

November 2014 Essex Rider Magazine  
(Winter time, tack, cues and temporary round pens)

Winter is fast approaching and I would like to remind everyone of a few of the winter related problems such as slippery roads, frozen ground, bridleways and tracks that can not only be hard on the joints of our horses but dangerous to riders. Additional to horses slipping and getting us into trouble, we need to be very diligent in watching out for the bad winter driving habits of many drivers. There is usually some, but never enough news items warning drivers about being aware of riders, done by DVM Professionals. Even though more of them are recognizing, what heretofore has been much ignored, we can't rely on the news very much. 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 whilst they are curtailed from doing as much riding out as they might wish. I trust the following will be helpful in this regard. This type ground work, in addition to other exercises I regularly recommend, is never a waste of time.

### **Building Temporary Round Pens**

When a permanent round pen isn't allowed at your location, 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, sunk into the ground about a foot. Otherwise, you can build a pen with commonly used plastic posts, which are generally 48" in height, by doubling their height. The height can be increased by using two of the 48" plastic posts and binding them, by overlapping the ends by about a foot, in order to produce a height of around 6 feet. Either type posts can be strung with 1" (or greater) 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 joints of most larger horses, although they can work for smaller horses. This is particularly important when making temporary pens as there is not generally a foot board around the circumference of the base as would generally be 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 would need 18 posts for a 40' pen. The circumference measurements for a 50' diameter pen is (50 x 3.14 PI) 157' (rounded up) 48 meters and with a post spaced every 7' you would need 23 posts for a 50' pen. To make the plastic posts sufficiently tall, you need the overlap I mentioned above. You need two 48" posts for each post location 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 (when 4 are used) 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 bit more needed to create a gate and have some to stake diagonally out for strengthening). 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 (or only a slight slope to drain) 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 on the outside of each wooden post to hold the wire) and you would not likely need the diagonally stakes and tape.

**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". I still recommend 4 strands.**

### ***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. 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 advocate. When using a noseband, there are two specific things to remember (a) do not fit them too tightly, as that can create unnecessary discomfort 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 the ever present claustrophobic mental anguish put on horses. Far too many folks pull the cheek straps on their bridles far too high, which holds the bit far too high in the mouth and above the bar area of the jaw making it difficult for the horse to carry the bit on the tongue. This practice prevents soft cues via rein and o prevents a comfortable carry. If the bit is carried so high, it can actually cause them (as it often does) to put their tongue "over" the bit, more than normal, 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. 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 method does not leave the cheek straps loose. Trained / learned cooperation between rider and horse creates proper tension in the reins and bit and generates a much better communication between the rider and the horse. This keeps the reins relatively firm.

**Re: Voice 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 to the rules for 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 effective, there is a flaw in that if it is a very windy day or a helicopter or a tractor is operating nearby (for examples) 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 all riders, even English Dressage or Western Reining, to enjoy being able to speak to their horses when hacking out and give their horse a reminder that "it is us back there".

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

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