

April 2016 Essex Rider Magazine
(Temporary Round Pens)

Even though the normal wet winter has supposedly left us, the wet ground has been slow to go. Training horses in wet ground is still problematic with regard to the horses' fetlocks and joints. The slow to dry ground will take a while longer to give us solid footing. Additional to horses slipping and injuries as a result, we still need to be diligent in watching out for the drivers as in all weather. Hard to see how their driving habits don't really improve once the icy weather is gone. There is usually some advice given by DVM Professionals, but never enough news is given to sufficiently warning drivers about being more aware of riders. So don't become complacent just because the weather is slowly improving when out on the roads. Even though more drivers should recognizing risks to riders, we can't rely on them very much. As owners will now begin doing more repeat training as well as updating their horses in their training, in the better weather - remember the soft ground is hard on horses. 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 preparing to get out into the country side and on the roads. I trust the following will be helpful in this regard. Actually, this type ground work, in addition to other exercises I regularly recommend, is never a waste of time at any time of the year.

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 12" to 18" or you can build with commonly used plastic posts, which are generally 48" in height. As 48" is rather short for the job, the height can easily be increased by using two of the 48" plastic posts and binding them, by overlapping the ends by about a foot (duct tape works well), in order to produce a height of approximately 6 feet. Either type posts can be strung with 1" (or wider) electric tape, preferably 3 to 4 strands, although 3 will do for most. The better diameters for round pens, depending on height of horses, are 40' to 60'. A smaller diameter can be hard on the joints of most larger horses, although they can be alright most horses. The diameter is particularly important, when making temporary pens, as there is not generally a foot board around the circumference of the base. Generally be in a more permanent pen, where a slope can be built up allowing the horse to generate an incline which it can push against whenever running at speed. The circumference measurements for a 40' diameter pen is (40 x 3.14 PI) 125.6 feet. With a post spaced every 7' you would need 18 posts for a 40' pen (double the number of posts to increase height). The circumference measurements for a 50' diameter pen is (50 x 3.14 PI) 157 feet (rounded up) and with a post spaced every 7' you would need 23 posts (double the number of posts to increase height). The measurements for a 60' diameter pen is (60 x 3.14 PI) 190 feet (again rounded up) and with a post spaced every 7' you would need 28 posts (double the number of posts for increased height). The plastic ones can be duct taped together by having the bottom 12" of one overlapping onto the top 12" of the bottom post and securely taping at three or more places along the overlap - making them 6 feet tall. Then three or four strands of electric tape around the circumference: one about 1" from the top, one at 12" from the ground - then one or two more evenly dividing the distance between the top and bottom strands -- giving a good enclosure. In addition to the electric tape for the strands you will need some extra to install three or four diagonal stakes around the outside. You need relatively flat ground (or on a slight slope for drainage) 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 12" to 18" 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, if you are electrifying the strands) and you would not likely need the diagonally stakes and tape. There are also some longer plastic posts, being produced now-a-days to make height easier to achieve. There is picture, on my site, of a round pen using wooden posts with only 3 strands of tape and was built as well as most

Permanent Round Pens. That is good but not a must for the average owner training only a few horses. There is a section titled "Training Equipment", on my site.

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" the cartilage tissues (higher up the bridge of the nose), the cartilage to bone junction. Having it located below that junction can be painful as well as irritating and distracting to the horse. This also applies to some rope halters that are built to use in squeezing the cartilage tissues and generating pain. There is no worthwhile purpose to squeezing or constricting that area of the horse's nose. There are even worse tack called grackles and worse yet flashes. I truly loath the use of those. It is truly a rare case where either of these might be actually required.

Re: Bits: I observe all sorts of bit application errors being made - but for this article, I will limit my comments to only a few points. One major error that causes huge discomfort is where cheek straps on the bridles far too short and keep the bit too far back in the mouth. This 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 proper training of "soft cues via rein and a comfortable carry on the tongue". If the bit is carried so high, it can actually cause them to put their tongue "over" the bit, more than normal, trying to get relief which impedes rein cues. 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 normally if not held too high by the bridle. This allows for soft rider cues and quick recognition of cues. 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 helps communication between horse and rider. This method does not leave the cheek straps loose. Trained / learned cooperation between rider and horse creates proper tension in the reins and bit. That training generates a much better communication between the rider and the horse whilst maintaining a good contact between rider's fingers and the horse's mouth / tongue.

Re: Voice Cues: Regarding the use of voice cues versus tactile cues. I generally teach all my clients and/or students that voice and tactile cues are not actually exclusive from one another. With the exception of the rules for English Dressage and Western Reining disciplines. I like voice cues, especially as I like to stop horses with a gentle, short and quick "whoa" - as I softly move my feet forward a little and thereby shift my weight a little - plus lift a rein (not so far as a Cavalry Lift) to give clear signals for a stop (at any travelling speed) whether easy or instantly for a "sliding stop" in preparation for a "roll back turn" or simply for a normal stop. Whilst voice cues are interesting & can be effective, there is a flaw in that if it is a very windy day or a helicopter, tractor, other machinery or vehicle is operating nearby - 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 (in training) 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 still us back there".

Until next time, ya'll ride safely and have fun.

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