



Australian Brumby Alliance

(ABA)

Brumby Resource Information-6.1

www.australianbrumbyalliance.org.au

Rehoming Guiding Principles

For

People with Domestic Horse Training Awareness

Introduction - Generations of horses living in the wild posse unique qualities which are impossible to reproduce today. Along with these qualities comes the need to recognise certain evolved characteristics which require initial, knowledgeable and respectful care, in order to enter a full and productive life in our domestic environment.

These guiding principles have been sourced from the Australian Brumby Alliance (ABA) *Rescue & Care for Wild Horses (2010)* and the Victorian Brumby Association's *Australian Brumby Challenge Trainer Resource information*, and ABA Rehoming groups. Information has been written from our experience and offered freely with the best of intentions; how-ever professional advice should always be sought if you have any concerns.

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In this document, *rehoming* means a place where the wild horse is taken to adjust to living with humans by skilled and understanding people, before they are ready to be handled by a person with less understanding of the initial 'gentling or rehoming' phase.

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1. Transport from Park to Rehomer – see Brumby Transport Guidelines att-1. Park staff record little information on Brumbies they have trapped. It is recommended that the rehomer records as soon as possible, at a minimum, the following;

- Date trapped, sex, colour and age [Foal, Yearling or Adult],
- Notation of any accidents or injuries to each horse received,
- Photograph of each horse markings, including injuries;
- Date handed the Brumby is becomes the Rehomer's responsibility.

2. Rehoming Period

In this document *rehoming period* refers to the period taken for a Brumby to make the transition from wild and unhandled, to accepting basic ground handling, such as being caught in an open paddock, halter led, feet picked up and able to float load.

2.1 Receiving horses direct from the wild Requires;

- Appropriate transport for unhandled horses i.e. cattle trucks with loading ramp,
- Yard/s or small holding paddock/s to download unhandled horses, that are easily accessible for the truck the Brumbies arrive in,
- Yards that allow the handler to check for injuries or behavioral issues etc.; provide space for horses to learn to drink tap water and eat hay; and introduce 'fencing',
- *Note:* In the bush, horizontal flora parts as horses run through it, excluding trees, etc. so when Brumbies first enter yards & paddocks, they may try to run through solid barriers. Brumbies soon learn to respect fences and adjust to staying in a defined area.
- *Note:* The American Bureau of Management (BLM) advise 5ft fence heights for yearlings and at least 6ft fences for adults,
- Yards with room for Brumbies unused to containment to stay in for several days and allow the handler to maneuver Brumbies without direct contact,
- Appropriate access to water and feed and round yard/s,
- A crush or equivalent is preferable.
- Appropriate minerals/salt lick for your area as soon as possible after they arrive then re-apply as needed. *Note:* Wild Horses often lack vitamins and minerals.

2.2 Accepting new feed sources

- Feed good quality *pasture* (grass) or meadow hay.
- *Note:* Over many generations, Brumbies have developed the ability to process large amounts of poor quality feed.
- *Note:* Brumbies are naturally suspicious of new feed and may take several days to watch other horses eat similar feed, or sniffing the feed in the yards, before they try it.
- *Note:* Newly acquired Brumbies often eat much less than domestic horses as less feed is normal for a Brumby.

2.3 Accepting new water sources

- It may take a few days for a recently caught Brumby to learn to drink still water from containers; hay around the container can encourage the transition.
- *Note;* Brumbies in the wild are used to drinking running water at ground level,
- *Note:* Sometimes horses tip water out of containers onto the ground in order to get a drink before they grasp the concept of drinking still water at container level.

3. Wild Horse Characteristics

3.1 Wild Horse Characteristics

- Brumbies are by definition hardy (but this does not mean they can tolerate neglect), frugal, (but need feed), sensible (but not immune to mistreatment and definitely not oblivious to their natural instincts),
- They are correct in conformation for soundness and for the type of survival qualities their breeding has developed, although this is not always wanted in the show ring,
- Most Brumbies have iron hooves, big sloping shoulders (even in small horses), gentle, wide set eyes and very big barrels,
- Brumbies are highly protective of new foals, having had to defend their young from Dingoes, so react quicker to perceived threats than domestic mares.
- Young Brumbies with large barrels and big shoulders can seem disproportionate and to be carrying a “worm burden”, this minimises as they grow into their adult bodies.
- Brumbies are slow to mature – emotionally as well as physically. It is recommended a Brumby is not ridden hard or regularly until 4–5 years old.
- A wild horse is a hardy, intelligent, affectionate, loyal and long lasting companion and in the right hands will never look back - nor will their owners!

