

Back to Basics:

Don't Nag your horse:

I find that riders of all levels and in many different riding and competition disciplines make some common errors (without regard to their horses understanding or misunderstanding of it's partnership responsibilities), These errors can cause problems with their horses; such as causing them to become quite dead to light or normal cues, as well as believing that they need not take any responsibility for their actions or impulsion within the partnership with their riders due to riders "nagging" with their cues.

An often unnoticed error is the nagging of horses with the leg (and other) cues. Once a leg or foot cue is given and the horse responds it - it is an error to continue prompting your horse in order to continue or maintain the action we have asked for with the initial cue. By nagging them, the horse will often begin relying on the rider to tell them when to maintain an action or level of impulsion rather than maintaining, of their own volition, until we change their instruction with a different cue.

Nagging when asking for a halt is another, often unrealized, error by the rider. Often riders will ask for a stop with the reins (in conjunction with the appropriate body position cues) and continue to ask until the horse completely stops. This can be even more ill-forced when a rider is attempting to get the horse to stop with the feet square. Again, horses are quite capable of understanding our cues for stops, without nagging them and will stop "on the release" following a clear cue (very well and squarely) in order to be prepared to execute our next "unexpected/unanticipated" cue in whatever direction we ask, even if that is to rein back.

Mounting security and over reliance on riding helmet safety:

I am often dismayed at how many riders I witness mounting their horses in very unsafe manner(s). **Two main examples** are: when mounting, **riders hold both reins evenly** in their forward hand and on the mane just in front of the saddle, they are taking a terrible risk that makes their helmet a rather redundant instrument with regard to true safety. Suppose that something spooks their horse, just as they step one foot into the onside stirrup (and for this example they are mounting from the horse's left side) with their left hand holding the reins evenly and on the mane or on the saddle - with their right hand on the cantle and begin to rise in order to swing their right leg over their horse. Should this happen whilst in this mounting position, the horse then can lurch forward and into a fast trot or run, whilst the rider is standing in the stirrup and holding onto the saddle. As the horse is taking strides - it is exhaling, which is allowing the saddle cinch around the girth area (or in English parlance allows the girth around the girth) to begin shifting on each exhalation. As this occurs, the rider is exposing their neck to the great danger of being broken, no matter how well the helmet protects against concussion. As the rider slides around the horse whilst holding onto the slipping saddle – they are exposed to impact by poles, trees, etc and if even lower they can impact anything near or on the ground. A helmet cannot protect their neck and we all know how serious that type injury can be. **A second dangerous example** I see, albeit less often, is where the rider **holds the single offside rein** (in the same position as the previous example for both reins) and then the horse spooks - the horse then spins away from the rider and centrifugal force can throw the rider off the horse onto their back. This can effectively whiplash their head backward violently (even at slower horse speed). I know personally of one case where the rider was thrown this way and their head and helmet hit the ground so violently it cracked the helmet (a very expensive one) and jarred their head so badly they actually

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dislodged/tore the veins & tissues inside the skull. They did not survive. They went home not realizing how badly they were actually injured due to the slow internal bleeding. When taken to hospital, feeling ill, next morning they never left again. Whilst I do believe helmets provide a lot of safety, they do not protect from these two examples well. The only way to effectively protect yourself when mounting is to hold the single “ONside” rein in your forward hand and hold it solidly on the front of the saddle (no matter which side you are mounting from). Hopefully you have a place to hold the rein in your hand attached to the saddle. For English saddles : a balance strap installed between the front two D rings and for Western saddles a night latch (aka bucking strap) on the pommel. Then when you mount up, should your horse become spooked and try to escape, the horse can only turn a circle around your centered position where the centrifugal force will hold you against their body and allow you to continue the circling until they stop or until you find a safer place to exit.

Redirection of energy as opposed to trying to overpower (your horse):

Along the same lines of thought that I have expressed above, concerning ability to hold your horse in a turn around you in an emergency, I teach all riders to first of all teach their horse (1) ground & saddle leadership exercises (2) ground & saddle lateral bending and (3) cavalry lifts. These are important exercises to make sure your horse knows firstly that you are capable of turning them in an emergency and secondly they learn that they can safely follow your instruction to make such turns whenever needed. We are all capable of redirecting our horse's energies as opposed to not being able to overpower them into a stop by pulling on the reins. If anyone doubts this watch racing where all jockeys know how to get the last spurt of energy out of their very tired horses over the last couple of furlongs of races. They all know that when they pull back on the reins and bit - then shake their quirt in a threatening manner; they will get that last burst of energy to win races. Pulling generates opposition reflex, not stops.

A closing note about bits:

When working through nervous issues with our horses, they need to be able to chew on their bit in order to generate endorphin flows in their brains. A very good bit for this purpose is a chewable plastic happy mouth, straight, bit (absolutely not rubber or hard plastic). Of course once the nervous problem is solved and initial training is being carried out for specific jobs or competition disciplines, one needs to move on and use the actual bit that will be used for the competition or work in the second half of each exercise session in order to better acquaint the horse and recognize the “working” bit. A sweet iron, copper or brass mouthpiece (for the area that the teeth touch) is important in order not to generate electrolysis as does chrome or nickel alloy teeth sections. Chrome can be used for the rings or D's without any problems to the teeth. Not to forget a chin strap, not a curb strap.

Ride safely and I hope this has been helpful and useful for ya'll.

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