

Training and Riding Advice

As it is a time of year that our horses can be more rambunctious, they need to recognize our leadership capabilities, even more than usual. Being firm - yet benevolent is a must. Understanding how to re-direct their minds, feet and other actions in a non-confrontive fashion is very important. Is it a common error to try pulling on the reins or using other brute forces in efforts to stop them in a panic or in one of their hard-headed actions. Being non-confrontive is paramount in safety knowledge.

Rather than trying to use brute force on reins, it is much more effective to be able to use a single rein (always using pressure release method) for re-directing or in emergencies turning a horse in a circle as a basic requirement for re-directing and stopping them against their panic instinct or even for willful misbehavior. Knowing how and when to disengage the hind-quarters as well as how large or small a circle that is appropriate is important in an emergency stopping effort. When to delay the turning move (i.e. speed being one main factor) is also important. Controlling / re-directing them when bolting from a stop or slow gait is another thing. Working from high speed requires a completely different approach for getting into a good position for accomplishing an effective turn, whether it is a tight or large turn.

Proper use of single rein in controlling bolting horses----I have listened to multiple discussions that prompted me to write about this as so very much is misunderstood. It is doubtful that an average strength person could ever force turn a speeding horse so tightly as to cause a fall. However, for the few that are strong enough to do so it is a good warning not to do so to abruptly and to only move into a larger sweeping turn until speed is reduced sufficiently to then make a sufficiently tight turn in order for disengaging the hindquarters and stopping safely.

In cases where the riding track is too constrained and there is no chance to make a wide turn to begin with, then using a "cavalry lift" is an effective and safe way to reduce speed, although it can require some distance in order to get the horses attention. Otherwise, there is little choice (if you elect not to stick with it) but to bail out and most riders have not learned how to do that safely. Bailing out "can" be done relatively safely, although when moving at speed the inevitable fall forward into a roll will surely result in scrapes and bruises at the least. Bailing out usually doesn't result in anything too serious if learned and accomplished correctly.

Connection between Ground Work and Saddle Work :

Whether riding at home, at other UK locations or away on holiday, it is extremely important that, before you ride out, you "know" a horse can firstly bend laterally to each side as well as that you are able to disengage their hocks when required. To discover this, the standard leadership exercise should be done from the ground before mounting (this takes less than a minute) then again once mounted. If the horse is not able to follow your request and do these basic exercises, you are likely putting yourself in great danger to ride on. There is no horse alive that cannot bolt or try to bolt under extreme circumstances. Horses have millions of years of DNA learning in place and they are never going to lose instinctive behavior. At least not in our lifetimes.

Riding tool tip: An excellent tool for general riding as well as for many competitive riding activities is the use of a Billy Allen sweet iron snaffle bit with a tube/collar holding the center joint from completely folding / pinching. The tube causes the bit to fall into becoming (more or less) a Mullen mouth shape. This type bit is currently sold in the UK under the name Reinsman 292 (sweet iron bit with a tube/collar in the middle joint). The bit should (as should most bits) be used with a chin strap fitted close enough to prevent the bit from being pulled out the side of the mouth in an emergency rein pull. The chin strap effectively turns the entire lower jaw. The chin strap is not a curb strap and is attached to the bit ring **BELOW** the point of rein attachment so that the reins cannot cause added upward pressure. I have convinced many riders to use these and none of the horses have ever rejected or disliked such bit and chin strap arrangement. It is also very important not to allow any chrome material to touch a horse's teeth - as that causes electrolysis and is very uncomfortable.

Rein use tip:

A common flaw riders can make, in taking up rein slack, is to look down whilst sliding a loop of the reins up through one hand (assuming there is a connection between reins). If you must use this method, then you must learn to do it without looking down when you begin the movement. You can often inadvertently move your weight forward and create an awkward loading of the shoulders. Whenever you are looking down and not focused forward to watch the ground being covered by your horse - even for just a few seconds - can be very dangerous.

Ride Safely and Aware.

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