

Riding perspectives :

Riders often seem to forget that when on the back of a horse ; the horse can no longer see you, unless they have turned their head. With the horses' short attention span, during a ride the surprise of noticing "something" on its back can be startling. Therefore, it is a good practice to periodically remind them who and what is sitting on their backs - lest they think, in their subconscious minds, that we might just be a creature with claws and large teeth as the millions of years of DNA imprinting has firmly imprinted in their psyche.

Typically, riders are not focused sufficiently on their horses' state of mind during the time out on a hack. Too many other things are going on in the rider's mind, which puts the rider "behind" the horse in reaction time rather than ahead. This can put us in a tough situation. Therefore, whenever a horse becomes frightened or spooked it is imperative that you remind them who is sitting on their back. Try slightly bending their head & leaning yourself out so that they can see you. If need be, bend their head & neck - turning them, and if needed in a circle until they regain their view and understanding of it being you on their back. *Of course a good reminder is to have trained your horse to understand this movement with the "Leadership Exercise" I advocate in many of my articles.*

Asking for a particular lead when the rear / driving foot is in the wrong position : Often riders ask for a change of lead / or departure onto a particular lead, when it isn't physically comfortable or possible for the horse to do what it is being asked - especially *in a timely fashion*. Riders can then make the mistake of reprimanding the horse, as if it made a mistake, when it missed expected timing or in its attempt to get the timing correct, getting the lead wrong or delaying the change by an extra step. In spite of the fact it was the riders fault. Therefore, be sure to notice which foot is on the ground when asking for lead departures or changes of lead in order to ask when it is actually physically / possible to accomplish what you are asking. For example, to ask for a left lead change or departure when the horse is already stepping down with its right leg or standing on its right rear foot, it will then need to take another step with the opposite (left) foot in order to shift its weight so that it can come back down on its right rear and push off in order to achieve the left front leg extension as asked.

Footfall recognition: Riders need to learn to recognize the positions of the horse's feet and legs in order to know when to ask for

a change of lead (or for many other actions you may wish to ask for). You will have a much better chance of a successful result if you do so.

Training perspectives:

Often, riders who have ridden for some years, usually believe that they are more experienced riders than they are in reality as they likely have less "varied" experience than they might believe. This is more prevalent when riding the same horse for a long time and primarily due to the fact that riders continually repeat the same cuing errors without being aware and their horses have learned to compensate. Therefore, when they ride an unfamiliar horse, they can end up in unexpected problems. Additionally, when their own more familiar horse doesn't progress or advance as well as they expect, the problem can be due to the consistent compensation by the horse in repeating rider errors. Even trust between horse and rider can become damaged due to growing misunderstandings especially were the horse starts to doubt we are sufficiently competent as protective leaders and capable of keeping them from harms way. Many riders are unknowingly guilty of this and would benefit from qualified / professional instruction in order to have various errors pointed out so that they can begin recognizing them and making changes. This is especially so with "muscle memory" (for both rider & horse) which is always difficult to recognize and change. Once we recognize and correct our errors we can then begin to re-train our horses to recognize our new cues & unfamiliar horses will also be more likely to understand us.

Some riders become frustrated & lose patience following extended periods of incorrectly trying to rebuild the foundation between themselves & their horses without realizing that they are making the same mistakes over & over. Rebuilding clear communication between horse and rider, initially via ground work then carrying that into saddle work, can change long ingrained habits. This can be much more difficult in correcting & changing without professional assistance. It is often false economy to cut corners & saving money by avoiding assistance.

Closing note regarding horse feelings of safety:

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

Ya'll ride safely and Aware. *Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn,*
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