

## Training & Riding Perspectives/Advice w/ Exercises & Winter (Mud Fever) Advice

This month I am covering some basic exercises for communication and leadership as well as a bit of riding & training advice and more winter thoughts.

### Riding :

When we are riding and expecting our horse to execute correct lead changes, stops and many other movements we need or wish, it helps to ask for the movement when the horse is physically able to execute the requested move successfully and on time. Specifically asking when the horse's feet are in the right position to make a quick and fluid decision.

Some examples;

*When we use conventional aids/cues to ask for a lead departure and/or lead change at a lope/canter*, most of us were taught to move our foot back behind the girth area to ask for a particular hind quarter to activate so that we could get the opposing front foot lead departure or change. The reality of this action is that we are likely to only get a 33% accuracy out of this effort due to the fact that the particular foot we are asking to make a movement can only achieve our request if and only if that foot is lifting off of the ground and moving back - as opposed to having already been committed to a movement and on it's way to the ground or worse yet already on the ground. If the foot is (1) lifting and moving back then the horse can, in a timely manner, make the correct decision and bring the foot back to the ground to execute the push we are asking for thereby executing, **in a timely manner**, the correct lead departure or change. Whereas, if the foot is either (a) committed to a step or (b) already on the ground; then the horse can only execute, **in a timely manner**, an opposite side lead departure or change or he can **delay the reply** by one step until the relevant foot is again off the ground so that he can bring it back down with the correct impetuosity and execute the correct lead departure or change. *We can learn to get the correct lead change, in a timely manner, most if not all of the time, by learning to recognize when the relevant rear leg is swinging back and up and give our aids/cues at that moment. This is by recognizing the barrel movement & positions. I will cover this further in a subsequent article.*

*When we are asking for stops*, it pays to ask for a stop when the hind feet are in the air (a minimum of one) and not when they are already on the ground and committed to the push for forward momentum. When the front end is up in the air is when the hind feet are on the ground and not the optimum time to ask for a stop, therefore when the front end is down & hind end is up it is the time to ask for a stop, *of course this is the time when it feels the most precarious to us and that is generally why we fail to ask at the right time to make it easiest for the horse.*

*When giving our aids/cues (in general)*, the success you have when riding your horse depends a great deal upon how self-disciplined and consistent you are with your

aids/cues. Precision and repetition in an unambiguous manner (firm for training) is all important to horses. Therefore, a generalized goal leaves a lot of room for confusion, the more specific and clear you are with your goals, for riding and teaching, is what is so important. Be very, very specific with your aids/cues. An aid/cue is something that has been taught to a horse and is not just his natural reaction to a stimulus. If you don't have a clear idea of the result you want when you give an aid/cue your horse, you'll confuse him and frustrate yourself. One example is a leg or heel aid/cue for forward motion; a clear and definite aid/cue given with the leg or heel can be taught to mean one of two things – to simply move forward or to ask the horse for a change in speed whether already moving or not – these are two separate things to the horse and must be taught clearly.

**Time to digest our request:** when giving an aid/cue, don't forget to allow for a sufficient time gap between when asking and when the horse replies/acts. It is a good idea to give a preemptive aid/cue prior to the full aid/cue, such as lifting the reins or saying whoa, etc an instant before giving the full aid/cue.

### **Training Perspectives & Advice**

***How Horses learn:*** number one from confidence, then acceptance, then understanding and then achievement – the result. The result can be no better than how well they understood - and that can be no better than how well they accepted it – and they can't accept anything until they are confident and feeling safe.

***Crossing in Front of your Horse :*** when moving across, in front of your horse, in close proximity : do not "push" the face away to pass by, always move it towards yourself as you move by (do not grab the face but use an open hand, back of hand is best or a closed fist, on the opposite side to press / release in the direction where you just walked from (i.e. back towards you as you pass), a push away serves to reinforce the normal horse exit routine / habit.

