

**Point of Interest:** This video is well worth the viewing :  
[www.americancowgirl.com/film.htm](http://www.americancowgirl.com/film.htm)

**Training Advice:**

One method of training a horse for stops that has proved to work well for all disciplines, from English style Dressage all the way across the spectrum to Western Reining, is the pressure release stop. This method requires and allows the horse to make better and more square stops without interference from the rider. Less interference from us works best much like it does for other requests that we make of our horses, such as for impulsion and constant gait. The request and agreement for stops should be a shared responsibility with our horse, with us as leader. Getting our weight, pelvis and legs into the correct position as well as asking and releasing with rein pressure in order to allow the horse to execute well is all important. If we try to micro-manage the horse we are interrupting their natural ability to stop gracefully just as we would be doing in turns and lead requests.

As all horses are looking for the easiest way and the reward of release of pressure, firm beginning requests progressing to less pressure with more releases works well in training even if it requires a bit more overt pressure with some, just so it ends with softness. Start by initially using the reins with a firm pressure in order to give what is commonly known as a half halt movement (using fingers or wrist – not the arms). Follow the cue with an immediate release (sometimes more than once to begin with). Make this rein cue in conjunction with turning your pelvis under, exhaling and dropping our energy whilst slightly moving your feet forward with about 30% of your weight on the balls of your feet in your stirrup until you get the stop. Then a small rub reward. Begin at a walk, and then in due course progress to a trot and then a canter / lope. Then repeat the exercise with the same firm half halt pressure / release but with a smaller number of hand repetitions. Then begin to lessen the pressure of the half halts as the number of half halt repetitions decreases to achieve the stops. Continue this descending progression until the stops are easy to achieve with very light rein pressure /release. For men, think about sitting on our back pockets, without leaning lean back, as we aren't built as well as ladies for this part of the movement.

Do note that the slight movement of the feet and legs forward is very important, as stops will improve to an abrupt level and having your feet forward will keep you in your seat better and prevent bumping your nose on the horse's neck. This exercise will help by allowing the horse to stop square from lesser speeds and even at greater speeds eventually. At greater speeds (lope, canter and gallop) what is commonly called a sliding stop will occur and it should also be noted that a sliding stop is not the showy stop in Western Reining (which also requires special shoes and boots) but is actually a very abrupt stop. This stop in ranch work is followed by what is called a roll back which is useful in chasing reversing cows. High speed stops also require knowledge of where the rear feet are in order to give the stopping cue at the best time for your horse to tuck its rear feet under.

**Riding and Training Advice:**

I often run across an interesting, important and much overlooked communication problem between riders and horses. The problem applies to riders as well as trainers and is accentuated due to a horse's Extraordinary Sensory Perceptions (not simply ESP).

In today's expanded awareness of our human "condition" of deep seated mental problems with confidence and confusion issues, we have an ever growing number of modern solutions and methods for recognizing, facing and dealing with our problems and then realigning our thinking and moving toward more positive thinking patterns.

Whilst these methods are generally effective for humans, there are flaws in using them whilst riding our horses. Due to their **monocular vision**, horses cannot see us when they are facing forward and we are riding them. This causes them to rely heavily upon their **Extraordinary Sensory Perceptions**, which are extremely valuable to them in the wild, when dealing with predators attacking them or approaching from many directions in which horses have no effective line of sight. I like to call it Extraordinary rather than simply Extra, since over approximately 50 million years they have evolved their sensory perceptions to such advanced degree compared to ours. This requires us to be competent, firm albeit benevolent leaders in order to keep our horses comfortable and trusting in us for their safety.

In natural horsemanship, we apply prey animal psychology as we serve as benevolent "herd leader" to our horse. So it's natural for the horse to remain **highly perceptive** to us (as their herd leader), and whenever you (imagined or otherwise) sense, fear or even dread, the horse is going to pick up on it instantly and it stays in their mind as they then act instinctively as their DNA in engineered. It is then a new task for us to change their minds back to where we wish and deal with directing them whilst we accomplish this.

Horses take time to change their minds, as do we, and they are especially slow once they have gone into their instinctive mind (a.k.a. to their right brain). Therefore as leaders, we must be able to redirect our horse's feet more quickly than they can change their thoughts. This leaves us not much time to change our own thoughts and be able to take appropriate action.

Over the last few years, I have had a growing number of clients inform me how they are learning to deal with their insecurities and/or loss of confidence via various modern methods. Whilst I appreciate what they are doing and see how it is working well for many folks, I also notice that some of them are using these methods whilst riding. They are trying to catch themselves when thinking negatively, such as falling off, horse running away from their control and many other things and then working methodically to move their thinking back to more a positive state of mind.

This is fine when working from the ground as the horse can see us and when there is more time available for changing our state of mind and we can make use of these somewhat time consuming methods to adjust our thinking to the positive side without so much risk from when our horse picks up on these thoughts and then gets left behind us when we need them to stay with us, i.e. collecting our "initial" negative thoughts before we get to our positive thoughts.

The flaw in using most (not all) of these methods whilst riding is that for us to use them for redirecting thinking in a better state of mind takes that extra bit of time to accomplish. **This is more than problematic** as the horse is still moving off in an instinctive direction which its DNA directs due to (1) our negative state of mind and (2) our lack of firm leadership when we were in that negative state of mind. The horse needs our leadership badly once he is worried. When we are not in control and directing the horse, it must take care of itself and horses aren't generally very good at that so DNA engineered instinct is the only thing available to keep them alive as it has done successfully for millennia. We must learn to use more mechanical methods for cutting short our negative thoughts and changing our minds much more quickly and reactively - rather than by being methodical. We cannot afford to be slow in changing our minds or too much ground can be covered whilst our horses are out of our control.

One of best methods I have found to be very effective in abruptly stopping or interrupting our thoughts and changing our state of mind, is the breathing technique of inhaling quickly and fully - then rapidly exhaling whilst mentally centering our mind and gravity down into our abdomens. By forcefully exhaling and focusing down into our abdomen, we are better able to immediately **break our own "brace"** of thought and begin our positive thoughts and actions. We are not so different from our horses in our mental bracing, we simply must be able to break our brace and change our thinking much more rapidly than our horse in order to direct our horse's actions

whilst it is still lagging behind in the process of changing its thoughts and recognizing we are “at the helm”.

This breathing technique also helps to generally relax us as well as our horse and can be used to relax us whenever we get a bit stressed or tight. This same technique is very helpful with improving stops, changing leads (flying or otherwise), centering our seat and body - plus much more.

An old adage in this regards has been to say that we need to focus our mind and thoughts onto what we *want* the horse to do, not what we *fear* the horse will do. However, in reality that is not so easy to control. Therefore, we need to learn how to more or less instantly “reset” ourselves so that we can change our actions, more by rote than methodical or logical thought. **Although we do need to practice being more “aware” as riders and not so much as just passengers.** We need to try to keep positive thoughts going through our minds and thinking about what we intend to do at least a step ahead of our horse whenever possible and avoid thinking about our negative problems. Not an easy thing to do all the time.

**Your horse will greatly appreciate a positive, firm leader on its back in lieu of a worried passenger.**

### ***Closing safety reminder:***

Whenever a horse shies, 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”. By executing a Cavalry Lift we have a much better chance to **“Break the Brace”** and then make turns to regain the lost control whilst simultaneously causing the horse to *SEE* us in the saddle - which they can’t do once they go right brained and are running/moving with their head straight ahead, due to their monocular 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 hand 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.

***Until next time, have fun and stay safe.***

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