

Opening reminders:

1. I apologize for *typo errors* in my February article, which might have caused some confusion. One important error is in the second sentence of the “longeing” section the word **NOT** was omitted. I intended to say that forcing horses to run in multiple circles is NOT a good thing at all - especially as horses cannot see behind them and will simply run away from pressure placed behind them in an instinctive way rather than thinking and acting in a more left brained pragmatic manner as we desire.

2. If you are worried that your barn or stable is too drafty for your horse, chances are it is not drafty enough. What we humans like is not always best for our horses. There needs to be plenty of outside air circulating through the barn or stable, **even when it is cold**. Nature gave horses a *sophisticated thermoregulation mechanism* that keeps them comfortable in weather that would kill us humans. However, if our horses do not use their systems - they run the risk of losing it - so even though there is nothing wrong with providing shelter for horses, just be sure to also to provide lots of access to the great outdoors and of course to other horses.

“Points of Interest”

1. ***Bombproof Horses*** : Nothing is worse than a overly spooky horse. The American Indian warriors had something every rider today covets and that is a truly bombproof horse. A very good example was the horses of the Lakota Sioux Indian Warriors. They had trained their horses to an extent unequalled since their time. They were able to suddenly dismount and fight their enemies hand to hand. Their horses were able to remain focused and within eight feet of their dismounted riders in the midst of huge battles, amongst flying arrows, spears and guns going off. They would wait for the voice command to run up and allow the warrior to remount his horse. These horses were pretty much bombproof to what was going on around them by staying focused on their riders so intently. This level of training has not been achieved since.

2. ***Perfect places to raise horses***: Horses do best on diets of high-fiber, high-quality forage. In other words hay or pasture and pasture is the better of these two as it takes longer for the horse to eat and keeps him moving throughout the day. This is known as “natural grazing behavior”. However, not all pastures are created equal. There are four perfect places in the World with perfect limestone-based grass and these are: Newmarket, England; Chantilly, France; Lexington, Kentucky; USA; and Ocala, Florida, USA. Ocala’s year-round mild climate makes it the most ideal and the sheer size and diversity of the horse industry there has earned it the title Horse Capital of the World.

Riding & Training Advice:

1. Horses, on average, require up to 60 repetitions to learn a specific lesson. This may sound like a lot but that isn’t really the case. If we repeat an exercise, either on the ground or in the saddle, three or four times a day for four to five days a week, in no time we will achieve 60 repetitions in only a short while.

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2. A handy method for putting your horse into the correct state of mind for competition verses casual riding is to make use of two different bits and train in the specific bit for each purpose. A malleable metal bit for competition and a more easily chewable bit for casual work. One important thing to keep in mind is that a chrome bit or any other bit containing nickel or nickel plating can cause electrolysis in the mouth which can be very irritating.
3. When mounting up, the safest method is to ask your horse to turn its head toward you in a lateral bend and hold the rein against the pommel section of the saddle and keep that secure until fully mounted and having you offside foot in the stirrup and the offside rein in your hand before releasing the hold. This can be taught fairly quickly to any horse so that it allows a soft rein **whilst it also learns to better stand still** with the bend in place. One precursor for teaching horses to stand still in this mounting exercise and in many other exercises is by rubbing them every time they execute our ground work requests as in moving their body, etc. - which I teach for all ground work. A balance strap is good for this for English saddles and western saddles have the handy saddle horn. I have seen far too many accidents when folks hold both reins together and main hair or saddle front, which allows the horse to run straight forward in a panic situation and as the rider is only standing only on the onside stirrup the saddle gradually slides over and since the rider is hanging on for dear life of course the riders head is the first thing to hit the ground and at speed by then causing severe damage to the neck and head and a helmet does little to prevent neck injuries.
4. Most riders are good about **balancing** their horses, when in a long trot, by changing diagonals from time to time. If we are truly conscientious about helping our horses mental and physical balance - then another thing we should be doing to further balance our horse is to practice mounting and dismounting from both sides. It is frustrating that so many riders miss this obvious need of our horses.
5. When we are training our horses, we must consider and make our approach with consideration for their various personalities or what Pat & Linda Parelli have coined **Horsenality**. An example of this is the **introverted personality** where some horses tend to handle stress or confusion by shutting down and blocking out any further confusing or worrying input. These horses rapidly get worse if we increase pressure whilst they are in that state of mind. The Horsenality chart that Parelli has online is very interesting for identifying horseanalties and charting changes during training and farther in time.
6. The **introverted personalities** also do things that many riders are familiar with such as bracing when we ask, from a trot, for a canter / lope departure. The horse extends the trot - then when we ask again it extends further and continues this cycle until it is completely frustrated and either bucks or just carries on until we become frustrated. The horse has closed down its further understanding and is **“stuck”** in one thought and believes it is simply being required to continue extending its trot. A quick solution for this is to stop asking and drop the speed with a quick half halt then repeat the request once the horse breaks free of its braced mindset, which doesn't usually take long.

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7. These **introverted personalities** also do not handle well longeing using high pressure or pressure placed behind their girth area / line of sight as they cannot see behind them and simply brace and run from pressure thus increasing their reliance on their right brain instinctive behavior. These introverts begin to shut down or in an opposite reaction begin running uncontrollably /braced without seeing anything other than straight ahead - becoming more or less catatonic.

8. **Improving stops:** We can greatly improve both our horses stops as well as their attention to us mentally by using our half halts “***with an immediate release of pressure***” in order to teach our horse to stop on the release rather than the hold. The stop and communication can be further improved by reining back a few steps every time our horse fails to stop as quickly as we wish. It then begins to anticipate the possibility of our requiring a rein back on every stop. Additionally by moving our pelvis under us, sitting on our pockets and/or moving our feet forward slightly, we help cue our horse as they can feel the slight weight changes. Furthermore by dropping our energy levels and exhaling our breath the horse is also provided with further natural feelings to slow or stop. It is a good practice to work on stopping without use of the reins at all by these body movements / cues and mental focus on our part. It is a great feeling to know our horse is so attuned to our thoughts when this is achieved. Riders seldom fail to break into a smile when this is done.

9. It never pays to **constrain or restrict a horse**, especially when it is excited or frightened as that only serves to push them farther into their right brain instinctive flight mode. A much better and effective solution is to redirect their energies and direction of travel by using single rein controls. Additionally the horse can see us once its head is turned a bit and that helps their state of mind considerably.

Closing reminders:

1. ***Stress and Illness:*** Although horses are big and strong they have a relatively delicate constitution and one of their main enemies is ***Stress.*** Stress can come from many sources and one of the most significant events is transportation. After a horse has been on a long trip, typically their immune systems are really suppressed and not working up to full potential. This puts them at greater risk to many disorders. In order to minimize stress whilst traveling it is a good idea to have a rest stop every two hours and being certain your horse drinks plenty of water. Besides compromising his immune system, stress is a common cause of ulcers and life threatening colic.

2. Please beware and keep in mind that, especially in winter whenever riding on pavement, that your horse will tend to have questionably footing and have a tendency to slip/slide whenever wearing metal shoes. Please be careful if your horse must wear steel shoes.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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