3.2 Brumbies and Human Interaction

- Being raised in social families, Wild horse have evolved an innate ability to read body language so are exceptional quick to read very small changes in body language, more so than most domestic horses.
- While there is no *correct* training method to use, we advise using *least resistance* type methods which build a loving and *respectful* relationship and use natural wild horse behavioural psychology to guide the horse’s responses.
- ‘*Approach & retreat*’, ‘*Sensitizing & de-sensitizing*’, ‘*Making the right thing easy and the wrong thing difficult*’, ‘*Rewarding through release of pressure*’, ‘*Consistency and patience*’ and ‘*Finding the feel*’ are all catch phrases of gentle trainers and help keep both Rehomer and Brumby safe while building a strong foundation for future training avenues.
- Brumbies have a well-developed sense of self preservation, so are exceptionally sensitive to their environment and perceived threats, but rarely inherently aggressive or flighty. As Brumbies see humans (eyes in front) as predators, a handler’s eye focus will alter pressure.
- A Brumby head bob or nodding can indicate they feel confused but trying to work out what is expected of them. Train within the horses learning ability and avoid prolonged pressure to force the horse to comply with demands it does not understand or cannot tolerate.
- *Note* - A newly arrived wild Brumby can seem quiet; when in fact they may have shut down to ignore unpleasant sensations. This seemingly quiet period will pass, so read the signs and adapt as needed once the shutdown period passes.

3.3 Maintaining Records Suggestions

- Date the horses passed to the rehoming group ownership,
- Photograph each horse on arrival (shows condition & horse identity on arrival)
- National Park/location each horse came from,
- Identifying marks and any injuries, etc.
- Decide whether to freeze brand, microchip, DNA hair sample, when to geld etc. once the horse has adjusted to close human contact,
- Record key Progress Stages for each horse [halter lead, electric fences], etc.,
- Record any treatments [worming, illness, injections] etc.,
- Contact details of new owner, date the horse goes to its new home.

4. Forever home and follow-up

In this document, *forever home* means where the horse goes after the rehoming period

4.1 Partnering the Brumby with its new owner

- *Forever* owners able to spend time with their Brumby at the rehome's property will help smooth the transition to the *forever* home and sort any teething concerns.
- Check the new owner's property has appropriate fencing, paddocks and another horse for company. A Brumby used to a family mob feels insecure without other horses.

4.2 Handling & care information for the new owner, suggestions;

- Congratulations on choosing a Brumby; we hope you and your horse share many happy and useful years together. We have cared for your horse since he arrived from a National Park, basic handling and introduced to him to a new life.
- Brumbies bond closely with an owner they respect. In the wild the herd instinct is very strong, it needs to be, for their survival; now you have become your horse's leader so by following a few rules your pleasure will increase immensely.
- Give your new brumby arrival just enough time to take in his new surroundings before developing his basic training in the direction you want to go,
- Observe your horse in the paddock, tune in to his body language, he will teach you and show how he's feeling so learn to read his signs as he learns to read yours.
- Your Brumby doesn't need a stable or to be rugged as he is used to living in a range of environments, but he does need some shelter from the weather.
- Fresh, good grass is the best food as this is his natural diet in the wild and he is 'feed efficient', having learnt to cope on lower protein requirements
- Introduce any diet change gradually to avoid colic or stomach upsets.
- Correct trimming and barefoot is a great for Brumbies. They have natural iron hooves.
- Avoid forcing him to do something; that is negative training. If things are not going as wanted; retreat, wait a while and try again. Horses are very forgiving of your mistakes so be prepared to be forgiving for his too.
- Never chase him as this only frightens him. Remember, he sees you as a predator.
- Brumbies learn your voice so teach him yours so he can respond accordingly.
- If your horse is avoiding something they don't like, distance him from you; horses are inquisitive and like to be noticed, this will hurt his pride and make him think twice.
- Reinforce the positive, spend time with him, anyone with empathy can achieve plenty,
- Each Brumby learns at a different pace; this doesn't mean your horse is different or difficult; it only shows his own unique personality.
- Catch, handle and yard your Brumby on a regular basis so he does not slip back in the early months of getting to know you. Regular handling is essential for his wellbeing and to ensure he maintains a healthy respect for you as his *leader*.
- There are many 'how to do' horse books on the market, read them but choose your own path, you know your horse best, not the writers of the books.
- *Parasite Control* - Check your Brumby regularly for worms in the first 12 months, there after same rate as other domestics.
- *Toxic plants* - Usual precautions for toxic plants, even though Brumbies have a natural tendency to avoid toxic plants problems can still occur.
- *Sand Colic* - Brumbies are more stoic with ill health, but this innate toughness means Brumbies sometimes don't show symptoms until they are very ill indeed.

