

**A wonderful, ancient, accurate, applicable quote: *Anything forced is seldom understood and can never be beautiful* – by Xenophon, Greek Soldier 430bc**

Winter is fast approaching, so I would like to remind everyone of a few of the winter related things to be aware of, such as slippery roads. Frozen ground, roads, bridleways and tracks can be hard on the joints of our horses. Also, extra need for vigilance watching out for the bad winter driving habits of vehicle drivers is needed. There has been some, albeit never enough, good news in the growing behavioral awareness by DVM Professionals, in that many more of them are recognizing, the heretofore much ignored, aspects of dealing with horses. We can only hope that drivers become more aware of the dangers they can present to horses and riders. I was again asked by a few clients to repeat my instructions for building temporary round pens so that they can do some training. The following will help with this.

**Building Temporary Round Pens**

If a more permanent round pen is not allowed where you are, a Temporary and relative easily moveable Round Pen can be built from either wooden 8 ' tall by 2 1/2 " or 3 " diameter wooden poles or by the commonly used plastic posts typically used in dividing paddocks, which are generally 48 " in height. If the 48 " plastics are used then each post needs 2 plastic posts bound (overlapping about a foot) together in order to give a sufficient height of around 6 feet. Either type posts can be strung with 1 " electric tape, preferably 4 strands, although 3 will do for many. The better diameters for round pens are 40 ' to 50 '. A smaller diameter can be hard on the leg and foot joints of most standard sized to large horses, although fine for smaller horses and foals. This is particularly important when making temporary pens as there is not generally a foot board around the circumference of the base (as in a permanent pen) where a slope can be built up allowing the horse an incline to push against whenever running at speed. The circumference measurements for a 40 ' diameter pen is (40 x 3.14 PI) 125.6 ' or 38 meters. With a post spaced every 7 ' you will need 18 posts for a 40 ' pen. The circumference measurements for a 50 ' diameter pen is (50 x 3.14 PI) 157 ' or (rounded up) 48 meters and with a post spaced every 7 ' you would need (rounded up) 23 posts for a 50 ' pen. To make the plastic posts sufficiently tall, you need two 48 " posts for each post location on the circumference at the 7 ' spacing. The plastic ones can be taped together by having the bottom 12 " of one overlapping onto the top 12 " of the other and securely taping at three or more places along the 12 " overlap - making them 6 feet tall. Then three or four strands of electric tape around the circumference : one about 1 " from the top, one 12 " from the ground - then two more evenly dividing the distance between the top and bottom tape strips gives a good enclosure. This requires 152 meters of tape for 40 ' pens or 192 meters for 50 ' pens. A power supply is needed if the horse doesn't already respect electric fencing or until the horse learns to respect it, then it is generally no longer needed. You need relatively flat ground with no holes or sharp rocks, etc. If you can get wooden poles, they are available in the better lengths such as 8 ' at most fencing suppliers and if sunk one foot into the ground they work well at 7' height (you would need 3 or 4 of the screw in insulators for each wooden post to hold the wire).

**There is picture, on my site, of a temporary round pen using wooden posts with only 3 strands that a lady client in Bedford built as well as Permanent Round Pen Information in a section titled "Training Equipment"**

**Re: Tack applications**

**Re: Nose bands:** I still notice unnecessary and/or incorrect tack applications, such as for nose straps, by owners on many horses over the last few months. I want to repeat an important point about nose bands and how they should be applied, if used at all which I don't generally approve. When using a noseband, there are two specific things

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to remember (a) do not fit them too tightly, as that can stop the horse from being able to open it's jaw, even slightly when needed and (b) be sure to keep it lodged "above" (higher up the bridge of the nose) the cartilage to bone junction (located normally about "one hand" above a regular sized horses muzzle). Having it located below that junction can be painful as well as irritating and distracting to the horse. There is no worthwhile purpose to keeping it tight. This is not to discuss the awful uses of grackles and worse yet flashes which I truly loath the use of. It is truly a rare case where either of these is actually required.

**Re: Bits:** I observe all sorts of bit application errors being made - but for this article, I will limit my comments to one major error that causes huge discomfort as well as claustrophobic mental anguish to horses. Far too many riders tighten / set the cheek straps on their bridles far too high - which holds / fixes the bit far too high in the mouth and above the bar area of the jaw where there are no teeth. This practice also prevents the horse from being able to "carry the bit" comfortably in the folds of their tongue where they are much more comfortable and can feel softer applied cues. Also if the bit is too high this can actually cause them (as it often does) to put their tongue "over" the bit to get relief. All horses will put their tongues over and under bits from time to time and they will put it back under to carry the bit when being "asked" to receive cues. I have corrected this error in hundreds of bridles. This release of excess and unnecessary pressure has been very effective for rider's horses working in dressage as well as in many other types of riding disciplines. In every case this relaxing of the bit improves the action and solves the tongue over bit problem that I see so much. This does not leave the cheek pieces loose, as it is a trained / learned cooperation between rider and horse that creates proper tension in the reins via the riders hands & the horses use of its tongue holding the bit firm and which generates a much better communication between the rider and the horses mouth / brain. This keeps the reins relatively tight but not forced to a ridiculous degree of pressure.

**Re: Cues:** I have been reading a few riding group sites where lengthy discussions ensue regarding use of voice cues versus tactile cues. I would like to make a point that I teach all clients / students of mine. Voice and tactile cues are not exclusive from one another, with the exception of both English Dressage and Western Reining. I do like voice cues, especially as I like to stop horses with a gently and quiet "whoa" as I softly lift a rein to get a stop whether easy or instantly for a slide, etc. Whilst voice cues are interesting & can be very effective, as well as somewhat enjoyable to many folks in their two way communications with their horses, there is a flaw in that if it is a very windy day or a helicopter is hovering or some other outside loud noise is occurring, *voice cues can be lost in the din.* There is an easy and multi applicable solution to this problem. I advocate that all voice cues be combined with tactile /physical cues so that the horse can understand the rider's intent even if not clearly hearing our voices. This will allow, even English Dressage or Western Reining , riders to better enjoy being able to speak to their horses when riding out on trail rides in order to give their horse a break in routine.

**Closing comments on winter training:** Many folks will use winter time for training their horses and it is a good time for this as it is more difficult to enjoy hacking out. Also, **ground work** is never a waste of time and effort, especially as your horse can "see" you.

*Until next time, have fun and stay safe.*

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