

Riding & Training Perspectives

Howdy Folks, this month I am responding to a number of comments regarding loss and/or lack of rider confidence. **Having our horse's trust has a great deal to do with rider confidence.**

Remember that it is much safer to ride a thinking (even disgruntled) horse than it is to ride a horse that is frightened. A thinking horse won't generally run through fences and across roads, etc., whereas a frightened horse is not thinking (it is reacting) and is dangerous to itself as well as to the rider. So it is a never ending task for us to be teaching our horses (desensitizing) about as many things as possible and displaying leadership.

The relationship between human and horse consists of predominantly two parts. On one side we both need a friendly relationship, whilst our horse also needs for us to be a firm leader that can be trusted for its protection. Therefore, as horses live mainly in the moment, it is important when we approach our horses to be aware of how we move and how we show what our intentions are. Our body language must be positive. If we are viewed as leader, our horse has a better chance of relying upon us when it is frightened.

Whenever greeting your horse; whether approaching them at the stable or in the paddock / field, in the morning or in the afternoon/evening, there are a few simple things you can do to improve the relationship and insure safety. The first is simply by approaching in a friendly manner and avoiding appearing as a predator. The other is the following **exercise*** (short and simple) which is aimed at mimicking what horses do when greeting one another in a herd situation (every day) and establishing or re-establishing / reiterating their hierarchy (pecking order).

Before riding out; there are a few things to do whenever you mount up and before riding; first, have the horse "stand still" for a minute or even two in order to consistently be teaching him/her not to walk off immediately. Second, execute the following quick / simple **exercise***, which will accomplish two things. One is to let you know if the horse is tight or has any physical problems (stiffness, etc.) that you should be aware of during that days riding or training, etc. so that you are aware of any physical problem. The other is that you will be asserting your position as leader by confirming to the horse that you are in control of its feet / body movements. This **exercise*** will make sure you can bend his neck and disengage the rear end when needed.

The effect / object of the exercise* is multi-purpose; (1) *establishing your ability to move the horse's body around (reiterating yourself as a competent leader) from the ground, just as horses do with one another often* (2) *expediting tacking up* (3) *identifying any stiffness or soreness* (4) *assuring the horse that when you are in the saddle you are in control of his movements and* (5) *to improve respect. These exercises should be executed from the ground as well as from the saddle.*

The Exercise*: The exercise is a five part movement that requires, on average, approximately forty five seconds to complete. The movements are conducted from the ground via the lead rope, using a direct and indirect rein and **above all by applying a pressure& release** method. Never using a steady or constant pull. This exercise should be accomplished daily from the ground as well as every time you mount up.

Once you have completed your friendly greeting and haltered the horse (lead rope attached) use a **direct rein with pressure release movements** - move the fore quarters to either the left or right in a full circle, then reverse the movement to the opposite side. Whilst making this circle movement (when about half way round) also use the rein or rope as an **indirect rein** and disengage the hind quarters to end the turn. Once you have completed these two turns (reverse circles) and are back to the original starting point (stopped) back your horse one or two steps, stop and then lead him back forward to the starting point again and stop. *Then give a quick friendly rub on the crest of the neck and forehead and nose.* You will then have completed one exercise routine.

This routine will reiterate your leadership and go a long way towards getting your horse to use its brain when dealing with fears and rely on you for security.

Horses, being single minded creatures, give us an advantage. For example, when a horse shies or spooks from something, we can use direct and indirect rein controls to change their focus and redirect their energy to where we wish them to move. We can cause them to change their focus *rather than trying to stop them with the bit* which is generally a mistake that causes them to feel more claustrophobic and feel an even greater need to flee. When a horse “bolts” and goes completely right brained or instinctive, we then need to use methods that regain their attention by turning their heads slightly in order to redirect their energy. Turning their head also shows them that we (and not some wildcat) are in fact that weight on their backs. They tend to forget who or what is on their backs when they go into their 40 + million year instinctive (DNA wiring) actions. These methods should be taught as part of the basic foundation for all riders and horses. I often teach these things to riders to instill a greater sense of confidence.

I will continue next month with more on this subject, focusing more on the rider’s position, rein usage, methods to regaining the attention of our horses when they are fleeing, etc.

In closing today I would like to remind folks about some facts regarding the normal life of a horse and what we should remember about their use of time -- **Horses living out** (over 24 hrs) use 60% Eating on the move, covering around 20 miles daily ; 20% Standing Around ; 10% Lying down ; 10% Other (i.e. Play, Social Activities). **Stabled Horses** (over 24hrs) use 47% eating and not moving; 40% standing around; 10% lying down; 3% other (i.e. Play Social activities).

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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