4.3 Periodic progress updates

- We encourage the new owner to ring with any concerns they may have and initiate contact as needed to smooth the transition phase,

3.4 Full potential in domestic life

- Brumbies are able to do a wide range of domestic horse riding activities, and are great for children's ponies, trail & endurance riding, show ring activities, jumping, obstacle races, camp drafting, i.e. anything they could have been doing naturally in the wild.

A Brumby is special; he will always have that something extra he was born with, that contact with the essence of nature and a privilege sharing our life with him.

6. Training Resources

Websites

Wild Horse Mentors – big site, with lots of wild horse specific information:

<http://www.whmentors.org/>

Mustangs 4 us – this site has a lot of information on a variety of wild horse topics:

<http://www.mustangs4us.com/> and more specifically, a great booklet for new adopters/ trainers of wild horses here: http://www.mustangs4us.com/gentling_&_training.htm

Lauman training - Kitty and her husband Rick have trained more mustangs than most, use fabulous methods which our own training is heavily based on and are all about the mustangs. Their website is well worth a look: <http://www.laumantraining.com>

Frank Bell – Frank has been gentling mustangs for a long time. There is a lot of good info on his site and he also has a great gentling DVD (see below):

http://www.horsewhisperer.com/fishing_for_mustangs.html

Joe Kamp - The Soul of a Horse. There is nothing on Joe's website that isn't worth reading. Joe's ability to see 'the way it has always been done' and find the way that horses would have it done is amazing. <http://thesoulofahorse.com>

Australian Brumby Alliance - Rescue & Care of Wild Horses in Australia which gives general set-up notes for a Wild Horse Re-homing organisation and for Wild Horse rescue in Australia.

<http://australianbrumbyalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/8.0-Rescue-Care-of-Wild-Horses-In-Australia.pdf>

Papers:

Equine Behaviour. Patricia Evans, Utah State University:

http://www.mustangheritagefoundation.org/media/pdf/Equine_Behavior.pdf

An introduction to handling your Mustang by the Mustang Heritage Foundation:

http://www.mustangheritagefoundation.org/media/pdf/An_Introduction_to_Understanding_Your_Mustang.pdf

Wild Horses; the stress of captivity. Bruce Nock:

<http://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/42742685/Stress%20of%20Captivity-Bruce-Nock.pdf>

DVDs:

Wild to Willing – Core training, Kitty trains Mustangs, her DVD is easy to follow and she demonstrates on three adult mustangs. <http://www.laumantraining.com/mercantile>

The First Touch. By Lesley Neumann. A fabulous DVD. Lesley trains mustangs for the BLM and does training displays across America. <http://www.lesleyneuman.com/video.htm>

Pole Gentling the Wild Horse. By Frank Bell and John Sharp. More great viewing of a terrific method. The best part of this DVD is that the mustang didn't react in the expected way, so you get to see the problem solving that we all know is an integral part of training any horse:

http://www.horsewhisperer.com/horse_training_videos.htm#Pole

Books:

Working with Wild Horses. Can be downloaded for \$7.74:

<http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/nancyatmustangs4usdotcom>

The Wild Horse; An Adopters Manual. By Barbara Eustis-Cross and Nancy Bowker. This well written book is out of print, but you can often get it on e-Bay. It is for people taking on their first wild horse (most USA/BLM mustangs are rehomed totally wild and unhandled).

The Soul of a Horse Blogged and also *Born Wild; the Soul of a Horse*. By Joe Kamp. Has a strong Mustang emphasis, see Joe's website: <http://thesoulofahorse.com>

Trust n Horses. By Franklin Levinson - Well priced e-Book about Franklins trust based system.

<http://www.wayofthehorse.org/Testimonials/review-ebooks.php>