

KAIMANAWAS NEW OF ZEALAND

Nº. 1 – Nov 2015

In the first of a series of interviews, KHH meets Kirsten from Otane and her two Kaimanawas Te Ata and Tika.

How many Kaimanawas do you have? I have two, Te Ata (Ata) and Tika, and both are now 8.

When did you get your Kaimanawa? From the 2008 muster

Why did you choose to get a Kaimanawa? At the time there were very few homes for the horses, and I had always wanted to save one of them. I never thought I could because of my fencing, but by



using my neighbors yards for delivery, and applying for young ponies, I passed the home inspection.

How would you describe your Kaimanawas? Both are very different. Ata is very laid back, strong in mind and body, very very food orientated, and very patient with me. Tika is very reactive, but never nasty, very canny and wary, very sensitive and very smart, and nowhere near as food orientated.

Before you got your Kaimanawas, what was your background and experience with horses? I have been riding since I was 8, got my first pony when I was 13, and worked with horses for 3 years as a teenager before I realised the pay and hours were crap, so trained in IT instead. I spent a couple of years without horses in my 20's while at Tech and have had horses, donkeys, and mules ever since then. So all up almost 40 years playing with horses, but I have never been much into competitions and really only ride and have them for pleasure. While I have had a lot of experience I would not describe myself as an ultra confident rider, but I am confident on the ground. I take things slowly and avoid as many confrontations as I can buy not letting it get to that stage, and this has worked well for me. I am riding Ata, and have done all her training myself, though Tika may never be ridden I can handle her and will keep working with her.

How did you feel when they were delivered? I was nervous and excited.

What was it like to see your horse? I was so stoked to get a gray (Ata) and Tika was just so sweet.

What did you do in the first few weeks? I used my neighbours yards to get them delivered, but he had to use them a couple of days later. I could have left them there as he was only using the front part, but decided to bring them home. They followed my older mare that had been with them for company home across my neighbours farm. From then on, all the work was done in a small paddock. I got them used to eating out of a bucket, me touching them as they did this. Ata was very quick to let me touch her, Tika took longer. I think Tika got a fright on the first day I got her, she came right up and sniffed my hand, and unfortunately got a static shock. I also fed them wormer in this time and the worms they shed were huge.

What did you do in the next few months? With Ata, I very soon had her haltered and walking around, picking up her feet, and brushing her. With Tika it took me 2 years to get a halter on and

required a year of working with getting her used to ropes near her. Tika's big step was letting me have two hands touching her at once, and it has been a long but very rewarding journey with her. I was touching and patting Tika within the first few months and this is when I started to introduce ropes and such like.

Do you have a favorite memory from the first year? Getting Tika happy enough for me to cut the knots out of her mane.

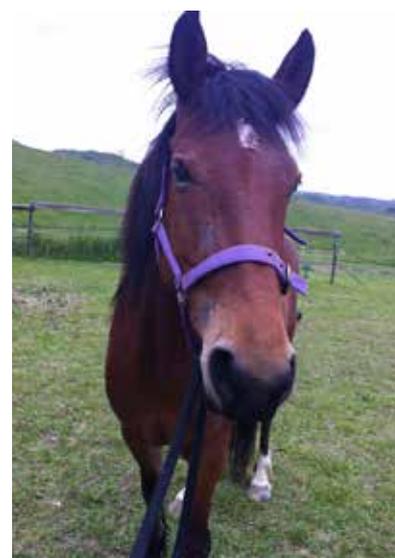


What has been your biggest challenge? With Ata it was getting the confidence to get on her. I did not have anyone to hold her, and it was sometimes too difficult to organise someone when the time was right — Ata has been very patient with me. With Tika it was managing my own energy levels so she was more comfortable with me around her.

What has been your biggest success? With Tika I did a dance all the way across my round pen when I got the halter on her the first time. With Ata it was riding her around my track system. Other than having to take it much slower with Tika, neither have presented me with any major challenges from their side. I could write a book about the challenges I have had with my mule of pretty much the same age.

Do you have some plans or goals for your Kaimanawa? I just want to enjoy them for the rest of their lives. This summer I hope to get Ata out and about hacking with friends and taking her to riding club days. With Tika I will still work towards riding her, but if it doesn't happen I'm not stressed.

What advice would you offer someone planning to get a Kaimanawa? Make sure you know what to expect. These horses are not handled at all and react very honestly. You need to be in it for the long haul as you will not know what you will get. Both of mine were so different, and I can imagine I would have been very discouraged if I had only got Tika, as I would have thought I was not doing something right. There are many ways of handling an unhandled horse, and the most important thing is to pick the right method for you and the horse you are working with. Don't be afraid to try a different method if one way doesn't work. And if the method is working for you and your horse, and it is safe for both of you, do not let do-gooders who think they know more about your horse change your mind. This is not to say don't listen to them, but trust yourself.



What facilities did you find useful to begin with?