### **Basic Exercises for Communication and Leadership**

#### **Notes:**

- a. *\* All exercises are accomplished by using the basic 3 levels of pressure & quick release, do not change or add any further pressure (nor release any) whenever the horse goes in the wrong direction(s) but constantly maintain whatever level of pressure was on the horse until he responds*
- b. *With all these basic exercises don't overly worry (initially) about the precision / direction moved –be concerned with the general movement "away from pressure" (i.e. yielding to your instruction); the point is to cause the horse **not** to react to the Natural Instinct (Opposition Reflex) of going against pressure - directional accuracy can be dealt with after the horse clearly understands how to give to the pressure/release.*
- c. *try to vary the routine from time to time and don't such large volumes of work at any one time that you drive your horse to distraction*

## **Head & Neck Work** (17 exercises)

From a position of standing to the side near the neck  
*(apply all pressure exercises from both left and right sides)*

- a. \* straight down from halter loop (with the lead rope), stand facing forwards, then facing backwards toward hind quarters, then stand facing directly to the horse (from both sides for six exercises).
- b. \* straight back from halter loop (with the lead rope), stand facing forwards, then facing backwards toward hind quarters, then stand facing directly to the horse (from both sides for another six exercises).
- c. \* straight down on poll (with your hand), stand facing forwards, then facing backwards toward hind quarters, (from both sides for another four exercises) then stand facing directly in front of the horse (for a fifth exercise).

## **Body Work** (12 exercises)

*(use finger tips or edge of knuckles for all except for the ribs, where flat of fist works best)*

*These exercises are all applied from **both sides** of the horse*

- a. from side of the face, request movement away to the opposite direction (mid jaw)
- b. from side of the neck, request movement away to the opposite side (midway on neck)
- c. from middle of shoulder, request movement away to the opposite side (crossing feet in due course) \*\*
- d. from middle of side/barrel (at you calf level), request movement away to opposite side (crossing feet in due course) \*\* allowing turning on the fore
- e. from middle of hip, request movement away to opposite side (crossing feet in due course) \*\*
- f. for shoulder & side/barrel simultaneously (side pass), request movement away to opposite side (crossing feet in due course) \*\* whilst blocking neck to prevent turning on the fore

\*\* *when applying the body exercises don't "Initially" overly worry about the precise direction moved so much as achieving actual movement "away from pressure" (i.e. yielding to pressure). The main point is to get the horse not to react to the Natural Instinct of going against pressure (opposition pressure) and to learn to move away from your "request" (applied firmly, if necessary, but benevolent in nature) Directional corrections can be accomplished once the horse clearly understands how to give to the pressure you have applied in your "request" . When using contact pressure / release methods on the body, be sure to lightly rub the spot you just applied pressure to, when ceasing pressure and stopping the horse from moving away, in order to teach them to "stop to the rub" as another aid/cue. This is very handy when tacking up or moving small distances for specific tasks from the ground.*

## **More Winter Thoughts:**

**For Mud Fever help with treatment**, particularly applicable this time of year, it is very important, following gentle cleaning, to completely dry out any scratches or wounds (should the problem have progressed that far) before applying any of the many good ointments and creams available for Mud Fever treatment. In any case, tiny scratches caused by tiny rocks in the mud are not always evident to the eye. Many folks believe that drying with a cloth or air drying will do the job sufficiently, but that is not generally successful. One effective method of effectively drying the wounds is to apply surgical spirits via dabbing action with a cloth (it is called rubbing alcohol in the USA). Two UK chemists have told me that Ethanol is also effective and somewhat less of an irritant. Both have effective antibacterial properties and will effectively dry out the wound and outer skin surface effectively. The main point here is that in addition to cleaning properly, do not cover the wounds with ointments, etc. until the water is forced out as otherwise the bacteria are provided with a good place to thrive beneath the ointments and coverings. If a horse develops scabs they should not be picked off but gently washed off, after softening. If the problem is persistent or the horse gets a high temperature or increased swelling then a Veterinarian must be consulted. One more pointer for reducing scratching, is not to wash mud off with hose pipe water pressure and to use a handful of hay (for example) to wipe off excess mud & once the remaining mud is allowed to dry, then lightly brush it off.

### **Longeing Advice**

Only a brief note here, I will cover this in detail in a following article; always apply pressure (in three levels of pressure / release, as in all training exercises) from the drive line (girth / cinch area) forward and not behind that point or from behind the horse. This method (drive line forward) will teach the horse to use his mind (or left brain) to comply with requests/cues and not simply run from pressure (from behind) in a natural instinctive manner which teaches nothing.

In the meantime, have fun and stay safe.                      Lewis Blackburn

For more information see: [www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com](http://www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com),  
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*Next month I will continue with more riding advice and exercises (including more on direct/indirect rein methodology & barrel movements), recommendations for handling horses before they “Blow up” and why it works for safety, more detail on effective / constructive longeing, more on the nature of horses and more on communication problems / solutions.*