Why Did You Fall?

by a Student

You urge your horse faster. Off he goes, cantering down the trail. For a split second you feel giddy – you're in charge of a powerful animal! Next, you're on the ground, bruised in several places. You watch helplessly as your horse canters on without hesitation. Does he even realize you're gone? Does he care? Now you wonder, "What did I do wrong? Why does my horse hate me?" The answers are simple -- your horse is dim-witted, you weren't paying attention, or the landscape was pesky.

A dim-witted horse can cause a fall in a few ways, especially if he is clumsy. Your horse could be prone to stumble if he doesn't pick up his feet. Stumbling horses cause saddles to slip, which can toss a rider skyward and slam her down to earth. Some horses are indecisive, dancing back and forth in mid-canter before choosing a direction around a log. The rider bounces unsteadily and is shaken out of the saddle. Finally, your horse might not like you. Perhaps he meant to ride underneath that foot-thick branch at chest level. Maybe he knew he was too fat to go between those stumps with your legs around him. Now, this is hard to admit, but your fall could be caused by your own lack of judgment.

Just say it: not paying attention is stupid. You could have been telling your horse "turn left" with your legs but telling him "turn right" with the reigns, resulting in horse confusion. Your lack of judgment might come from kicking your horse instead of clicking to him, going faster than you expected. Or maybe you saw a pretty leaf on a bush and tried to grab it. The leaf is always farther away than you realize! Causes of rider stupidity are

simply not paying attention. If you're watching the birdies or the neighbor dogs instead of the road in front of you, you aren't paying attention. You won't notice that your horse has decided to hop over a branch instead of stepping over it, or that there are sharp rocks ahead that will make him angry. We all know where that leads! Now, when you aren't paying attention and your horse is stupid, you will try to shove the blame onto something else, and the only other element is the landscape.

The ground is pesky, indeed. Trails are strewn with rocks, sticks, roots, water, and slippery mud. Fields are rarely level nor smooth. Even tracks and arenas have potholes, manure chunks, litter -- anything to spook, trip, or unsettle. Trees are nasty. They either grow straight up in the middle of trails, or they stretch their branches out over them. Dogs, snakes, and bears are akin to trees. They come up when and where you least expect them. Dogs are annoying, snakes are freaky, and bears should never be trusted. Yes, your animal is bigger, but he does not know that! Are you stable enough to climb that rocky slope? Skillful enough to gallop through that prairie dog plantation? Smart enough not to pick flowers or daydream while trotting? Finally, are you alert enough to duck under that suspended log? Truly, you must always consider the landscape before you ride a horse.

After you've considered your horse's intelligence, your own lack of judgement, and the landscape, what will you do? You have owies. You are still on the ground. But the horse must be caught. Next time, pay more attention, teach your horse a lesson, or cut down that tree. For now, you must cowgirl up, catch your animal, and try again.