

# GETTING TO GUINNESS

## The World Record That Almost Wasn't

"How would you and Lukas like to try for a Guinness record?" the inquiry in my mailbox read. The message was from Louise Ireland, Talent Manager at Guinness World Records, Ltd., "Something having to do with his cognitive tasks," she added. The following events would take place during the adventure of a lifetime. My horse Lukas is a seventeen-year-old ex-racer and former rescue that shot to fame a year ago when his You-Tube videos became an Internet sensation. Since his web debut, his story and message have traveled the globe: overcoming adversity to spread hope and happiness for all creatures. Little did I know how our lives would soon change course and the far-reaching effects it would create.

Choosing a cognitive task was going to be easy: we had one minute to accomplish a feat never before attempted by a horse. I picked number identification since the Guinness rules specified a random and non-sequential demonstration of Lukas' abilities. After submitting our record attempt proposal to



Louise, we had our work cut out for us. As documents and rules began arriving, our packet grew to a huge notebook of items to arrange and keep track of. Collaborating with Louise, we came up with the definition of the record and the guidelines.

### **MOST NUMBERS IDENTIFIED BY A HORSE IN ONE MINUTE**

The horse must correctly identify numbers called out at random by a pre-determined signal. It will be measured by the most numbers identified correctly in one minute.

## **GUIDELINES**

1. The event must take place in a public place or in a venue open to the public.
2. Include all details about the animal including breed/species and age.
3. One of the signed statements must be by a qualified veterinary surgeon verifying the claim.
4. No equipment must be used by the handler. No touching or pointing by the handler or any other person present is allowed.
5. A single verbal request (a number) solely must be made by the handler.
6. The horse must identify the number using the pre-determined signal.
7. The numbers must be placed on the floor or on a table in front of the horse. They must be placed 20cms apart (eight inches).
8. The horse must return to its starting position after identifying each number, making it a distinguishable motion, conclusive to observers each time it selects a number.
9. Only correct responses are counted.
10. The numbers must be spoken at random and not in any order/sequence or pattern.
11. Numbers can't be repeated (in a row).

In addition, the event is continuous; the clock (and filming) does not stop. Also, two experienced timekeepers must time the event with stopwatches accurate to 0.01 seconds. Moreover, two expert witnesses would need to be present and provide statements of attestation of above.

Securing high definition footage and photos became the first priority. We turned to our loyal friend Hadi Khalil - at International Production and Advertising - for his expertise in these areas, and Linda Walton also volunteered her lens. Check. Next on the list, I was hoping that Lukas' vet, Dr. Vrono, could arrange his schedule to be present. Check. For our expert witnesses, I asked long-time horse enthusiasts Stacey Erb and Tat Yakutis to provide statements of authentication. Check.

Our expert timers, who turned out to be within a split second of each other, were Doug Murdock and Chuck Erb. Cover letter and Lukas' Jockey Club papers. Check. Evidence Submission Schedules. All set, except for one small problem that almost ended the entire operation.

Lukas' dark two inch numbers and letters are bought from a carpenter and my husband mounts them on light-colored wood for better stability and visibility. After measuring the distance between them, I discovered it was only six inches! I had a



choice of a bigger desk or smaller numbers. After multiple trials with different desk sizes, we decided on smaller numbers. I scoured the hardware stores and came up with one-inch numbers that would meet the

spacing requirements. Would Lukas be able to see them, I wondered? This prompted a thorough investigation into horse vision. Suffice it to say that Lukas' 20/30 eyesight is probably better than mine so we proceeded as planned. Our biggest obstacle, however, would lie ahead.

While together, Lukas and I spend our time interacting playfully and spontaneously. Lessons are loose and flexible, often interrupted with frequent bursts of his nickering and my clapping proudly for his accomplishments. No longer, this record meant business - now that we had announced our plan to the world, we *had* to do it!

I've dedicated my life to promoting kind training for animals, and with our record I was hoping to show how intelligent animals are for their improved treatment. Lukas' sessions were becoming routine and troublesome though, with mistakes happening



more and more frequently. Why had he suddenly forgotten what he should be doing? Well, fortunately Lukas has been able to teach me as well, along the way. I realized that in losing our happy games, practice had become drudgery for both of us. We settled on a compromise with lessons including some insistence on structure and preciseness, and we soon recovered our connection.

Guinness day arrived and along with it came nerves. My own, of course. I realized something though, as Lukas stood calmly beside me in the round pen surrounded by equipment and helpers. As he rested his chin on my shoulder during the attempt introduction, it occurred to me that the record, although important, would be remembered for this moment of love and devotion while he waited in readiness for my signal. My jitters lifted and he performed in stellar fashion - our certificate arrived from Louise several months later.

"The most numbers correctly identified by a horse in one minute is 19 and was achieved by Lukas, who was assisted by his owner and trainer Karen Murdock (USA), on June 16, 2010."

Karen Murdock

<http://www.playingwithlukas.com>



Photos courtesy of Linda Walton and Hadi Khalil