He also showed me some exercises to improve my communication.

I saw the effects immediately, and after a few months Oscar was one of the best behaved horses on the yard! As soon as I was able to lead him well, it solved all the other problems that we had.

Most problems I had occurred due to misunderstanding. When I take a moment to listen to my horse and talk to him how he understands and help him succeed, he really appreciates it. Oscar is a very clever horse and is always coming up with new ways to try to get that piece of grass or evade me when I'm asking him to do something. I've realised how horses brains don't work like ours, he doesn't stand in the field plotting ways to out-do me, horses live for the moment and sometimes he just doesn't see a good reason why I'm asking him to walk across a field of lush grass and he's not allowed to eat it all!

He's a sweet boy but can get really cheeky sometimes. Lewis has shown me loads of little non-confrontational methods I can use which have proven to really work. There is no point trying to force a horse to do something that he doesn't want to do. I have learnt how to earn his respect so he wants to do things when I ask him to do them. I actually enjoy training my horse now!



# Lewis Blackburn

## *Natural Savvy Training....*

This is only half of the story, as our relationship was so good and I was hacking out by myself for miles and miles with no trouble, I took it for granted and thought that since I can do this that was enough training. I'm ashamed to say I stopped doing the groundwork. I just wanted to get on and ride! Big Oops!

I had all the tricks in the book to get over him napping and move on when he's eating grass, so I was totally lost when he started bucking and rearing with me. He had lost his confidence in me as his leader because I didn't reinforce my position as leader by doing the groundwork.

He soon worked out that rearing up at me and throwing himself around intimidated me (while ridden and just leading him around). This made it worse and it got quite dangerous as he didn't respect my space. All the tricks that I had learnt when he was calm and left-brain didn't help much when he was like this, all agitated and right-brain. I knew just who to call, Lewis.

Never underestimate the importance of groundwork!! Leadership and communication isn't something which you can work on for a bit then tick it off as being done. It needs to be practised every time you're with your horse. As Lewis explained to me, the pecking order in a herd can change every day. If one horse's leadership slips, another will be quick to take its place. So, now everyday, as soon as I greet him in the field, or stable, I reinforce to him that I am still the leader.

It took me a while to get my confidence back but Lewis has been working with me to get it back up. He showed me how to safely deal with him if he rears up and after I practised it a couple of times and it worked, my confidence has really soared! I love going for lovely long hacks but it's definitely not much fun when you're not the leader! I know now how important it is to keep on incorporating ground-work and schooling in to my schedule. It keeps us both safe and keeps our relationship in check.

It's great to have someone to turn to with any horse problems! I'd definitely recommend him.

Thank-you Lewis!

Katie (Feb 2009)

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# Lewis Blackburn

## *Natural Savvy Training....*

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Katie (Feb 2009)