

### **Riding Perspectives:**

Clear and firm intent is just as important when riding for pleasure as it is when riding for training. In either case, before riding out and immediately upon mounting up; a very important, brief exercise that you should perform is the “basic mounted exercise for firm but benevolent leadership” as I advocate in my articles and demonstrations. The vast majority of horses actually “want” a firm but benevolent leader for them to rely on.

This exercise not only makes sure, to both you and the horse, that you can indeed turn their head and body (and that they can see you when it is done), it also helps you learn immediately if there is any pain present in the horse’s occipital neck joint or vertebrae of the neck, shoulders, hocks and/or ribs. This will warn you not to exacerbate a problem in a painful area. Whenever you need to maneuver them you can select ways that do not cause unnecessary pain.

Regarding rider fears, whether irrational or not: As most fear is future thinking and often takes the form of “what if” thoughts. “What if my horse bolts ?” or “What if I fall off ?” An effective mental exercise which can help cope/deal with these fears is to add the word “So” in front of the thoughts and answer yourself with “I can handle it”. A couple of these would be; “So what if my horse bolts ? I can handle it ?” or “So what if I fall off ? I can handle it ?”. This is worth trying as the Truth is that you can and will handle it. You have no other choice. Of course if you need more tuition to help more effectively handle the situations. That is what Trainers, such as myself, are here for.

Along this line of thinking, here is a basic solution as to how to ride and understand bucking horses. Whenever a horse begins to buck, the first thing to do is to put most of your weight on the balls of your feet. Sit up and do not bend forward or backward. This will cause your heels to drop and keep your feet simultaneously, firmly in the stirrup. All saddles, Western or English and more should have balance straps fitted on the pommel so that an have a grip without having to bend forward to find it, such as the badly advised neck straps I see far too many of. You should sit softly as well as erect whilst using your ankles as springs. Hold the reins loosely, never tightly as that will cause the horse to pull your center of gravity forward when he throws his head down to get the weight transfer he needs to effectively move his hind quarters up. As the horse raises his head (preparing for the next lunge down and forward to help his hind quarters lift your weight) ask for a slight turn to the side. Doing this repeatedly will cause the horse to be uncomfortable in the ribs, since they do not bend, and in short order will stop the bucking to that side. It may need repeating if the horse changes sides for his head lift. In due course you should be able to disengage the hind quarters, as in the leadership exercises I described a few times in this article and many of my previous articles.

### **Training Perspectives:**

Clear and firm intent is just as important when ground training as it is when riding for training/pleasure or competition. Never forget that when you are simply leading a horse in from a field (or anywhere else for that matter) you are in fact training the horse, whether you are aware of it or not. An easy, quick and productive habit for you to form is to perform the “basic ground exercise for firm but beneficial leadership” that I advocate for whenever you greet your horse following a lengthy absence (a few hours is sufficient to seem lengthy in their mind). The vast majority of horses actually “want” a good, firm, benevolent leader to rely on. These “leadership” exercises apply equally to ground work as well as when you mount up and before you move off.

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The best horsemen and horsewomen are casual and confident around their horses, whether on the ground or in the saddle. When training, they conduct themselves in a relaxed, confident and firm fashion. They work with the horse and not against it, even assisting the horse with extra cues to help them succeed whenever needed. The horse can be weaned away from the extra cues, in due course. If this course of action is followed, a positive result is inevitable. In public demonstrations, time after time I have found that horses have amazed onlookers by quickly relating to positive training.

In the beginning the horse does not see reason, meaning or purpose in what we may be asking if it. Only through “accurate and clearly understood” repetition can they learn what we want or do not want of them.

In my line of work as a trainer I am presented with many tough horses that are deemed un-trainable, incorrigible and/or un-ride-able. People often ask what my secrets are in training those types of horses. There are no secrets. Horses simply respond positively to clear, understandable, firm but benevolent effective techniques.

The main keys to being an effective trainer are: patience; ability to recognize the slightest “try” in the horse; flexibility to make necessary changes; maintain clear intent; provide accurate repetition of requests and instructions; plus maintaining firmness combined with benevolence. Don’t underestimate the effectiveness of good ground work prior to saddle work. The horse can better “see” you during ground work and good ground work is designed to tie well into the ridden work. From good beginnings, things tend to progress naturally.

Don’t forget that your horse is not going to mistake you for another horse. However it is very important that you sufficiently act like one in order for them to recognize it and respect that you know more about them than they think you might. This point of view goes a long way in support of your Firm but Benevolent Leadership position in your herd of two.

### **Closing reminders:**

#### ***Helping your horse to feel safer in the paddock:***

Try building grass covered dirt mounds (aka Knolls) in about the middle of paddocks. Try to make them about four or five in height by fifteen to twenty feet in length and eight to twelve feet wide (or larger if possible). This provides your horse with a natural vantage point with which they can see their surroundings. This gives them a much better feeling of security as they can see so much farther out.

#### ***Visual acuity:***

Keep in mind that your horse cannot see you when you are in the saddle, without turning their head. Whenever they become frightened or spooked it is imperative that you bend them slightly and make sure they see you or continue to turn them (preferably in a circle) until they regain their view and understanding that it is you on their back.

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

***Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn,***

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