

Horses: Unique senses – unique behaviour

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Horse Senses

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Susan McBane

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Review Title:
Horses: Unique senses –
unique behaviour

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This book aims to bridge the gap between scientific textbooks and books for general horse enthusiasts. In particular it targets veterinary and animal science students. It is comprised of 12 chapters containing the following:

- the first two chapters deal with the nervous system, followed by the endocrine or hormonal system
- the next five chapters explain the senses of smell, taste, hearing, sight and touch
- these are followed by 5 chapters explaining the senses in practical terms.

The chapters are short, which allows for quick reading, and the general anatomy and physiology of the senses are explained in a very simple way. This is an advantage especially for students who grapple to understand the scientific concepts of the senses.

The book is a combination of scientific information on the senses of a horse, followed mostly by McBane's observations on how the behaviour of horses is influenced by the unique characteristics of their senses. The author is categorised as a 'horse gentler', advocating a gentler way to handle horses. The golden thread that runs through the book is the unique nature of the horse's senses, highlighted by the uniqueness of each individual horse. The author clearly draws the reader's attention to the fact that each horse is an individual with specific needs, that need to be considered when handling or managing that specific horse. McBane encourages the reader to take on the challenge as highlighted in the introduction: 'The world is changing, and a more open-minded attitude is much more evident in both human and animal medicine, and is expected by many patients and clients.'

The author should be complimented on the fact that she highlights a few complementary treatments, but unambiguously states that only veterinarians are permitted, by law, to diagnose an animal's condition. Thus, she recommends that the veterinarian should be consulted first on any health care issues.

The text is augmented with photographs as well as drawings. Unfortunately some of the photographs and drawings do not clearly highlight the message of the text, and are sometimes even found to be irrelevant. Additionally, there are a few statements in the book that serious horse behaviourists will challenge or even refute.

To summarise: although this book falls short in a few aspects, it remains an enjoyable read with very powerful and practical tips for the horse enthusiast. I believe that veterinary students and horse enthusiasts, who want to better understand horse behaviour, will find this little book worth reading.