I did mine with no yards except for my neighbors yard for delivery. I have a round pen but it is very large. Having yards may have made some things easier, and may have made some things quicker, but with Tika it could also have gone the other way. The biggest thing you need is time and patience.

The Wild Horses' Perspective

The First Days

The newly mustered wild horses have had their lives turned upside down. Being captured and then separated from their family band members and close companions is traumatic for them. And, to add to that, they have been removed from their familiar home ranges. They have lost all that is near and dear to them.

Understanding the horses' predicament as they make their transition into captivity is helpful to the horse and makes it easier for them. It's hard for them to adjust initially so it's up to us humans to make it as easy for them as possible.

When they arrive off the truck, which is yet another traumatic experience, they are in a state of shock. Often they just shutdown, as it's all been just too much; this can sometimes be misinterpreted as being quiet and people take advantage of them being in this state and begin their handling. But, a shutdown frightened horse (or any being) cannot learn, or retain much, if anything at all, in this state – they can also become dangerous - because they can explode unexpectedly.

Giving the wild horses what they need most is up to the human. As prey animals, horses, and especially wild horses, are instinctively scared of new things, so the horses need time to figure out that everything new is not going to hurt them; that includes people and everything else in their environment.

They need the company of another horse or horses, food and water and to be left in peace for at least the first day/night. Putting another horse into an adjoining yard will help the new arrival to settle more. It would be wise for the horse provided for company be quiet and without a cover, as a horse wearing a cover can frighten the wild horse enough to have it attempt or even succeed in escaping.

All the Kaimanawa horses are different and will react accordingly. Some will be absolutely shutdown as previously mentioned. Some will be highly reactive and if pressured, will either attempt to jump over the yard railing or crash through it, while others can appear more confident. They will respond better with thoughtfulness and consideration from humans.

The next step

Introduce yourself quietly by entering the yard and standing still, while offering a big handful of cut long grass (long grass is more

appealing) or hay. If the horse is highly reactive, offer food through the fence at first. It may take some time for the horse to take food, just be patient... it's a big deal for the wild horse. Patience is key to helping the horse.

Get the horse used to you by entering the yard, offering food and then leaving, to let it be. If the horse is reacting strongly to your presence, only stay in with it a short time till it settles, then leave. That way he learns that you being in with him doesn't hurt. He has to learn you are trustworthy. Leaving while he is calm allows him to learn this.

Don't put the horse into a position so he thinks that he needs to defend himself. There should be no reason for him to bite or kick if you are aware of how the horse is feeling – putting too much pressure on him is unhelpful to the horse – and not safe either.

Go into the yard for short periods, several times throughout the day. Increase the time spent with the horse slowly. Some come on in leaps and bounds, taking food readily, others require more time, and some will take a lot longer. Resist the urge to reach out to touch the horse - wild horses don't want to be touched by us, they don't understand our intentions – they perceive humans as life threatening.

Wild horses senses are acute – they are aware of everything in their environment – so every movement you make should be slow, deliberate and smooth. Keep the environment quiet too if possible. Kaimanawas are extremely sensitive. Especially during this initial stage, they have no idea what lies ahead of them, so they're expecting more trouble. Keep in mind what they've been through already to reach this point... they've lost their family and their home, the only thing they have left is their life!

Being able to read the horse and use feel as a guide goes a long way. Be watchful, be aware - look for signs - read his face and body, they will show you how he's feeling. Notice his expression, his eyes, ears, mouth – are they relaxed or tight. Same with his body, is it reasonably relaxed or coiled tight and about to spring. We have to anticipate what he is about to do next and react before he does. Keep the horse calm by withdrawing just a bit or all together.

Be self disciplined. It's hard for us humans to do nothing when we are with horses, yet it is one of the most powerful tools we have. Just stand/sit with the horse, offer food by hand and wait... Patience, patience and yet more patience... It's not a race.

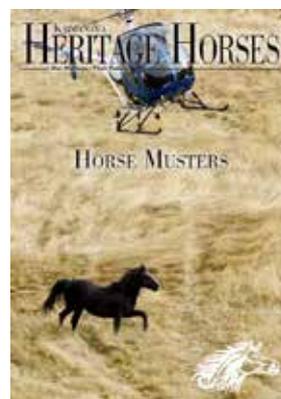
Robin Sisley

Author of *Eat the Wind*

Visit our website to learn more about getting a wild horse from the muster. You can download our booklet on the muster process, about the Kaimanawa horses, and options for getting a Kaimanawa Horse. There are also application forms for when you are ready to apply.

If you would like a Kaimanawa but don't want to do the initial handling or don't have the needed facilities, then we can put you in touch with registered handlers who can get your Kaimanawa ready for you. We also have Kaimanawas at our welfare centres that may be just what you are looking for.

Once your Kaimanawa is delivered you can contact us to ask for advice on any matter. Our experienced committee members and area representatives can point you in the right direction for a long and happy journey with your Kaimanawa.



www.KaimanawaHeritageHorses.org