

Riding & Training Perspectives

August 2006

REMINDERS:

A common “*Control Myth*” claims that we can control a horse by simply turning the horse and controlling where the feet travel. If the horse has not been taught a conditioned response to turn when asked to do so, you will quickly realize how strong the horse is and how weak you are in comparison. A human can control a horse only when the horse believes that between the two of them the human is more qualified to be leader. I spend large amounts of time teaching this to riders and their horses as **both** need to learn “Conditioned Responses”.

For every horse I ride, I first establish whether or not there is a conditioned response to the single rein directions I would need to use in a panic situation. If it is not evident, I then teach them -- on the spot --, both from the ground and saddle. I then establish, with the horse, that I am a capable leader with the leadership exercises (outlined in my previous articles). It doesn't matter how long it takes me to do this as I am more concerned with my (and clients) life than the convenience of others.

Equine Psyche:

Don't Bore Your Horse when accomplishing the Communication Exercises and Practices, by going through the entire regime each and every time you work on them, whether from the ground or from the saddle

It would be similar to asking a human fourth grader to tell you how much two and two is each and every time they are in class...it would eventually bore them to agitation and insult their intelligence.

On the other hand, it is very important for you to accomplish the leadership exercises (which takes less than one minute) each and every time you greet your horse for the day and anytime / every time you mount up on your or any other horse to ride out on. This is due to the paradoxical fact that horses see each and every day differently with regard to the herd pecking order / hierarchy. In a herd situation, this causes herd members to feel the need to prove (daily) their positions in the pecking order / hierarchy. Normally they can do this with very little effort unless a stubborn social climbing member contests their position. In accomplishing this exercise you will also be checking and reinforcing the learned conditioned response of being turned via single rein.

Road Safety (problems with metal shoes):

A recent incident that occurred brings to mind something for everyone that rides shod horses. I have seen this problem too many times and have stopped by road sides to help far too many times. This problem occurs in both hot weather as well as in cold weather and on dry as well as on wet pavements.

A rider went out early in the morning, near Stansted Airport, in order to avoid the heat (this problem is exacerbated by hot pavement) and as he turned his horse onto a paved road to make their way to a bridledway just down the road a bit, the horse lost it's footing on the tarmac. This rider was lucky as there were no cars coming and they exited safely. However, the horse went over on its side and then could not right itself due to the slippery metal shoes against pavement situation that it found itself in, so it panicked and damaged itself extensively. Thankfully, the rider was quick enough to dismount as he fell so as not to get caught under the horse. Needless to say the horse as well as the rider were shaken pretty badly and walked back to the stables, lucky not to have gotten hurt much worse.

Back in Texas, where the heat is extreme in summer and the roads are very slick, we rarely have this problem as we do not normally shoe our horses and the natural hoof walls provide much more friction than do metal shoes. Even our Police, who ride long days on pavements, have learned the benefit of being barefoot which also helps to prevent Navicular problems (which were largely a result of being shod). It was also discovered how metal / inflexible shoes cuts down on lower leg circulation. The metal shoes prevented the natural flexing of the hoof walls when the horse steps down. It was found that the long days on pavement or hard ground does not cause problems or unnecessary soreness in a healthy foot as the hoof grows to match the wear. The improved circulation made a big improvement.

One thing the Mounted Houston, Texas Police do is to carry rubber boots with them (Old Mac, style, etc.) for use whenever they are handling crowd control or riding on extremely rough ground. Unruly crowds have been known to break glass on the ground to injure horses. With or without metal shoes, the glass gets to the frog and shoes do not protect from that nor do they always protect from rough ground problems.

Unfortunately not all horse have sufficiently healthy feet or have confirmation problems which prevents them from going without shoes. However that has been shown to be a minority of horses. Many horses can make the transition quickly over a few months. However, some need up to a year or more. A qualified trimmer / Ferrier is also very important.

Try to keep your horse's point of view in the forefront and be very careful if your horse is shod when riding on any paved surfaces. In the meantime have fun and stay safe.

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