

Opening reminders:

1. Make all our cues specific and clear and as light as possible.
2. For rider health, ride at a walk and **don't fight the horse's movement as those movements are natural and effective for releasing pinched nerves that cause sciatica etc.. Horse therapy for humans is fast becoming popular World Wide.**
3. When traveling with your horse in a trailer or horse box, horses are **working hard due to the constant movement and need for re-balancing themselves. It is a good idea to periodically stop and allow them to rest by simply standing still with upper doors open for fresh air and more light. A little water helps as well.**

Riding advice:

Canter leads; a clear and concise method for achieving the correct or desired lead departure for cantering can be found by taking advantage of the English rising trot method of riding. This is a big advantage as the rider becomes accustomed to knowing when a particular rear leg (generally the onside rear leg) is pushing off - as that is when the rider is sitting to the trot. Therefore, if the rider wants to achieve an onside or inside (same as the equivalent onside rear leg push) foreleg departure in canter - all that is necessary is to "sit twice" (as if changing the trotting diagonal) and simultaneously give the horse an increased impulsion cue. This method will result in a correct lead departure no matter which direction the horse is traveling and also allow the rider to easily execute a "counter canter" lead if desired. Remember, when asking for a departure, not to hold the reins too short or tight, not to lean forward or try to "help" the horse depart as those things make it more difficult for the horse to perform correctly.

On muscle balance and safety:

1. When trotting, we regularly change diagonals in order to balance our horse's muscles then we make the mistake of persistently mounting our horses from only one side, generally from the left side. This long standing practice does nothing to balance our horse and in fact does the opposite. It is not a difficult matter to learn to mount from both sides. Teaching our horses to stand at mounting blocks for both sides mounting also helps with our horse's mental balance.
2. When cantering, we rarely canter on the offside lead (a.k.a. Counter Canter). Counter cantering does a good job of balancing our horse's muscles. This practice is not difficult, albeit a bit uncomfortable to some. It is a good practice for helping us to recognize the feel for when needing a particular lead.
3. When mounting up, few people take the important precaution of bending their horse's neck to the onside and holding the rein on the saddle until

mounted correctly and securely. To make matters even more risky; I often see folks holding both reins, evenly, in their left hand (if they are mounting from the left side) whilst often holding the mane or saddle front. This practice allows a “spooked” horse to bolt forward, creating a very dangerous situation, by generating a lot of forward speed rapidly whilst a rider is only partially mounted and can cause a rider to fall backward where the first thing to hit the ground (at speed) is the head. A helmet is not likely to prevent serious damage, esp. to the neck, in such situations.

Training advice:

Time to digest our request; when giving an aid/cue, don't forget to allow for a sufficient time gap between when asking for and receiving a horse reply. When training or when a horse is frightened, it is a good idea to give a preemptive aid/cue prior to the full aid/cue, such as lifting the reins or saying whoa, etc an instant before giving the full aid/cue.

Licking and Chewing; Don't overlook the horse licking and chewing during lessons, as that action releases endorphins and relaxes them (similar to human's chewing gum). If the horse is not relaxed the lesson is not likely being effectively absorbed.

Keep in mind the old adage about experience; you get the quickest results and learn the most from making mistakes / errors then recognizing and correcting them. This applies to both riders and horses. Taking things in small bites helps keep the mistakes smaller, easier to correct and more manageable.

Overcoming Self doubt and fear; learning anything new requires stepping outside one's comfort zone. This applies to humans as well as horses. Rather than dealing in extremes (one extreme being never moving close to the edge of a comfort zones or the opposite of pushing too hard against that edge) which can cause unnecessary mistakes and worse, I believe it best for folks and horses to gently “stretch the outside of the envelope” and then the trainer must allow it all to come back again to the more comfortable place. This is accomplished well via “pressure release” methods, which slowly moves the edge farther out – i.e. enlarging the “Comfort Zone”, without generating unnecessary panic. Taking things in relatively small steps is very important to prevent stumbling.

Regarding foals; remember to treat them as horses and don't do too much humanizing. A small amount of humanizing initially is not always a bad thing - at the beginning of their lives. However, to continue humanizing will likely result in not very favorable personality traits as they grow and strengthen. Becoming a firm leader, whilst remaining benevolent is a must when young - as well as when they age.

Disengagement;

A very important exercise for horses and riders to become familiar with and one that they should practice often, is how to disengage the hind quarters. Disengaging hind quarters prevents the horse from being able to effectively run, buck or rear as well as being able to stop a horse naturally without pulling directly back on its bit, which rarely stops a frightened horse. Use a single rein (w/ pressure release) to turn the horses face to one side or the other prior to imparting any back pressure on the bit. Then as the horse turns to the side you wish and when you progress to approximately 45 to 90 degrees from the original straight position you began from, you then begin to use what is called an indirect rein in order to direct the rein pressure from the horse's mouth through your arm and elbow on towards the opposite side hock (opposite side from where the horse's head is turned). This will generate a disengagement of the onside/inside rear leg in the same way horses naturally do in a field (stepping under and across in front of the offside/outside leg) - thus stopping without pulling directly backward on the bit and constraining the horse which drives it onto it's instinctive thinking and to more panic . If the horse has stiffened its neck, then correctly using a Cavalry Lift (for one option) will cause the head to rise slightly and loosen the stiffness allowing the turn. Do not forget to use pressure release guidance throughout the exercise and to place your inside/onside leg on the horse's side firmly and move your offside/outside foot forward - keeping in mind you must put pressure on the balls of both feet all the while which will naturally cause your heels to drop and will prevent loss of the stirrup.

Closing reminders:

1. Don't forget a horse needs to be able to lift its head in order to relax its neck. Therefore it is a dangerous practice to ride out in a martingale. That apparatus is best used in training in safe and contained areas.
2. In all sessions I believe in teaching the owner how to carry on, as much as I believe in teaching the horse. Generally it takes only a few sessions to get an open minded rider/owner started well and then they need only call me back whenever they believe they need me again for specifics.
3. I always welcome any cogent input concerning my observations, opinions, advice and views, via my e-mail address.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

Everyone have a **Merry Christmas and Happy New Year !!**

Lewis Blackburn, www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com, blackieb@btconnect.com,
01799-543711, 0771-8317654