

Riding & Training Perspectives

Howdy Folks, this month I will expand on the use of single rein controls - tied to the redirection of horse attention, energies and coaxing body movement.

Reminder:

When riding out, riders should have their horses wear a halter under the bridle (preferably a rope halter) in order to prevent having to lead by the bridle / bit / teeth whenever dismounting for any purpose. A lead rope can be carried unless that is not practical or an alternate would be passing the buckle end of the reins through the halter loop and bending them back to create a short lead.

Riding Advice:

Most riders are aware that when your horse is running beyond the speed you desire, whether in fear or following others in exuberance, it is generally difficult to get their mind to “come back to us”, i.e. moving from the “right side” instinctive mode back to the “left brain” pragmatic mode and listening to us again. *This applies even to the best behaved horses.* Whenever this is an issue, it is all important to get their mind back to us before causing them to turn enabling us to redirect their energy / feet to where we are safest. This is especially important whenever we need to accomplish **an abrupt turn** as to turn a horse at speed, before their mind is with us, can create imbalance and cause them to fall, causing an awful wreck.

There are a number of methods for regaining their attention. I like to use two methods in particular. One is when we have sufficient room to work so that we can get into a feet forward position enabling us to lean forward and **wave the rein next to their eye** until they respond allowing us to take control of their feet and energy direction to begin a turn. The other is more applicable when we do not have sufficient room and is commonly known as a **Cavalry stop** (a bit misnamed as stopping is not the main intent).

Whether using either of these methods or some other, it is always very important that when making a turn at speed, not to try to make the turn without coaxing the horse to lift its head and shoulders. To do so otherwise plows its weight (especially considering 60% of its weight is in the front) into the ground and can cause loss of balance. The Cavalry Stop lifting method is accomplished via lifting one of either side rein more or less straight up above the head of the horse by pushing that side arm directly forward whilst pinching the rein between the thumb and forefinger, leaning slightly forward and moving your feet forward when doing so to balance yourself. The support rein (opposite side) should be held in a blocking fashion to prevent any preemptive turning. Then, using a reverse half halt motion in an upward motion (in a pulsating fashion) using more of a wrist movement than finger movement and without using any great force but by consistently making the pulsating movements. A horse will generally recognize this upward movement “as it is such natural movement for them when stopping, especially at speed, when they run without us on their backs. In Western riding shows we use a sliding stop and in doing so we lift the head upward in this way (only in shows as to slide would make any cow happy to see us miss catching them as we slid by). Once the horse recognizes the upward request

and slightly lifts its head / usually softening little bit, you can then turn your hand so that your knuckles are upward and begin an outward (again pulsating) whilst continuing an upward movement / pressure - release move. This upward and outward, pulsating, single rein movement to the right or left is begun whilst still you are still leaning a little bit forward, then as you begin the turning instructions you begin to sit back up into the proper seat position and releasing the blocking rein. This return to correct seat position causes you to pull your extended arm back a couple of inches and thus begins the turn without ever bending your arm by using the muscles in your arm. This small amount is sufficient to begin the turn **in balance** and allows you to start using your arm muscles and elbow to begin making the turn as tight as necessary *without causing your horse to lose balance*.

This *blending of the movement that regains the horse attention and on to single rein controls* is accomplished in much the same way for both the Cavalry movement as well as waving the rein by the eye movement. In both cases, you are leaning forward with your feet forward to stabilize you and able to sit up pulling your extended arm.

Training advice:

Remember that when you are doing ground work, try not to bore your horse to distraction when accomplishing communications exercises. Rather than making them think that they are being taken to the “first grade” repeatedly, the problem can be easily avoided by varying the exercises and reducing them to “shortened” versions -- such as using only one of the four side body exercises from each side, plus only one of the three downward head exercises from each side, plus only one of the three poll exercises and only one of the backing exercises from each side. *This only takes a minute or so.* **Not forgetting to begin it all with the initial leadership exercises** and *those too can be abbreviated* to only a partial turn to each aside and a minimal disengagement plus backing exercise. Remember to do this abbreviated version both from the ground as well as from the saddle. The ground set can be done whilst tacking, in the stable or the field, in order to vary routine.

A closing reminder :

For those dealing with the youngsters this time of year, folks need to keep in mind that small bits of information over relatively short periods (say 20 min) using slow and very clear signals, without too much pressure - which can cause them to slip into instinctive behavior and miss the lessons, are all important factors to keep them “left brained”. We need to be sufficiently firm to be seen and understood as leader whilst not treating them as pets, although we need to be sufficiently benevolent. Small, firm leadership exercises are important in showing them we are able to move them around. Benevolence shows them we are not intimidators and to be feared only respected. We also must not allow them to get away with too much “youngster” behavior. All of this in keeping with the way their Mom’s treat them.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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