

August 2008 Essex Rider
(Natural Training and Pressure Release)

Howdy Folks, this month, as I generally do each month, I am responding to the many varied requests I receive from riders in all disciplines. As I cover requests that are so varied, I hope ya'll will look for the specific parts that apply to your current interests and persevere with the balance of information that may only be of interest to you later on.

I work with horses and riders of all disciplines, although I am happily seeing more Western riding practiced, even by some high level dressage riders, as well as other disciplines, in order to keep their horses more supple and interested. Typically I only see a small percentage of Western riders although I do enjoy working with the many other disciplines.

Riding & Training Advice:

A Quotation from Benjamin Disraeli : "A canter is a cure for every evil"

I am often asked why I consider **Natural Horse Training methods** to be a better way than the older /established harsh and autocratic methods. At my current age (nearing 61) I have done things both ways for a long while and now after thousands of horses have become firmly convinced of the validity of the Natural Methods. The following is a basic explanation.

An old, wise quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson was/is "The only way to have a friend is to be one". This insightful point clearly sets out a decision to be made by horsemen everywhere in relation to their horses as well as for humans. Whether to be autocratic, intimidating and forceful **OR** to be naturally firm and dominant whilst remaining kind and benevolent is the decision to be made.

Horses truly "want / need" firm leadership that they can count on for their protection and as such, one way to get through to them is for us to become firm and adamant when necessary, followed immediately by softness in recognition of our horse's efforts. This can be accomplished, amongst other ways, by correctly working free in a round pen and/or on a 22' "active not flat" line in a field or ménage. In both situations it is important to practice the use of true pressure release in a manner that the horse can recognize the release and respond to that in lieu of constant pressure. I call this application : "pulses". Horses in herds generally use these pulses of pressure as opposed to applying constant pressure and horse's best respond to releases of pressure in lieu of being forced to capitulate to constant pressure. Watch any foal learning.

This true pressure release means not to apply a constant pressure on a horse thus requiring it to capitulate to pressure before we release as either a reward or simple recognition of the horse's effort to comply with our requests. This applies to whether we are applying pressure from the ground or saddle and whether we use a rope, rein, stick, leg or hand pressure on the face or body.

You can intimidate a horse into performing a in a certain way, but you will be making more work for yourself in the long run by doing so. For the moment, disregarding any questions about the morality of harsh treatment in horse training methods : such treatment does work as it has for centuries – the problem is that there is little staying power compared to using firm/benevolent methods in convincing a horse to decide a method is best in its own mind. Consider what happens in a couple of months following training in these opposing / different ways/methods. When you mount up on a horse that has been intimidated, you will then have to intimidate him or her all over again. As a result he/she will learn what is coming (the big, strong squeeze / kick and/or hard pressure spur) and become ready to fight with you each time. In the other, more natural /efficient way, the horse has learned in a kinder way and will be much more trusting in what to expect from you. Therefore, when you get on this horse, it is prepared to simply "get on with the program" for the day rather than fight. Therefore, the fact of the matter is that the gentler methods of natural horsemanship are not only morally superior; they actually work better.

Obviously, whenever a horse is extremely nervous and biting, rearing, bucking it is difficult to get close to them. In order to accomplish this (to break through defenses and gain a horse's

Blackburn Natural Horse Training
blackieb@btconnect.com
www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com

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attention) requires a lot of patience on our part as well as exhibiting firm leadership followed quickly and clearly by friendly control. If such behavior occurs in a round pen or on a 22' active line we must exhibit more pressure, as a dominant leader would naturally, and be prepared to release applied pressure in what I term "pulses". Do apply pressure in an appropriate level for situation and be ready to release either incrementally or completely. These pulses of pressure (rather than constant pressure) provide the horse a chance to come back from its instinctive brain (commonly called the right brain side) back to its more pragmatic thinking side (commonly called its left side brain). Once it softens from its instinctive behavior we must recognize this by using softer controls. These pulses of pressure need to be applied to a horse, as nearly as possible, in sequence with the heartbeat at the moment. This method of releasing in increments also applies very well to rearing problems.

Don't forget that Alexander the Great was a Natural Horseman !

Controlling movement: As in herds, horses naturally establish hierarchy / pecking order via being able to manipulate another horse's direction and/or movement, this is an objective we can and need to manage and apply without being harsh. This can be applied in many aspects of riding and ground work. A couple of examples here are dealing with ***napping and shying***. These can best be dealt with via manipulating the horse's movement in a **rapid, smooth non-confrontive manner** rather than trying to fight with our horses by redirecting to opposite directions to where they are attempting (which also takes much more time). A simple, effective method to remember and practice for dealing with either shying or napping is to note which way the horse's nose is pointing and to take over control via single rein and directing them initially in that direction and then carrying onward to where we wish to go rather than fighting to turn them back to an opposite direction.

Points of Interest :

Don't forget that Knowledge looks a lot like Patience in disguise. One of the biggest reasons we get discouraged when training is we don't believe we are getting anywhere with our horses. One reason we can fall into this often erroneous thought is because when we are actually getting somewhere, we just don't notice the small signals that the horse is on the correct track.. Often we lose patience when in fact the horse is on the way to making it fine. Horses go through a predictable series of responses when learning something and there are various ways to help them along. Some of these ways to recognize progress are very subtle and we need to train ourselves to see / notice them. I spend much of my lesson time working with owners, riders, trainers in teaching them how to recognize these responses, generally with great results/effect.

Closing reminders:

When leading your horse be certain not to lead them in a manner allowing them to follow behind you or to walk ahead. Also don't drag them by their lead rope – use pressure release pulses to move them up to where you wish and then release the pressure completely so that they continue along with us at our side. **This is a form of join up.** This also applies very well to in hand showing where you need to trot alongside your horse and of course for the vet visits.

Next month I am asked and will write about the isolation of horses, especially stallions and the harm it causes to their mental state and physical capabilities.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

Lewis Blackburn, www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com, blackieb@btconnect.com,
01799-543711, 0771-8317654

Blackburn Natural Horse Training
blackieb@btconnect.com
www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com