

Riding & Training Perspectives

Howdy Folks, at the request of clients, this month I cover brief bits on “lead departure and changes” as well as more training advice points. I will expand on the lead departures next month by dealing with “footfalls” and the advantage English riders have over Western riders due to the rising trot that is so prevalent over here.

REMINDERS:

- *Softness vs. Lightness:* Softness is movement *with understanding* whereas Lightness is generally movement *from instinct and not necessarily from understanding* what we are asking. We should endeavour to illicit softness and not lightness in our horses in order to keep them more “left brained” (pragmatic) than “right brained” (instinctive). This can be effectively taught via the ground work before reaffirming it from the saddle. Proper use of pressure release in our use of the reins is a good way to reaffirm softness even when we are using our rein(s) firmly so long as the releases are present.
- *Like Computers:* Horses are like computers in that they may not do what we want but will always do what we have told / taught them to do even if we are telling / teaching them inadvertently. It is important that we stay aware of what we are teaching our horses when we are simply riding out, etc. in order to know if we are teaching “what we want” or not.

RIDING ADVICE:

Common riding errors in relation to lead departures and lead changes:

- *Looking down at the foreleg when asking for a specific lead.* Instead, look where you are going at all times and steer the horse’s rear end not the front end.
- *Leaning forward or into a lead departure or change.* When you lean forward, you ride the shoulders of the horse and you either make it more difficult for him to lift his shoulders (and you) for a departure or cause him to speed up in trying to keep his balance when executing a flying change. Sit back, sit straight and ride the hips of the horse. When you ride the hips it is much easier for him to use or change the hind end. Your legs and pelvis position / weight will be in proper position and more under control when you sit straight in the saddle.
- *Using too much leg.* Some riders use too much leg and don’t trust their horse to understand the cue. Instead of asking softly, they ask hard right from the git go which can scare the horse and cause a whole lot of other problems.
- *Asking for a particular lead when the rear foot is in the wrong position.* Be sure to ask when it is physically possible for your horse to accomplish what you are asking. I will expand on this next month.

TRAINING ADVICE:

- *Single cues:* The best way to achieve and maintain good impulsion is to teach our horses “single cues” for movement as opposed to multiple cues. That is, not to

- “nag” our horses with unnecessary leg or foot cues once they have begun to actually perform what we have asked.
- *Single rein:* When teaching a horse single rein work / cues / requests, initially it helps to extend our arm and hand far out to the side making our request clearer to the horse. Remember to also lift the rein in order to lift the shoulder and don't forget to apply releases throughout the cueing process. As progress is made and softness is achieved, the arm can then be gradually lowered and eventually brought back to the normal hand position for riding.
 - *Time to absorb:* When training horses we must allow sufficient time for the horse to absorb each segment of a lesson before going on to the next step. Lessons should be broken down into small segments in order to make it easier to absorb. One of the clear signs of their absorption is licking and chewing.
 - *Fast learners:* Horses generally learn five times faster than we do, however they do not learn in as intricate a fashion or in large amounts without becoming confused. Therefore, we need to break their lessons down into easily understood portions and sequences. As they quickly learn the individual sections, it doesn't take as long as one might expect.

A CLOSING REMINDER:

Periodically all horses are prone to “double checking” various parts of our intent and teachings. “Rooting” (pulling on the reins) is common for them to see if we are holding onto the reins when not in the process of actually giving them a cue or instruction. If they catch us out in that way (causing us to be jerked forward a bit), they can develop an irritating habit and they will use it to distract us when we should be concentrating on other things.

NOTE: *All my articles and instructions are reprinted on my site if you do not have the past Essex Rider issues/information referred to above to see expanded information on the various points.*

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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