

Opening reminders:

1. **Horses are affected by changes in seasons**; therefore it pays to keep a calendar with notations in order to keep track of these changes in personalities so that we are not surprised and can better deal with them.
2. **Seasonal preparations are important for safety** ; one very important exercise that needs to be practiced regularly, especially as good weather allows us to get out riding more following the winter is the direct and indirect rein controls used for bending /redirecting our horse as well as disengaging their hind quarters when necessary.
3. **Leading -- Use of lifting head when leading** ; when leading your horse it is a good practice to lift its head when asking for a stop or slowing. This is a natural movement for horses in fields and they quickly recognize it as control over their position by their leader. It is also good to keep their noses at your shoulders so you can see where they are and what is happening and prevent them from ducking around behind before you realize it and take action to prevent unwanted movement.

“Points of Interest”

1. **Run out pens** ; if worried about barns or stables being too drafty it is more likely that it is not drafty enough as horses have a sophisticated thermoregulation mechanism that keeps them comfortable in weather that would kill us. Whether for individual stable stalls or for the barn as a whole (using pasture lanes as used in limited pasture areas) – a door can be cut in the outside wall and a run out pen installed. Whilst not always practical for us whenever possible it is good for our horses.
2. **Pony Express** ; surprisingly in light of the historical near mythical stature of the pony express it was in operation only about 18 months. It started in April 1860 and stopped in October 1861 with the advent of the transcontinental railway. Despite its short history, it carried 35,000 letters and the route covered almost 2,000 miles. It was also mostly ridden by teenage orphaned boys.
3. **Animals In Translation** (by Dr. Temple Grandin) ; for anyone wishing to better understand their horses the book by Dr. Grandin, a highly autistic lady and professor, is a must read. It is an excellent book on autism and the behavior of horses as well as for dogs, cats and other farm animals. Her site, along with a free chapter of her book, can be found on the Links section of my site.
4. **Barefoot transition and rehabilitation via new developments** ; is explained well on the site of Alan Smith, DAEP BEng - Equine Podiatrist. I have recently run across him in his dealing with a number of my clients and it is very interesting for any owners with concerns for the increased standards of foot care. His site can be found on the Links section of my site.
5. **Origin of horses** ; Horses originated in North America, descended from smaller swamp-dwelling predecessor, evolving and adapting to grassy plains, surviving predators such as saber-tooth cats, lions,, huge wolves and by man, only to become extinct about 12,000 years ago. Fortunately it had by then crossed the Bering strait land bridge into Asia and from there evolving into many species of Equidae such as zebra, ass, onager and other wild horse breeds.

Riding & Training Advice:

May 2008 Essex Rider
(training awareness and directional controls)

1. **Everyone needs to become attentive trainers in varying degrees ;** this is especially true as anytime we are around our horses we are in fact training them whether knowingly or not.

2. **Road work focusing for our horse ;** as most of us need to do road work, in varying degrees, it is very important to remain aware of our horses focus in that when walking they are not so much focused on their footfalls as when trotting. Therefore when walking they are more likely to be bothered by traffic and roadside rubbish etc.. When trotting casually they use more of their brain to think on their footfalls and we can be more effective as leaders keeping their attention where it needs to be.

3. **Knowing when to stop;** is important to know when to stop a particular lesson in order to allow the horse to absorb when at it just learned. It is important to give the horse small lessons and allow for absorption or they can become deadened to a particular cue rather than soft and compliant. If you and your horse get it right for a particular exercise one or twice then stop right there and reward your horse. Don't drill or over-train. I see this all too much in riders being impatient and not releasing their cue pressures, especially with their feet and legs, when a horse complies with their requests.

4. **Leg positions;** applying weight to the ball of foot generates two important things (1) our heel naturally dips down and (2) our ankle naturally begins to flex as it should. Consciously pushing our heel down actually causes the front of our feet to lighten and rise and sometimes (often actually) loose the stirrup.

