

August 2007 Essex Rider (Impulsion)

Correction: In the July issue I had a typo concerning the use of a balance strap – it should have read „that holding and pulling UP helps to secure seat position“. I mistyped down.

Opening Reminders:

1. Using a pressure-release method to “request” action from our horse is preferable to applying a constant pressure which requires the horse to capitulate to our “demand”. This is applicable whether using a soft or firm pressure.
2. An important “catch 22” thought regarding worry is that to worry about falling off or about any other lack of confidence concern can actually cause a self fulfilling situation. Therefore, it is important to address such issues with someone on the ground and online. This is most efficiently accomplished by using a trainer who can apply the best exercises to help regain lost confidence.
3. I hope ya’ll noticed the National Day of the American Cowboy Holiday on July 28th.
4. As in all my articles, the riding and teaching advice is my own opinion.

Riding Advice:

I run across a number of impulsion problems. One of the problems I often encounter is generated when folks use too much pressure “squeezing and/or kicking” their horses. The horse tends to nap by stopping or simulating a slug (I call this “too heavy”). Most horses respond much better to a softer (albeit clear) cue. Most horses can be taught to respond readily to a light, sensitive cue similar to one used when applying a spur correctly. That is, a light rubbing motion which can be speeded up instead of by increasing pressure. Most riders do not do well with spurs; however their heel can be nearly as effective if it is used in a similar same way. By pressing down on the ball of the foot and simultaneously lifting the heel (more like pushing the heel up with ones calf muscle then letting it fall on its own) a rider can make a very comfortable, clear and effective cue that most horses will accept and impulsion problems then quickly become a past memory. Some horses can respond just as well to simple soft calf pressure. It is generally the hard or constant pressure that causes the problem or nap. It is important to make certain one completely releases all cue pressures when the horse complies with the request so that the horse to recognize our recognition and receive its reward for correct behavior.

A second type of impulsion problem is one where the opposite problem occurs and the horse does not maintain a desired speed and speeds up of its own accord whenever the rein is loosened (I call this “too light”). An effective solution to this problem is to institute work whenever the horse takes it upon itself to speed up in this way. Whenever the horse speeds up, take up a single rein and turn its head slightly to a side, then apply a normal back pressure (in the form of pressure-release moves) and move them in a 360° circle then carry on in the same direction. This is a non stop movement and can be repeated as many times as necessary until the horse realizes the movement will be executed each time it takes off of its own accord. Typically a horse requires three repetitions although some need less or more. Remember whenever turning a horses head and pulling them around in relatively tight (or in any size) turns, don’t fail to keep the plane formed by your elbow, wrist, hand, rein and the horses mouth in a straight line, as viewed from the side. Of course when turning the horses head, the point of your hand and the rein will be at an approximate 45° angle if viewed from

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above. However, once the horse's head is turned and you gradually begin taking control and pulling the horse around or back (with pressure-release movements) you should have always been on plane. When you complete the turn / move your elbow to hand to rein to mouth plane should be the straight line method you have always used.

Training Advice:

When teaching impulsion solution cues; for slow or stopping, it is not all that dissimilar to teaching rein back in that you use a single light cue initially and then add pressure with separate (simultaneous) cues until the horse responds, at which time you should drop all cues in order to indicate your recognition of the horse's correct "try". Then progressively work with the horse to reward each successful response by eliminating the extra / separate simultaneous cues until they are all eliminated down to the desired cues. This is very similar to teaching reining back. One of the simultaneous separate pressures one can apply is with the voice and it can remain a parallel cue for some time until the voice alone can be a sufficient cue. Although don't forget that on a noisy day the tactile cue is all important. The objective being to wean the horse from each of the added cues until necessary cues are reduced to the soft movement of the heel or calf plus or minus the voice. Again, it is important to make certain to completely release all cue pressures when the horse makes any effort to comply with the request.

For the increase in speed impulsion problem; I need to add to the explanation in the riding advice section above in that for using the single rein to turn the head and then pulling back for the 360° turns (always using pressure-release) we need to always recognize the need to lift the inside shoulder to prevent "digging in" and overloading that leg / shoulder. If you have trouble turning the horse head (in situations of fear or just stubbornness / napping) then a Cavalry lift is very useful. Lift the side that is on the intended turning direction so that when executing the Cavalry lift (not blocking the support rein) this will allow a slight turn to be initiated on that side and in the direction of the intended turn. You can then take up the back pulling motion to achieve the 360° turn (again in a pressure-release method). If the 360° is not working well enough, then progress the 360° turn to a full indirect rein and disengage the hind quarters so that the horse stops without having to pull back on the bit.

The objective in applying work as a solution for the too much speed problem is to redirect the horse's energy rather than stopping them via the bit which would be constraining them and causing them to go into their instinctive brains and exacerbating the problem.

Closing Reminder:

If one is worried about how horses are treated in Rodeos, consider the estimate that most bucking horses technically work an average of 10 to 20 minutes per year which leads to exceptional longevity and most are still bucking off riders at 20 years or more.

Next month I will go into Ground Driving (aka Long Reining) as requested by clients.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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