

April 2009 Essex Rider Mag.
(Effective Control & Communication plus Laminitis Warning)

I try, each month, to address as many varied points as possible. These points are raised by clients, readers and auditors at sessions. Therefore, my articles may seem a bit disjointed from time to time in my efforts to deal, at least in part, with many different levels of horsemanship. I trust this method doesn't confuse too many readers. I am happy to clarify anything that is not clear and will accept any legitimate query.

Opening reminders for Effective Communication:

1. Whenever using spurs, please endeavor to apply no more than 1 or 2 ounces of pressure as a general rule. Please use only dulled points on rowels, stars or spinners and bulbous ends for straight shaft "English style" spurs. ***I am considering reinstating spur training.***
2. With or without spurs, the softest possible pressure should be used, once the horse's attention is captured, in order to illicit the horse's closest attention in listening / looking for the cues. This obviously must be taught carefully and we must quickly recognize their reply to our cues or the horse will begin relying on us to do both our part and their part of the working partnership.
3. Be sure to minimize the number of repetitions for specific cues given in order to clearly require the horse to carry out its part in the partnership. Do not nag your horse and release pressure the instant they do reply to our cues.
4. Many horses are beginning to get a bit more "fresh" now that winter has more or less passed. This is a good time to pay more attention to being firm leaders whilst remaining benevolent, both on the ground as well as from the saddle. Your leadership influence confirms to the horse that you not only can move their feet where you wish but also that you can protect them when necessary. Single rein control and disengagement will do wonders for their state of mind. Redirecting their impulsion energy is important for safety as well as pure leadership and doing so without constricting them by pulling directly back on their bit is a must. Redirecting by taking control over their existing direction of movement is much more effective and quicker than attempting to reverse their direction from their initial intended movement in the conventional combatant manner.

Riding & Training Advice:

1. When exposing your horse to a directional command or desensitizing lesson, whilst remaining diligent, we must also avoid over exposing or over applying the effort (nagging our horse) for fear of dulling the horse and them becoming dead to a command.
2. When long lining (aka lunging), as much as possible, work with a loose line whilst still applying appropriate directional cues. Hold the rope / line in your hand as you would a rein and it will be much easier /quicker for you to apply pressure and never apply any pressure behind the girth line.
3. Along the lines of being constantly aware of when you are around your horse. A good practice / habit to form and apply is that every time you walk past them - "touch them". This is an easy way of "soft sacking out" on an ongoing basis and helps us to be more consciously aware of what we are doing around them. Also whenever you need to squeeze by in front of them in a stable or a passageway, remember to move their face as it would happen in a herd situation. That is, to move their face toward the position behind your direction of travel. Folks tend to forget that every time we are around our horses we are, in fact, training them in one way or another whether consciously or not and teaching either good or bad habits.
4. ***Boredom solutions:*** Although it often requires a considerable amount of repetition for some horses to initially learn lessons and habits we wish to have them learn. One effective and interesting solution for horses that have or are becoming bored with their training routines and which is especially applicable to "refined training", is to teach them more than one discipline. One good example of multi discipline training is a Dutch Warm Blood Sorrel gelding (aka light chestnut) that had been trained for English Dressage. I work with many Dressage riders solving

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unwanted ingrained habits - easily improves their scores. This very intelligent Sorrel Gelding was becoming ever more bored and difficult /frustrating for the owner who is a highly accomplished rider. Once we had methodically worked with and solved various ingrained habits and had refined some of the basic communication problems, the horse performed much better in its Dressage discipline. However the horse was still periodically displaying a somewhat bored attitude. The owner was open minded enough to consider a second riding discipline. This decision followed the owner/rider becoming a better and more attentive to horse language, trainer herself. This second discipline idea was not meant to replace the existing Dressage discipline but to augment it by overcoming the boredom issues. I agreed to teach both rider and horse a variety of good general Western Riding skills including some Western Reining thrown into the mix. The owner was pleasantly surprised at how easily she and her horse were both able to learn the new skills (including the reining portions). As the owner was so very contentious and diligent in applying the exercises, in between the sessions with me - her progress was solid and rapid. The results were impressive. She soon began to do well in shows, often winning or highly placing in the competitions for both Western as well as English Dressage. She had done with Dressage in the past, with multiple horses and now had improved with the present Sorrel horse in their Dressage as well as doing well in the new discipline with no conflicts between the two disciplines. The past boredom issues that were so frustrating for her, now were but a memory and she was happy with both disciplines. One interesting result in both disciplines is the stopping mechanism which the horse learned quickly and began stopping more square on cue - on the release of rein pressure - in lieu of the old standard of applied pressure. The pressure release movements softened every discipline movement and control over all aspects of the horse became softer. Communication between horse and rider is now impressive. Therefore, that frustrating boredom was a blessing in disguise.

Closing reminders:

Understanding Bravery: A horse is actually brave when it continues to perform for us even when its heart rate is up from the average of 30 to 40 beats per minute to 100 bpm or more. Whereas, it is not brave when it fails to perform even at the lower 30 to 40 bpm rate (lower end of the scale). Therefore, our only real assurance of safety is our influence as leader and this is enhanced by our effective use of a single rein flexing / bending and/or turning. Also, our horse can again see us in its field of vision in those positions, which it cannot when its head is forward.

Laminitis Warning: Considerable research back home in Texas and elsewhere is bringing to light some important recommendations and warnings regarding laminitis. I have been following the work of an imminent Veterinarian and educator, Bill Moyer, DMV, Head of the Department of Large Animal Clinic Sciences at the prestigious Texas A & M College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. He has presented a variety of considerations on the state of medical treatment for laminitis. A predominant point he stresses is that once clinical signs of laminitis are evident, often irreparable damage has already been done. Pain and lameness **are preceded** by vascular and structural damage within the hoof Laminae (lamellae). To which he poses the question: "*Is any specific medical treatment for acute laminitis efficacious in altering the outcome after a horse has developed clinical signs?*" Not such a good image and I will follow next month with more information from Bill Moyer, DVM. Meantime be aware that pain relief may increase mobility but that has the drawback of exacerbating further tearing of the laminae by allowing increased weight bearing activity. Therefore Bute (for an example) does not prevent laminitis if given during the development stage and even though it might reduce inflammation and pain it has NOT been shown to alter the course of acute cases.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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