

## **Riding & Training Perspectives**

Happy New Year Folks ; This month I start the new year with the format of Opening and Closing Reminders along with Training and Riding Advice.

### **REMINDERS:**

A calm mind for our horse comes from clear understanding of our requests and directions. If we wish our horse to stay in a calm state of mind then we must be clear and unambiguous with our cues.

### **TRAINING ADVICE:**

**Catching :** In training our horse for being caught, we need to convince them to “catch themselves” or “learn to be caught” by us easily. One good practice (amongst others) is to regularly take whatever time is required to approach, catch and halter them -- then do a small amount of friendly greeting and leadership exercises ---- then release them and walk away. This will steadily improve their attitude toward being caught each time as we will not be catching them for the sole purpose of doing work. Obviously, it may take longer to catch them the first few times then gradually it will require less time as we progress. Of course the approach and retreat method of catching is the most effective.

**Clarity :** An important direction for training is to constantly endeavour to find better ways to explain what we are asking of our horses so that they will better understand what we want. Be patient and persistent. Do not increase pressure applied before allowing plenty of time for our horse to try to figure out our request. Horses need repeated instruction to understand us and to become convinced of our sincerity as well as to help them build better muscle memory and absorb instructions.

**Focus :** Even though we need to apply our instructions / lessons whilst expecting minimal and subtle relies / tries from our horses, we also need to avoid focusing too much on receiving simply the “minimum try” from our horse for extended periods. Instead of releasing pressure only when the horse gives a slight try, we need to increase our requirements over time to more than single steps and slight tries. Increase to two steps (or larger appropriate movements if not steps), then when the horse is good at that - go on to more movements and/or steps and then continue on in sequence to greater amounts of movements and/or steps as the horse improves on each point as we are training.

### **RIDING ADVICE:**

**Muscle balance:** In order to prevent us from developing a sore lower back and equally as important in order to prevent generating a sore back for our horse, it is important to develop a habit of keeping our abdomen muscles firm, whilst keeping our stomach muscles flexible and breathing properly. In this way our abdomen and lower back muscles share our upper body weight and allows our pelvis to move properly whilst riding and giving various cues, rather than allowing our back muscles to handle our upper

body weight, by themselves, which will generate a perpendicular, bouncing motion impacting our horse's back and compacting our spines. This good habit also lowers our center of gravity and helps us to avoid impeding our horse's movement.

***Stirrup and Balance:*** When stabilizing ourselves at times our horse becomes unpredictable or frightened the old adage of keeping our "heels down" is flawed as to simply push our heels down will often allow the front of our foot to un-weight and if we bounce, we will invariably lose our stirrup. Most of us have experienced this at one time or other. The solution is a matter of developing a habit of keeping at least half of our foot pressure into the ball of our foot and onto the stirrup, whilst pushing our heel down with the balance of our weight. This will also result in our foot moving slightly forward.

***Improved stops :*** When bringing / asking our horse to a stop, it is a good practice (when not impeding other riders) to immediately back our horse a step or two so that they develop an expectation of a possibility of being instructed to back up when stopping and also cements in their minds that they won't be going forward. To prevent an unexpected backing, when not wanting one, we need only lightly contact our horse's sides with our legs to hold them still / in place.

**A CLOSING REMINDER:**

***Every Day*** we must act just as horses normally do in their herds when re-establishing the pecking order. To do so should only take a few minutes by using the simple ground and saddle exercises, which I have previously outlined, for firmly moving the feet and disengaging the hind quarters along with being benevolent.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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