

Happy New Year Everyone !

Opening reminders:

1. Keep in mind that horses need to counter balance their weight by using their head movements in order to get up once they have fallen or lain down. This becomes a problem whenever they are left tied to a wall, fence or in a trailer, etc.. This is exacerbated once a trailer is moving. Being tied in a moving trailer or truck also makes it much more difficult to balance when jostled, bounced or when the vehicle makes turns, stops and starts. I do believe it a good practice to tie a horse (whilst in a truck or trailer) once they have arrived at a destination and are about to disembark. It is important at that time in order to prevent them from rushing out when a door is opened and before their leader has control of their head with a rope and halter in hand.
2. Trailers and trucks also need plenty of side view windows for horses to see objects coming into view and then passing by. When limited to looking through single windows, objects suddenly come into view and then disappear which is not a comforting thing for flight animals. I have had to solve hundreds of loading problems due to modern, not well thought out, practices of building horse transport without sufficient viewing. Loading problems have seldom been a serious issue with more open trailers such as most as used back home in Texas. On my site is a link where some more horse friendly trailers can be viewed.
3. Remember especially during these winter months, that paved roads can be slippery and can cause precarious riding conditions for horses. This is especially true for horses shod in metal shoes. Those of you fortunate enough to be able to ride barefoot will have considerably better traction - but it is still a risk to watch out for. Plastic shoes, whilst providing much better circulation, are also subject to slipping on pavement, although not as badly as metal shoes. Of course paved roads are slippery in all weather conditions, simply more so in frozen or extremely hot conditions.

Riding Advice:

With reference to the winter warning given above – It is important to learn how to effectively use a “Cavalry lift” in order to raise a horses head and also being able to do so in straight a line. This is handy in relaxing a blocked neck which helps us to more effectively use single “Direct” rein and other controls whenever needed.

In all seasonal conditions, it is important to learn how to effectively use single rein movements (both direct and indirect rein movements) in order to redirect energy appropriate to conditions encountered. Riders and horses should learn “conditioned responses” for positioning and/or moving the parts of the horse’s body around as well as riders automatically moving into safe positions, such as a hunter seat.

Another factor dealing with your horse’s state of mind, especially on roads, is that trotting causes your horse to focus more on footfalls instead of spending so much time day dreaming and/or worrying as often is the case at the walk. This is comparable to humans walking

January 2008 Essex Rider
(horses in trailers, footing and join up)

slowly versus quickly as we also focus better at slightly increases speeds. Both humans and horses tend to stumble mostly when walking casually.

Last month I briefly mentioned how a horse's natural movement helps with spinal and other physical problems in humans when riding. This month I want to comment on how counter-productive it is for riders to try using their body to "help" a horse get into a canter or to maintain a canter (or any gait), as such movements load up the front sholders and makes it much more difficult for a horse to lift it's front end and move into or maintain a canter. It is also not a good practice to hold the reins to short and/or tight as the horse needs to extend its neck and head to begin any increased speed / gait. Of course this does not mean to leave a loose rein – simply, whilst maintaining contact, be sure to allow the horse to extend when it is needed.

Elbows: One common error that invariably leads to other errors is holding the reins shorter than necessary and causing / allowing our elbows to be held too far forward (i.e. not hanging down from our shoulders). This does not mean allowing a loose a rein. I mean that whilst keeping a soft contact and a straight line from our elbow down the rein to the bit ring, we need to allow sufficient length of rein in order to keep our elbows back under our shoulders. By doing so we are able to push our arms forward (without leaning our upper body forward) in order to generate loose reins for the instances that they are needed. This also allows us to shift our weight forward by simply moving only our arms forward when needed such as when moving out from a stop or accelerating, for just a couple of examples.

Training Advice:

“Join up” can be an effective tool in developing the partnership we want to develop with our horses. However, we don't all have access to round pens with which to conduct join up sessions. Therefore, a simple way to do a “mini” join up is to use a lead rope and work both sides of the horse. Do this by holding the rope (with your hand closest to the horse) about three feet from the point of attachment on the halter whilst facing forward. Then extend the rope across your lap and hold it secure with the other hand. Then walk forward until contact is made with the horses halter (don't jerk it) and begin moving forward without looking at the horses face. Continue facing forward throughout the exercise, do not turn and face your horse even if the horse stops and holds you there. Simply walk faster than the horse whilst continuing to hold the pressure across your lap - without turning to look. In due course (eventually) the horse will move forward (assuming it has not lifted you up and if it does still do not turn to look). As soon as the horse moves forward continue walking forward a bit faster than the horse. Each and/or any time the horse drags - continue to lean into the rope and do not look back. Continue walking around in this fashion until the horse accepts that you are not going to turn and enter into a tug of war and gives slack in the rope whilst following you. At this time (still without looking back) using your hand nearest to the horse (in a pressure release action on the rope) asking your horse to move up next to your shoulder. Once the horse reaches your shoulder then release the rope pressure from that near hand and allow it to droop across in front of you to your far side hand. Then begin using your nearest hand (held in front of the horses head) and indicate the directions you wish your horse to move (stop, forward, right and left). I use what I believe in the UK is called a royal wave motion for these directions. At this point as the horse is next to you now, you can begin glancing at the horses face whilst giving the hand signals. Now continue walking around for a few minutes conducting six to eight turns plus a few stops and starts until the horse is joined up well. Then take a break and congratulate the horse. This [Mini Join Up Exercise](#)

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should be accomplished from both sides each day for 10 days initially, then once a week for a few weeks and then can drop to once a month.

Cavalry lift: A cavalry lift is not so much a stopping exercise as it is a speed control and neck relaxing movement originally developed by Cavalry officers. Horses naturally relax more when their head is raised (they also stop better with their head raised). This should be taught and practiced as another important conditioned response. I will explain more on the method in next months article.

Closing reminders:

1. **Round pens (used for Join Up and much more) need to be built safely** with sides/walls being built at least six to seven feet tall or more and with no gaps left between the top edges of where panels meet in order to prevent a cannon bone or fetlock slipping into. There should also be no spaces larger than 1.5 inches between horizontal panel slats or rails as a foot could fit through and becoming cast in such a way it could do major damage (a mesh or closely spaced slats or flat panel of wood or flat metal is best). A good surface would be a packed clay base with about 1.5 inches of sand on top. Minimum size should be 60 feet diameter and 75 feet is even better.

2. **Effective use of Single Rein (direct or indirect)** is not easily achieved if the horse has not been taught conditioned responses for these moves. A human can control a horse much more effectively when a horse believes that between the two of them the human is more qualified to be leader. I spend large amounts of time teaching this to riders and their horses as both need to learn “Conditioned Responses”.

3. **For every horse I ride,** I first establish whether or not there is a conditioned response to the single rein leadership directions I would need to use in a panic situation. If it is not evident, I then teach them -- on the spot. I then have established that I am a capable leader as well as identifying if there is resistance on one side or other. I also make sure of this whenever I am riding potentially bucking mounts. In another issue I will discuss how to best ride such mounts.

4. **The key to getting better results** with our horses lies with clarity and refinement of our requests/cues. This applies whenever training or riding out. Another important factor is establishment of firm but benevolent leadership.

A new aspect for my articles in this New Year is that I am willing to receive and review serious requests from riders and owners wanting me to write about any specific subject or problem they would like to see.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe for a better New Year.

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