

Training and Riding Advice

Assuming our weather is returning to more a more mild condition, we may be getting ready to "ride out" with a bit more energy. This could open a mental door to our horses thinking that they can also step things up a bit. This could put them into more rambunctious moods, which could land them into unexpected situations where they suddenly think they need to take over the business of their security without thought to us. Therefore, we need to be sure that they recognize our leadership capabilities, even more than usual. An important exercise to complete (only require ring a minute or so) before riding out is that you must "know" that a horse can firstly bend laterally to each side as well as that you are able to disengage their hocks / rear quarters when required. Do this at a stop before riding out. Being firm - yet benevolent is a must for us to make it clear that we are capable to make decisions that will keep both them and us safe. Understanding how to re-direct their sudden insulin driven minds, bodies and actions - in a non-confrontive (AND FIRM) fashion is suddenly very important. Is it a common error to try pulling on the reins or try using other brute forces in our efforts to correct or stop them, when they get into a panic situation or even if it is only one of their "hard-headed" attitudes. Being non-confrontive (whilst remaining firm) is paramount in assuring safety.

Rather than trying to use brute force with our voice, feet, legs and/or pulling back reins - it is much more effective to be able to use the on-side single rein whilst remembering to use pressure release methodology in re-directing their energy. This pressure release methodology is just as important, in emergencies, when needing to quickly re-direct your horse in a tighter turn or into steadily decreasing circumference circle(s) as a basic requirement against their panic instincts or even for outright willful misbehavior. Knowing how and when to disengage the hind-quarters as well as how large or small the circumferences for circling may be appropriate/possible is important in an emergency stopping effort and this activity should be practiced to stay adept. Controlling / re-directing them whenever suddenly bolting from a stop or otherwise is another thing to practice in safe surrounds such as ménage or other safe areas. 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 larger more open turn.

Proper use of single rein in controlling bolting horses is very important and I have listened to multiple discussions that prompted me to write about this more often, 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 (when at speed) and to only move into a larger sweeping turn until that speed has been reduced sufficiently to then achieve a tighter turn in order for disengaging the hindquarters and stopping safely.

In cases where riding tracks are too constrained and there are no ready places to make wide turns, then "repeatedly" 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 never learned how to do that safely. Bailing out "can" be done relatively safely, although when moving at great speeds 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 and the rider is aware of the surrounding area.

Connection between Ground Work and Saddle Work : To repeat an important exercise - whether riding at home, at other UK locations or away on holiday, it is extremely important, 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 rear-quarters when needed. For horses that you are not familiar with, a standard leadership exercise should be done from the ground before mounting. This should not take long and if it does it proved it was indeed needed. Then again once you are mounted. If the horse is not able to follow your request and do these basic exercises, you are likely putting yourself in great danger if you ride out. There is no horse alive that cannot bolt or try to bolt under extreme circumstances. Horses have millions of years of DNA "hard wiring" in place and are not likely to loose instinctive behavior.

Bit tips: An excellent bit for general riding, as well as for many competitive riding activities, is the use of a Billy Allen style sweet iron snaffle bit with a tube/collar holding the center joint from completely folding / pinching. The tube causes the bit to fall into the shape of a Mullen mouth bit. 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 moves the entire lower jaw without damaging teeth. 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 (if the bit is chrome, rather than sweet iron or other non nickel containing material, not to allow the bit to touch a horses' teeth. To do so causes electrolysis and is very uncomfortable. Next month watch for some rider position and rein use tips.

Ride Safely and Aware.

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