

## **Riding & Training Perspectives**

Howdy Folks, this month, as requested by clients, I would like to remind ya'll about stress relief for horses and good methods for controlling their energy bursts.

### **Reminder:**

Before riding out, spend a minute reminding you and your horse that you know how to control their movements in order to successfully deal with them when and if they become frightened. It takes no more than a minute and you not only remind the horse (and yourself) of things important for control but also discover any ailments that you should be aware of whenever redirection becomes necessary. **Confidence is a 2-Way Street in that horse confidence relies on a confident rider and rider confidence relies on having a confident horse, quite a paradox.** **On that note, don't forget that secure seat position!**

### **Riding Advice:**

As I have found with hundreds of horses, one simple method of helping them deal with and relieving stress is to use bits made with chewable and non-splintering materials used to make plastic bits (nowadays they don't shatter as previously was a problem). I like the Straight bit with a Mullen mouth form which keeps it more balanced on the tongue which horses enjoy. I also like to use a chin strap (not a curb chain or strap) for keeping the bit from sliding to the side when a single rein is used and horses actually like the feeling of moving their entire jaw one way or other instead of being pulled by their teeth for movement. These chewable bits act as chewing gum does for humans in relieving stress (and in horses it also releases endorphins). **Of course becoming a more firm confident rider/leader will do wonders for the horse's mental state & then it comes back to us.**

Before riding out, it is very important to practice and remind the horse of our ability to conduct the natural body control movements such as the head raising and legs redirection movements via use of a single rein (both direct and indirect). Lifting their head is one of the best ways to change their mental state/attention and regain their attention.

The Cavalry Lift (or Stop) method is very effective for the head raise/lift. The single rein, direct and indirect rein movements are effective means for changing the direction of feet (including actual disengagement eventually). These combinations of movement are used without having to resort to pulling back on a bit in an effort to try to stop them. Pulling on a bit (no matter how strong the bit is - should one wish to be that severe with their horse) is not an effective method to stop a worried or frightened horse. For confirmation of this just ask any jockey about how horses increase speed when a bit is pulled back into their teeth/mouths. These few simple energy redirection/control methods take no more than a minute to remind before riding out and are extremely efficient time spent.

### **Training advice:**

With regard to redirecting the energy of our horses, practicing at various speeds, in a ménage is very important. Work them (on both reins) at a walk, then a trot, then a canter

June 2007 Essex Rider  
(stress relief and energy control/direction)

then at extreme speed. The methods of raising/lifting the horses head, changing their attention and/or shaking a rein next to their eye --- then carrying on into a single rein blending of our cues for a movement that redirects their energy and in due course to a disengagement of their rear is of extreme importance in building confidence in the rider and in the horse. In all cases, you are leaning slightly forward, balancing that forward movement with your feet forward for stability and are then, once the horses head turns slightly, able to sit up pulling your extended arm with your body and without using your arm muscles to bend your arm can initiate a slight turn. There is no need to turn them sharply (generally) before getting them to change their balance thus avoiding wrecks when turning in stressful situations. You can then control their direction much better.

Regarding stops – When training, a good practice for generating good conventional stops (using half halts, etc) is to ask for a rein back each time you stop. This also applies when riding out and can be practiced sporadically.

When using a bit, be sure to allow it to sit low enough in the mouth that the horse can take responsibility for carrying it with its tongue. Then they can recognize softer rein cues from us and ride with less stress on their mouths. Another advantage of this is the horse will not be putting it's tongue over the bit nor hanging it out of their mouths as they will be busy carry it in the folds they create with their tongues.

When lunging a horse, please keep in mind the horse's point of view and understand that if you use a whip placed behind a horse for impulsion you will not be relaxing the horse but instead be winding it up even if you fatigue it so that tacking up is easier. Once out on the ride the horse will be rested again and right back into the state of mind it started out with. There is a good way to lunge that does in fact relax the horse by confirming that you are communicating in a two way fashion as I have describe in previous articles.

\*The weather changes this year have caused a lot of horses to get bad ideas about what is expected of them when we initially start letting them out more in their fields then have to change back to Winter mode suddenly when the weather double crosses us. This has caused problems with re-entering their stables as well as other problems. This is especially true of the younger horses as they haven't yet learned how the weather works here in England and what we really expected of them. Convincing them to re-enter their stables is not so different in solving than that of teaching them to trailer load so similar training methods work fairly well.

**A closing reminder:**

Good lunging is brief and requires placing pressure for impulsion no farther back than the girth as well as using a series of cues for transitions and changing direction - which I will go into again next month. I will also go into impulsion methods that have proved very effective with any and all types of horses (both runaways as well as slugs).

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

Lewis Blackburn, [www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com](http://www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com), [blackieb@btconnect.com](mailto:blackieb@btconnect.com),  
01799-543711, 0771-8317654