

“Opening reminder” -- how to safely gather a cinch from opposite side of where it hangs:

It is very unsafe to reach under the horse from the left side with your right arm or from the right side with your left arm as your elbow will be bending in the incorrect direction if it is hit from the back legs and a damaging break is the likely result. It is even more unsafe to reach under the horse from the right side with your right arm or with your left arm from the left side - as you will be exposing your face, head, neck and chest to serious injury if kicked from a hind leg or hoof. Most folks are aware of the second one listed above but not the first. A simple solution is to stand on the left side with your backside to the horse's rear and step your right foot under the horse to protect your right elbow and on the opposite side step with your left foot and leg. This is effective as if the horse kicks your leg is bending in the correct position to flex and of course your other exposed parts are padded. Also, as you are stepping under - your weight is not on the foot and leg under the horse. Your weight is actually on the outermost foot and leg, away from the horse, so there is less resistance to a kick than there would be if your body weight was on the involved foot and leg.

Safety tip for Western Riders:

When saddling and unsaddling, be conscious of never attaching a flank cinch or breast plate before securing the main cinch at least to a snug position. If your horse is unexpectedly frightened during tacking up and the main cinch is not secured at least fairly snugly, if not completely, and you have attached either a flank cinch or breast plate (or both) then there is a high risk of the saddle slipping under the horse as it begins to run with a loose cinch. This can be terrifying to most horses as instinctively they fear being attacked from underneath. Once the main cinch is “snugged”, it is then safe to attach the others without this risk, should anything frighten your horse. This safety tip equally applies to English riders that use breast plates. Even though English riders tend to call a cinch a girth, however it is awkward to say “put a girth around the girth of a horse”.

Conformation points to watch for when selecting a high performance horse:

Via comparing the height of the peak of the withers to the peak on the bum *:

1. When withers are higher than the peak of the bum, it means the horse will likely be moving more if it's weight to the rear feet & legs which is best for high performance.
2. When withers are at the same height as the peak of the bum, the weight is more balanced, which is find in general riding but not optimum for high performance horses.
3. When withers are lower than peak of the bum, it means the horse will likely be moving with more of it's weight on the front feet, which is the least desired for high performance.

**This analysis is but one of the conformation aspects to look for in selecting a horse.*

Riding and Training Advice:

When making turns “lift” the shoulders. It makes turning whilst carrying us as riders much easier for our horses if we ask them to lift their shoulders.

When riding, it pays dividends to keep our weight in the centered position of the saddle (at the low point below front edge / bottom of the cantle, at back of seat). This center seat position is much easier to achieve and maintain via keeping stirrup contact with weight in the balls of our feet in the stirrup.

This does not mean bracing our legs and weight. Simply keep sufficient and appropriate weight for the specific action being taken, such as abrupt stops, radical turns, bucking, horse tripping or going down steep inclines.

For improving impulsion, a good method is to provide forward weight movement whilst giving a forward cue with out heels or legs. It is only necessary to use our arms moving forward, not our upper body or shoulders in order to generate forward movement from a stop whilst giving a leg cue, then release fore weight pressure and leg cues as soon as motion has begun.

Using a Cavalry Lift after the horse is running.

Whenever a horse runs away with us and its neck becomes much like a stiff plank preventing us from being able to turn them and regain control, riders need to learn what is commonly known as a “Cavalry Lift”. The lift is not a power lift but simply a pestering and constant requesting of the horse to do a very natural thing which is to lift it’s head to slow.

A “Cavalry lift” is a method of asking (if necessary pestering) our horse to lift it’s head, which causes a horse to redirect it’s thinking and slow it’s pace. The rider pushes one or both arms straight forward as far as possible, without leaning our shoulders forward, and begins repetitively lifting the reins, by using the wrist in the opposite direction that we would do if asking for a half halt (when using the wrist instead of the fingers). Eventually the horse will recognize the rider’s natural request of asking for the lift of it’s head and will “break the brace” it has set when it went to it’s instinctive brain, thus allowing us the option of using a direct rein to turn the horse. Whenever riding on a narrow bridle path where there is no place to turn, then by using the two rein Cavalry lift one can slowly gain control of the pace and slow the horse to a more controllable speed.

By executing a Cavalry Life we have a much better chance to “**Break the Brace**” and then make redirection and turns in order to regain the lost control whilst simultaneously causing the horse to *SEE* us in the saddle. They can’t see us when looking straight ahead - once they go right (instinctive) brained with their nose pointed straight ahead, due to their monocular vision / lack of binocular vision. The Cavalry Lift can be accomplished with both reins or just one - depending on the situation and the strength of our desire to use one of our hands to pull ourselves better down into our seat in the saddle. Of course in doing this or any other movement when in a precarious balance situation we must have our weight on the balls of our feet and be pushing our feet forward to whatever -degree is most secure.

Closing safety reminder:

As winter is on and off again coming quickly now, I would like to remind everyone that if your horse is wearing metal shoes, be extra diligent and careful. Each year I end up having to assist many riders when their horses fall on the roads as a horse has a tough time getting up wearing the slippery steel shoes and of course they get hurt when falling as well as the rider does. This is much less of a problem if the horse is shoeless as the natural material of the hoof (same as our toenails - filaments of keratin) has much more traction that does metal or even plastic shoes.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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