

November 2007 Essex Rider
(Leadership)

Opening Reminders:

In addition to better communication via our aids, another good way to help eliminate the *self-doubt and fear issues* that we and our horses have is to perfect our firm but benevolent leadership skills. This will help to assure our horses that we are capable of protecting them and in turn they are better able to trust our judgment and direction.

Additional Ground Driving (aka Long Reining) advice is to pre-condition the horse to having ropes around its hocks, legs and feet as well as over its back before beginning the Long Reining routines. Then it is best to begin ground driving by working via a rope halter - without a circingle or saddle, then via a bridle and bit (also initially without a circingle or saddle) then work with the halter and the bit using a circingle then progress to both using a saddle with its stirrups tied together under the belly.

Riding Advice:

When we are asking for stops, it pays to ask for a stop when the hind feet are in the air (a minimum of one) and not when they are already on the ground and committed to the push for forward momentum. When the front end is up in the air is when the hind feet are on the ground and not the optimum time to ask for a stop, therefore when the front end is down & hind end is up it is the time to ask for a stop, of course this is the time when it feels the most precarious to us and that is generally why we fail to ask at the right time to make it easiest for the horse.

Training Advice:

Leadership exercises from the ground and from the saddle:
(the **exercise** is stated following the three outlined circumstances)

Whenever greeting your horse; whether approaching them at the stable or in the paddock / field, in the morning or in the afternoon/evening, there are a few simple things you can do to improve the relationship and improve safety. The first is simply by approaching in a friendly manner and avoiding appearing as a predator (which of course we all actually are). The other is an exercise that is aimed at mimicking what horses do when greeting one another in a herd situation and establishing or re-establishing / reiterating their hierarchy (pecking order). The exercise is initially a bit more involved then afterward and as time passes a shorter exercise suffices just as it does amongst horses in their herds.

When you are Tacking Up / Saddling Up; there is a similar (albeit shorter) exercise you can use for getting the horse to exhale when you are cinching up (tightening the girth) and which is much more effective (and time efficient) than walking a horse around in order to get them to exhale or worse leaning down to tighten the cinch / girth from the saddle. This exercise also serves to reiterate your competent leadership position from the ground. By accomplishing this exercise you won't be "holding up / delaying" the departure and in fact you will be ready to mount up faster than normal and ahead of most others whenever going out in a group.

When mounted : there are two things you should do whenever you mount up and before riding; (1) have the horse "stand still" for a minute or even two in order to consistently be teaching him/her not to walk off immediately and without your cue. The second and equally

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important thing to do is to execute the quick / simple leadership exercise. This will accomplish two things simultaneously. One is to let you know if the horse is tight on either side or has any physical problems (stiffness, etc.) that you should be aware of during that days riding or training, etc. so that you can either avoid the physical problem or work on it, whichever is appropriate to your plans for the day. The other is that you will once again confirm your position as “competent leader” and that you are in control of its feet / body movements. This time, very importantly, the reminder will be coming from you, atop his back where he cannot readily see you as he was able to do when you were on the ground.

The Exercise: The exercise is a five part movement that requires, initially and on average, about 45 seconds to complete. The movements are conducted via a lead rope (from ground) and via rein (from the saddle). The movements use a *direct and indirect rein*, and the application of *pressure- release* movements. Never use a constant pull!

Once you have completed your friendly greeting and haltered the horse (lead rope attached) use a **direct rein** and move the front quarters to either the left or right in a tight full circle, around and back to the beginning and stop, then reverse the movement to the opposite side, again back to the starting point and stop. Half way through each side and around movement use an **indirect rein** in order to disengage the hind quarters - prior to the stop. Once you have returned to the original “second turn” starting point and stopped, back the horse a couple of steps, stop and then lead him back forward to the starting point again and stop. Then give a quick friendly rub (not a pat as no horse pats another) on the crest and forehead (as did their mother when they were young). You will then have completed one exercise routine. This routine can be abbreviated to only a third of a turn for both sides and down to one step back and forward for those two movements, once the routine is well established. For the saddling up routine simply the one third turn is needed w/ disengagement and only on the side being worked from in order to get them to exhale as the disengagement stops them from holding their breath for a short time each application.

Remember to apply the lead rope from the ground application “upward” and in the same direction it would be if it was the rein being used from the saddle. For all disengagements the indirect rein applies pressure from the mouth or bit towards the opposite side hock across the back from the turned head/neck position.

Closing Reminder:

Crossing in Front of your Horse: whenever moving across in front of your horse, especially when in close proximity, do not “push” the face away when passing by. Always move the horses face back towards and behind yourself as you move by. Do not grab the face but use an open hand, even better the back of your hand, on the opposite side from where you are approaching in order to press / release “back” toward yourself and behind you as you pass by. A “push away” serves to reinforce the normal horse exit routine / habit and you do not have nearly as much control over the horse in that way.

Discipline vs. Punishment: Remember at all times that punishment is much different than discipline and horses do not do well with punishment.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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