

November 2009 Essex Rider  
(Mud Fever & Cont'd Ground Driving)

**Howdy Folks,** As promised, here is the continuation from last month for ground driving/long reining.

**Ground Driving aka Long Reining:** Before beginning any ground driving / long reining exercises, there are a few things I advise you to teach your horse. All being ground work exercises. Some of these pre-ground driving training needs are: being halter trained, bridle comfortable as well as bit comfortable. I suggest, once advancing to using a bit, using a straight (or Mullen mouth half moon curved shape) made in a malleable plastic mouth piece. Personally, I never forget to use a **leather chin strap (not a curb strap or chain)** whenever a bit is in use. The chin strap is simply a strap fitted “above” the (proposed when riding) rein contact point and tightened only to the point that when the bit ring is pulled to one side or other the opposing side moves the point where strap wraps around simultaneously with the end of the mouth piece of the bit and moves the entire lower jaw, thus protecting the teeth. Also, for the plastic mouth piece, it is extremely important that it be made of a malleable material (such as most happy mouth types) and not made from one of the hard plastics that can splinter and cause pain nor made of soft or hard rubber ones which the horse cannot gain a purchase on. The horse also needs to have done at least some basic ground work foundation sessions with pressure release exercises on its body and j hocks as well as head down, lateral work and backing motion. For head down I use and prefer simple poll release pressure release exercises. It is important to have done some feet handling work as well as the rope around the hock and over the back exercises. Don't forget to include firm but benevolent leadership exercises (with disengagement understanding).

I typically begin the ground driving / long reining work without using a surcingle. I like to initiate exercises without a bit by using only a halter (I prefer the 4000+ year old Mongol designed rope halters) and using a saddle with the long lines / ropes run through the untied, loose stirrups in order to prevent pulling straight back. When a bit is introduced this is even more important as I want to avoid pulling back against the corners of the mouth as a surcingle will cause. Once you and your horse are cooperating well (and if so desired) a surcingle can then be used to teach a “light” straight back bit pressure contact against the corners of the mouth. An option to using a surcingle would be tying the stirrups together under the girth area and routing the long lines / ropes through the stirrups. I work in all progressive stages always using pressure release cues whilst staying aware of the horses' stress levels in order to release or apply cues appropriately. I work initially from whichever side the horse is most confident / comfortable with and which he or she accustomed to seeing me there. I then gradually work my way toward the rear and around to the other side then back again. Only then will I begin working from directly behind, whilst bending to each side to see the horses' eye then gradually lessening that visual contact.

#### **Mud Fever Recommendation**

I have been asked by folks, that I have helped with their horses having problems with mud fever, to comment on some of the treatments I prefer in dealing with mud fever. A large amount of my information comes from veterinarians whom I have asked and applied advice from over the years. Some of the most effective methods and advice has been to clean the infection with an antibacterial cleanser such as HiBiscrub, the well known hospital-strength cleanser containing the powerful antiseptic

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chlorhexidine gluconate then before applying any topical “healing” ointment (I recommend the many Aloe Vera products by “Forever Living” via my site front page link) get the bacteria out from under the bodily formed seal in the deep scratches/cuts or under scabs. This is an important factor that is overlooked often and causes extended infection and thereby slows healing by not getting the bacteria out of the bottom of the many tiny cuts which are often a part of mud fever. My best experience has come from pressing **rubbing alcohol** via cotton pads into the cuts, scratched and onto the scabs (in the UK it is commonly called spirits) in order to force the water out of the depths of the wounds prior to applying any ointments. I do not cover the wounds with ointment or bandages until the water with the bacteria has been forced out following the HiBiscrub cleansing - as otherwise the bacteria are provided with a good place to thrive underneath the ointment and/or bandages. Also if a horse does develop scabs then they must not be picked off! I have found that using warm water to soak the scabs when washing gently with the HiBiscrub, etc, softens the scabs so that the alcohol can be pressed down with cotton pads into the wounds or through the scabs prior to applying ointments, etc. The alcohol also quickly dries the coat around the damaged skin prior to application of ointments. If the problem is chronic and/or if more serious damage has occurred, then the horse may require antibiotics and/or hospitalization etc.. A veterinarian is then needed as such a case is a very serious and painful condition. Therefore such conditions can't be taken lightly and should be attended to as soon as noticed in order to prevent such increased situations.

**Closing reminders:**

1. Remember that once a horse is trained to a high degree of efficiency they can become “show smart” and begin to anticipate manoeuvres and patterns. Therefore it is important to train in variations of patterns as well as full patterns to “keep them “guessing” so they aren't as confident in their anticipations.
2. The “show smart” anticipation prevention method can be used similarly for keeping your horse easy to catch. If you always catch them and then bring them in for work, vets, overnight stabling, etc. - they often get pretty good at anticipating then becoming harder to catch. Therefore it pays to go into their paddocks and fields often just to catch them and do a little leadership work, for the couple of minutes that takes, then remove their halter and leave them in their field or paddock. That way, they don't always think you will be being bringing them in for the various things they would rather not do.
3. To Reiterate: Ground work, being the basis for all horse training, makes round pens valuable tools. When you begin ground driving / long reining and/or teaching your horse to accept you as a rider/leader, things will go much better if you have done your ground work and prepared him from the earliest time possible in your relationship with your horse.
4. Along similar mental lines, when working with worried horses it is common that once they are comfortable with you as a competent leader and that you will keep them safe, they can then become somewhat like a teenager and a bit stubborn and ornery, etc. so you need to maintain the “pecking order” style leadership exercises until that is well established - then carry on with the exercises to a lesser degree for the duration of the partnership. Even with horses at that are not disturbed they naturally go through this “pecking order” re-establishing situation over their entire lives in herd situations, it just gets less noticeable as they need only subtly express opinions to one another but they still do that daily for life !

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*I trust this is useful information for ya'll and Until next time, have fun  
and stay safe.*

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