5. **Effective use of rope to simulate a round pen helps to generate mental changes ;** not everyone has access to round opens or in any case not to safely built round opens. Not to worry as there is a practical way to simulate a round pen and its effect of controlling your horse's ability to flee. If you are in a ménage of normal dimensions connect 40 feet of rope to the halter, whether that is two 22 foot ropes connected together best via a fisherman's knot (that knot amongst others can be found on the knots section on my site if needed), and lunge allowing the horse to run as far as necessary away from you without too much constraint and gradually shortening the rope as time goes. Of course remembering not to apply any pressure behind the girth line on the horse is very important as I have described many times in previous articles.

6. **Knapping and shying control ;** whenever your horse knaps or shies it is generally a mistake to try to contradict the direction of movement the horse is trying for. It is much more effective and speedy to move, non-confrontationally, in the direction the horse is wanting and use single rein pressure (with releases) to initially carry on in the direction the horse desires and then carry on turning beyond that direction and continuing on until we reach the that we wish. It is generally much to time consuming to contradict their desire and force them to change their direction to the opposite they started to, even if we are strong enough to do so. This also is applicable when a horse shies, as we can use single rein pressure to initially carry on in the direction the horse's face is looking / pointing and then continue on past the point of worry and on to a direction we choose or continue on around to speed time desensitizing, should we wish to do so. . Basically to make our idea initially coincide with theirs and then take over control of where their feet are moving.

7. **Weight transfer care ;** As skiers, runners or motorcycle riders must push with our outside foot in order to prevent the centrifugal force from causing us to fall to the outside of a turn. When riding our horses, we simply move the outside stirrup a bit outward and our weight, from centrifugal force, naturally pushes our weight into the stirrup and we prevent ourselves from being flung off our horse

May 2008 Essex Rider
(training awareness and directional controls)

to the outside. That same centrifugal force is exerted on the horse's body and his outside feet and sole must bear the extra force weight and he has to push against the ground to prevent sliding outward so we need not move any extra weight beyond the natural centrifugal force on our body or we cause our horse to unbalance. On the other hand, if we move our weight too much to the inside of a turn, we again can cause imbalance, Therefore, in either case if we try to move too much weight in either direction we are getting in his way so we need to remain as center balanced as possible and only allow the centrifugal force to push weight down and against our outside stirrup on the ball of our foot so that our heels naturally bend down behind our slightly moved forward feet.

8. Dealing with grass eating effectively from the saddle ; if your horse is holding his or her head down and we are needing to move on, it is not a good idea to start pulling on the reins to get the head up since they are so heavily and can simply fight with us effectively. It is a better idea to ask for forward movement and wait for them to pick their head up to see where they are going, as will be the case when moving forward, then take the reins up and control their direction, turning if necessary initially.

Closing reminders:

1. Resting during and after traveling ; on long trips horses have their own version of jet lag which has nothing to do with time zones. During trailer trips constantly bracing and rebalancing takes its toll using different muscles than everyday life. They are working as hard as when riding, so if you are on a long trip it pays dividends to make sure he or she is rested before the trip and to stop and rest periodically during the trip and upon arrival give them a break and if possible a nights sleep before riding them. Along the way it is best to let them stay inside the trailer during the rest stops opening top doors, refreshing water etc. tying them during traveling is not a great idea either as if they slip and fall they will be hard pressed to be able to rise again and ten to panic and harm themselves in that panic. Of course tying their hand held) lead rope onto them on arrival before opening the exit is not a bad idea.

2. Alfalfa vs. Grass; Nearly all horses prefer alfalfa hay to grass hay, but that doesn't mean you should give a steady diet of it as Alfalfa or Lucerne (a perennial legume) is in the same family of clover and various other bean plants. Whilst it is a good source of energy and protein (but not fiber) too much of it can cause hyperactivity, obesity and even colic in horses. On average about 20% (depending upon where it is grown) is fine for their overall diet and the balance can be simply grass or grass hay (pasture hay). Grass hay with its high-fiber and abrasiveness on the teeth is better for dental and digestive health.

3. Being Leader; remember that being leader is maintained mostly by controlling the movement of the horse. In herds it is usually an older mare (beta member) that leads the herd most effectively.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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