

WINTER POINTERS:

Typically, during the winter there are many opportunities to practice important ground work. Good lunging practices include avoiding application of driving pressure from behind the girth line of the body where they have very limited view. Horses are better able to see what you require of them via cues given forward of the girth line of their body. The more you teach them visible (and verbal) cues in this way, the better the partnership becomes. It is also much better to allow the bit to be carried in the bar area on the tongue and not be too far back in the mouth.

Cold bits are also a problem to be especially aware of at this time of year. Please remember that comfort is a major factor in horse's lives whether training or riding and freezing cold bit is anything but comfortable to your horse. Therefore, taking a little time to warm it is a good use of time and will be generally appreciated by your horse. It is important for them to recognize that we have their welfare in our heart and they will be less likely to feel that we have no concern or compassion for their comfort.

Riding barefoot rather than with shoes is much safer with regard to traction during the winter. This is especially true of riding on paved roads. Too many falls occur due to sliding out of control on pavements. Also muddy conditions will be much less likely to cause worry about losing a shoe to the inevitable suction occurring.

MOUNTING AND RIDING TIPS:

Firstly, be sure to bend the horse's head laterally to the inside towards you and hold it there whilst mounting. Be sure to maintain your hold on the inside rein "**in contact**" with some part of the saddle until you are safely mounted with both feet in the stirrups and have the offside rein in your offside hand before releasing the lateral bend pressure. In this way, should anything frighten the horse whilst you are mounting, it can only spin around you and centrifugal force will work in your favor instead of against you - flinging you away.

Then whilst riding at this time of year it is a good idea to be especially vigilant of maintaining soft, albeit consistent, rein contact in order to generate better communication with your horse. This consistent and *NON-CONSTRICTIVE* contact/control will go a long way in keeping them more than normally aware of your presence as their leader and not imagine that something else is on their backs which they might assume via their ingrained DNA understanding. Your consistent communication will help assure them of your being in control and capable of dealing with surprises, which horses inevitably find in the wind where their hearing is then impaired. Be sure not to keep too tight or constrictive rein contact or they will be thinking more about the irritation and pain than that of your communication intent. A

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short note on this point is to always use "Pressure Release" action on the reins as well as with your feet and leg cues. Also be extra aware of the need for more patience with horse compliance to your cues and requests as they can be distracted in uncomfortable weather. Wind can also prevent clear understanding of voice cues - if that is one of your main choices of instruction.

As horses are more uncomfortable, more distracted and not always in a good mode for riding at this time of year. It is very important to make sure that they recognize your abilities as a competent ***(firm but benevolent)*** leader. This applies especially in being able to control their foot movements as well as your ability to re-direct their energy. Therefore, before mounting up, as well as immediately (or near immediately) after mounting, you should execute the leadership disengagement exercises I always advocate in order to remind them of your ability to move their feet at your will..

Lateral Bending: pre-training with your horse to accept your requests for lateral bending is important. It is an important aspect for your horse to understand that it is not frightening when you need to take control over its movement in this direction, no matter the adrenalin state of the horse.

CLOSING REMINDER:

As a reminder to be more attentive to ***Mud Fever Risk***, I am repeating some of last months closing notes. Please be aware that incessantly washing mud off horses feet and lower legs ***via hard brushing*** can generate many tiny (some not so tiny) cuts and scratches. When small grains of dirt, sand and tiny stones are scrubbed off by stiff brushes - they can leave these cuts behind. Instead, if the mud is lightly sprayed off with water then by using very light brushing (***with a soft bristle brush***) of the coronary band and legs there will be much less abrasion caused cuts and scrapes. In any case, it is important to extract the water and mucus which gets trapped deep down inside any large and generally the tiny cuts. Bacteria lives below the water and mucus down in the bottom of the cuts / scratches. If this is not removed before any application of creams, etc., water and mucus can be trapped beneath. If that is allowed to happen then you will be inadvertently protecting the bacteria and allowing them to continue growing underneath the medications. There are many astringents one can use to extract the water and mucus prior to applying any salves or creams in aid of healing. I personally use sprits (rubbing alcohol).

Ya'll ride safely and I hope this information has been helpful.

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