You Were Not Born With This

The good news and the bad news about your riding fear.

The bad news first, because you already suspect it. **Riding fear does not go away on its own.**

It can come from a fall that lasted three seconds, five years ago, and you have been carrying it every day since. Time on its own does nothing. Plenty of riders have proved that by waiting.

Now the good news

You were not born this way. Every single baby arrives with exactly two fears. **Falling, and loud noises.** That is the entire list anyone starts with.

Which means every other fear you have was learned somewhere. Fear of snakes. Fear of spiders. Fear of competing. Fear of cantering. Fear of getting on at all.

And if something was learned, there is a presupposition sitting inside that word. **It can be unlearned.** Not managed, not pushed through, not white knuckled. Unlearned.

> **YOU MAY HAVE ALREADY SPOTTED THE PROBLEM**
>
> Hang on. Falling is one of the two you were born with. And riding fear is mostly about falling off.
>
> So is this one the exception? Is yours the one that cannot be unlearned?
>
> **No. And the reason why is the most useful thing in this guide.**

So what about falling?

Drop a newborn an inch and it will fling its arms out. Nobody taught it that, and nobody has to.

But look closely at what that reflex is actually about. It fires **while the baby is falling**. It is a response to something happening, right now, to a body that is already in the air.

That is not what you have.

What you have instead

You are standing on the ground, fully supported, nothing happening. Your horse is eating. And you feel it anyway, because you are not responding to a fall. **You are responding to a prediction of one.**

A prediction is a thought about later. It was built out of something that happened, and it was learned. Which puts it straight back into the column of things that can be undone.

A **Real fear**

It is happening now. The gate is open, he is loose on the road, you are already going over his shoulder. Your body is right, and you want it doing exactly what it is doing.

B **Imagined fear**

It is a story about later. What if he spooks. What if it is windy Saturday. Nothing is happening at all, and your body runs the entire programme anyway.

Almost all riding fear is the second one, and it feels identical from the inside. That is the whole problem, and it is also the opening.

> **AND THERE IS A SECOND LAYER**
>
> Most riders who say they are scared of falling are not actually scared of the ground. They are scared of what falling would mean. Getting hurt. Not being able to work. Being a burden on someone. Being the one who could not do it.
>
> None of that is innate. All of it was learned, and some of it was learned nowhere near a horse.



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GRAND PRIX DRESSAGE · MASTER NLP PRACTITIONER

If you broke your wrist, you would see your doctor, and your doctor would send you to somebody who does nothing but wrists all day. Nobody finds that insulting. It is just what you do when the thing is specialised.

Riding fear is specialised. A good instructor can teach you to ride, and most of them are very good at it. But **fear is not a riding problem**, and being taught to ride harder has never once fixed it.

I was the first person in Australasia to take a Friesian to Grand Prix. I am also a Master NLP Practitioner, and I have taken over 4,000 riders through riding fear. I could not get back on my own stallion once, so none of this is theory to me.

The door

Here is how something gets learned. You walk through a door, and on the other side something terrible happens. Now you do not trust doors. You get a feeling when you see one. You go the long way round.

But the door was never the problem, and no amount of standing in front of doors being brave about it will fix anything, because you would be working on the door.

The canter is the door. The wind is the door. The arena with other people in it is the door. They are real, they are what you can see, and they are not the thing.

Three fears, not twenty

Go far enough down under almost anything people are frightened of, and you arrive at one of three.

1 **Not belonging**

Being outside the group. Being the one who cannot do it, in a yard full of people who can.

2 **Not being good enough**

Being found out. Not deserving the horse, the lesson, the ribbon, the time it all takes.

3 **Not being loved**

That if you are not coping, not useful, not the capable one, something gets quietly withdrawn.

These three run deep because for most of human history they were fatal. Being cast out of the clan was not embarrassing, it was a death sentence. You did not survive alone. **Nobody has told that part of your brain this has changed**, so it is still running clan software in a world of float parks and warm-up arenas.

One question that starts moving it

Fear is not a thing you have, like a birthmark. It is something you do, in a particular place in your body, with a particular voice attached. And a thing you do can be done differently.

TRY THIS

Think of the last time it turned up. Where was it in your body? If it had a shape and a colour, what were they? And what did it say to you, in whose voice? Most riders find the voice is not their own.

YOUR TURN

Write it down

Reading this changes nothing on its own. Writing it down starts to, because the moment it is on paper it stops being a fog and becomes a thing with edges.

1. **What am I actually scared of? In my own words, as I would say it out loud.**

2. **Is it happening now, or is it a story about later?**

3. **If it did happen, what would that mean about me?**

4. **Which of the three is underneath it? Belonging, good enough, or loved.**

> **ONE HONEST EXCEPTION**
>
> If your horse has genuinely hurt you, and has hurt other experienced people who handle him too, this is not a learned fear. It is an accurate one and it is doing its job. Make other arrangements, and do not let anybody talk you out of it.

WHERE THIS GOES NEXT

Tell me what came up

Question three is the one that does the work, and it is also the one people skip. So do not sit on it by yourself. Reply and tell me what you wrote, or just tell me which question you got stuck on. I read them.