

Riding & Training Perspectives

Howdy Folks, as promised, this month I am expanding on dealing with footfalls to achieve correct lead departures in the riding advice section.

REMINDERS:

- *Breathing*: Holding our breath is something we all do when we are scared /frightened. But as our breathing is noticeably copied by our horse, good breathing is extremely important in relaxing our horse (and ourselves) and releasing tensions in our horse (again in ourselves), especially in tense /scary/frightening situations.
- *Firm abdomen*: Don't forget to keep your abdomen firm in order for your back muscles not to be overly taxed in carrying the upper body and causing bouncing in the saddle harming both our lower backs as well as the horse's back.
- *Alfalfa*: Don't forget, especially when our horses are kept out of work so much as in Winter, to be careful not to over feed with alfalfa due to it's possible large calcium content (as it can adversely effect the parathyroid gland and causes problems when we do wish to work our horses) and possible large content of magnesium (which can contribute to the forming of enteroliths and can cause serious colic as they grow).

RIDING ADVICE:

“Asking for a particular lead when the rear foot is in the right position” : Be sure to ask for a specific canter lead departure when it is physically possible for your horse to accomplish what you are asking for. There is more than one way to recognize correct footfalls, some simple and some more complicated. The more complicated methods involve knowing where each foot is from the feel of the horse's body movements (primarily from the barrel / ribs movement / position) whilst there are other ways that tie into things we already know and practice. Most English riders can ignore the barrel movement when riding in a “rising trot” method. This method teaches one to know the feel of which hind quarter they are sitting to. If sitting to the left rear leg (a left diagonal) whilst trotting, when the rider rises, the opposite or right hind quarter is moving back, up and around in preparation for making the next contact with the ground. This is the instant that the horse can succeed in executing a left lead canter departure if we then ask for more speed. As most horses are trained to have us seated when we canter, we can sit quickly (double sit as if we are intending to change diagonals) and ask for more speed simultaneously in order to get the left lead departure in this example. The horse will then naturally be able to execute the left lead departure, as we wish. Once the horse is cantering, it is not too difficult to recognize the position of the barrel, making it easier to change leads at the canter (a flying change). If a horse's barrel is moved to the right side then the right hind quarter is moved back, moving up and around and putting the horse in a position to successfully make a left lead departure and of course vice versa for right leads (barrel moving to the left). This barrel movement is difficult to feel in a trot, although it can be felt with practice. If one learns to feel the barrel position at a trot then

it becomes possible to make correct lead departures whilst riding to a “sitting trot”. At a walk it is also fairly easy to feel the barrel movements. This makes it possible to accurately achieve correct canter lead departures from sitting trots and walking if so desired. You can see this used in Western Riding often.

TRAINING ADVICE:

- *Tom Thumb Bits:* Be cautious about using Tom Thumb bits as confusing can be caused to the horse by the contradictive pressures the bit causes when asking for turns as when giving a turn pressure the shank bottom (where the rein is attached) pulls one direction whilst the top of the shank (where the cheek piece is attached) pushes the opposite direction.
- *Plastic bits (aka happy mouth):* Plastic bits (with a wire inside) are a very good method for helping the horse have something to chew on and releases stress as does chewing gum for humans. Metal bits fail to allow for this release.
- *Always training:* Not only do horses learn faster than we do, but remember that any time we are around our horses, whether riding or not, we are training our horses. If we are not aware of that fact, we may be training them to act in ways we do not desire.

A CLOSING REMINDER:

As the weather begins to improve and we begin to ride out again (with our horses holding in so much pent up energy), don't forget to execute the direct and indirect single rein exercises (it takes only 30 seconds). I would also like to remind everyone there is an often unused / overlooked option that can be used in a panic / runaway situation if all else fails. Get out of the stirrups and Bail Out. Learn how to bail out over the rear safely. Don't blithely believe it will never happen or be needed. Always know and admit in your own mind when your ability to control has been exceeded.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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