

February 2008 Essex Rider
(Lunging, Bucking)

Opening reminders:

1. A very practical piece of advice is to plan all training for small bytes and steady progress. Steady and unhurried progression from step to step in training is most effective by keeping our horses mind in its “left brain” or pragmatic side. If we attempt the progress too quickly from one complex cue to another or from one level of adrenalin to another, such as from jog (aka trot) to lope (aka canter) before our horse has fully understood a set of cues and gotten comfortable with them - we run the risk of pushing them into their instinctive “right brain” side of their brain and no effective learning occurs.
2. Control of horses in any state of mind is largely about redirection of energy, sometimes in completely non-confrontive style and at other times with a bit of force followed immediately by releases and softness for carrying on forward.

Riding & Training Advice:

Loss of control strength: I often observe muscle memory caused errors when folks are first learning and/or practicing single rein controls, both direct rein and indirect rein control. One error is allowing their hands, wrists and forearms to do too much of the work and not using their upper arms and shoulders sufficiently for pulling a rein back in order to make a tighter turn after initially turning the horses face. When it is done correctly and following the turning of the face first, the elbow and shoulder does the work of pulling the forearm, hand and rein resulting in our forearm and hand staying in the straight line with the rein to the bit. When we begin learning new muscle memory required for using a direct rein “out to the side” - using our hand and forearm to turn the head which doesn’t hurt the mouth as the old method does – then once the head is turned and we begin controlling the size of the circle or to disengage the hind quarters, folks tend to get caught up in the mechanics of the rein use and mistakenly allow their hand and forearm to take over the backward movement and leave their upper arm and shoulder out of the equation. Often the rider moves their forearm downward and back. This loss of the straight line from bit to elbow leaves us vulnerable to the horse simply turning its head back to the front as we have lost our upper arm and shoulder “strong” position.

Bucking: As I briefly mentioned in last months article, riding a potential bucking horse is best initially dealt with by informing the horse that we are capable of redirecting their energy and feet as well as verifying that the horse understands the rein controls that produce the redirection. This is best accomplished by using briefly the *leadership exercise* and should be done before riding forward. The same exercise that I have previously recommended be taught from the ground first. Then we are much more likely to be able to redirect the feet, neck and energy should bucking ensue. If riding in an English saddle, an important piece of tack is a “balance strap” which attaches to and between the front two D rings on either side of the pommel or front of the saddle. This provides the rider with a method for “pulling up” and by doing so generating downward pressure on our seat and feet - pushing us down into the stirrups and *preventing any air gaps* forming between us and the saddle. The rider’s *feet need to be forward* and weight needs to be on the balls of the feet (aka Hunters seat). In a Western saddle has the option of using the saddle horn or attaching bucking straps around the pommel on either or both sides of the saddle horn for the same purpose. When a horse bucks, the rider should *not hold onto the reins* as two big problems occur by doing so. Firstly it will cause the horse to become even more agitated due to the constraint and secondly it will pull the riders arms forward and unseating us. Whenever a horse bucks, it needs to move its head up then

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downward in order to cantilever its weight to generate then buck effectively. When it raises its head to begin the drop the rider needs *to use a single rein and redirect its head to the side* and eventually to disengage its hind quarters. By pulling up on either the balance strap or the saddle horn with one hand the other hand and arm are still available for a single rein maneuver.

Lunging can be an effective tool in developing two way communication with our horses or it can be a pressurizing and problematic method of generating fear in your horse. The lunging should be used to produce a demand from the human to the horse or to run them around in multiple circles.

I have seen many folks lunging their horses around and around in multiple circles, at various speeds, simply tiring their horse so that they can tack up and ride out. In most of these cases, when I was able to be around when those riders returned from their hack out as well as following training in ménages, it was a commonplace to see the rider quite exhausted as after only about 20 minutes the horse generally was sufficiently rested to resume its original state of mind and actions. This of course caused the rider to be in a fight or battle throughout the entire ride following the horse's rest.

Effective lunging generally only requires a few minutes work and very few revolutions.

Additionally the owners /riders typically used long lunge whips to place pressure behind their horses, generally on the ground. This method simply pressurizes the horse into running forward escaping the pressure and the horse cannot see behind itself, so actually in its mind it is running away from pressure and there is no calm communication nor relaxation.

It is important not to place pressure in a way that the horse cannot see what is happening as they will then be forced to assume what is happening and horses are terrible at assuming the incorrect thing. It is equally important to use lunging to communicate cues clearly for two way communication, not simply to run them around with pressure from the rear.

Another error I observe from time to time is that lunging is conducted on a tight line. This can cause many problems such as muscle imbalance, bone stress problems and of course last but not least opposition reflex to constant pressure.

Generally, I lunge on a relatively loose line without constant pressure and always use pressure release moves for any corrections I give cues for, such as correcting head position, etc.

Closing reminders:

1. An important aspect of mounting, whether from left or right side and it should be practiced from both sides - for horse muscle and mind balance sake - is to *hold the onside rein short* by asking for a lateral bend and by holding the rein and the saddle (or balance strap) in the riders fist fast until fully mounted before releasing. This is the only safe way to control a frightened (or potential bucking) horse during mounting.
2. Remember the best way to reprimand a horse is to use non confrontive methods such as "work" - not by being confrontational and punishing with kicks or whips, etc.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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