

## **HAPPY NEW YEAR !**

### **Training & Riding Perspectives Collection /Bridling Up:**

Many folks believe to get their horses to “bridle up” aka “get behind the bit” aka “Collection” they need to coax or demand by kicking them in the belly, squeezing too hard with leg cues or misusing spurs in order to push them into a tightly held bit. This poor style of communication is something that you should certainly avoid. It is mostly counter productive and generally can cause varying degrees of anger / irritation and can cause them to begin acting in a “mechanical” way of movement.

As many riders realize; horses use their large muscles to drive from behind and in our efforts to request - accomplish this, we ask for what we term as “collection”. This term means the horse is to shift its weight onto its back end, tuck its hindquarters, round its back, lift its withers, arch its neck, lower its nose, tip its chin and free up its shoulders and front feet. **That is a lot of complex thought** that can cause any rider to become overwhelmed via attempting to control /co-ordinate all those individual moving parts. Even more to the point is that it can also become much to complicated for the horse to understand our multiple rider cues. It is far more effective and constructive to keep our cues as “simple” as possible for the sake of both rider and animal. One simple cue to train into horses and riders is to use soft rein requests in a alternating lateral /rocking movements whilst simultaneously applying gradually increasing (not to any great power degree) backward pressure with our hands and arms whilst keeping our heels in firm (not heavy) contact to help the horse better recognize that a “stop” is not being asked for. When the horse drops its nose (flattens its face to vertical) a release is gained and rider should stop any pressure increases whilst maintaining gentle contact with the bit rings. When riding casually - it pays dividends to allow a bit of extra time for horses to think about what we have asked and not be impatient. Being consistent with our patience and simplicity in training and/or casual riding will prove more successful when we need to do serious work such as in competition and the like. This “simplicity” applies just as well to lead changes, lead departures, side passes, half passes (forward and backward), turns on fore and rear/hock, roll backs, stops (abrupt or otherwise) and transitions.

Of course without a riders weight on their back, horses naturally execute all of the movements that we wish to instruct them to do when riding. It is always beautiful to watch horses play and run in fields where they make all that we labor to accomplish look so very easy and graceful. The fact that they allow us to sit on their backs should make us understand that it is our responsibility to learn how to clearly, patiently, consistently and painlessly communicate our requests to them when they are carrying us. Especially as they cannot see us whilst we are on their backs. I cringe when I see riders reprimand a horse for perceived mistakes and act autocratically/tyrannically. This is harder to bare when in fact it was often likely the rider who was at fault for not clearly communicating, and/or not being consistent with their cues. Rider often fail to recognize that the horse has not previously been correctly nor clearly trained (via non-confrontive methods) to our cues. Therefore, being impatient and autocratic / tyrannical with our requests is completely misunderstood by the horses.

### **Firm and Benevolent Leadership :**

Working on horse & rider partnership mutual confidence can be accomplished effectively via developing firm & benevolent leadership skills, these aspects of the partnership are important factors and should be ongoing aspirations / objectives for all riders. Treating horses with compassion both as riders and as well as trainers whilst redirecting their

energies rather than fighting with them, can and does convince them that we are intelligent, confident, benevolent and firm leaders.

### **Brains over brawn:**

By becoming intelligent leaders, we can and should be using gradual increases and releases of pressure in asking without autocratically or tyrannically demanding action from our horses. When asking for movement, we are much more likely to be able to generate better co-operation with horses and they will become much more willing to work toward our desires, rather in opposition to them. Consistency on our part as well as firm, benevolence will also help convince them to trust us for their personal protection. Kicking is much less effective and certainly not good communication technique. Maintaining, not overly, firm contact with our legs and/or heels can be much more effective and less onerous to us as well. Using our heels in a manner we would move if we were wearing / using spurs, we can generate a scratching or rubbing motion whilst remaining in constant contact in order that we can impart relatively soft cues all the way up to very insistent and persistent cues if required. Avoiding kicking for response will avoid causing lurching by the horses. We can be patient or impatient, both with or without any pain that frightens our horses and gains wonderful and cooperative responses..

### **Closing reminders:**

- (1) Be a **RIDER** - not just a Passenger if you wish to be trusted by your horse. Often riders are thinking about all sorts of problems and other things in their lives, whilst riding, other than paying attention to the horse and environment. This doesn't engender confidence in the horse's belief that we are competent leaders.
- (2) Please remember that a freezing cold bit is anything but comfortable to your horse - so taking a little time to warm it and that is a good way for them to recognizing that we are a better partner.
- (3) Comfort is a major factor in horse's lives whether training or riding.
- (4) The best way to gain co-operation, when using a bit, is to allow it to be held on the folds of the horse's tongue whilst keeping only sufficient rein contact to maintain communication between rider & horse.
- (5) Moments of confusion are part of a horse's learning curve. Recognizing it and giving the horse time to absorb new lessons is a huge benefit.
- (6) Horses have built into their DNA millions of years (40 to 50) which we will not change so learn to deal with their fears and eccentricities.
- (7) Every contentious rider needs to become a patient, firm and benevolent rider / trainer.

**Ya'll ride safely and with firm benevolent leadership.**

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