

## **“Approaching/Saddling/Mounting, Training & Winter”**

Each day a horse's World starts anew and during the day they “live in the moment”, an apparent paradox in that horses remember, so well, everything in their history (good and bad) with the exception of the day to day herd hierarchy (pecking order).

The relationship between you and your horse consists of predominantly two parts, one is a friendly relationship whilst the other is being a firm but benevolent leader (which we all want to be ourselves). Therefore, as horses live in the moment, it is very important every time we approach our horses, to be aware of how we move and how we show what our intentions are. Our body language must be positive. It begins here, whether good or bad.

**Whenever greeting your horse;** whether approaching them at the stable or in the paddock / field, in the morning or in the afternoon/evening, there are a few simple things you can do to improve the relationship and insure safety. The first is simply by approaching in a friendly manner and avoiding appearing as a predator. The other is an exercise\* (short and simple) that is aimed at mimicking what horses do when greeting one another in a herd situation and establishing or re-establishing / reiterating their hierarchy (pecking order).

**When you are Tacking Up / Saddling Up;** there is a similar exercise\* you can use for getting the horse to exhale when you are tightening the girth or cinching up and which is much more effective (and time efficient) than walking the horse around in order to get them to exhale, as is the general norm . This exercise also serves to reiterate your competent leadership position from the ground. By accomplishing this exercise you won't be “holding up / delaying” the departure and in fact you will be ready to mount up faster than normal and ahead of most others when going out in a group.

**Before riding out;** there are two things you should do whenever you mount up and before riding; (1) have the horse “stand still” for a minute or even two in order to consistently be teaching him/her not to walk off immediately when you mount up. The second and equally important thing to do is to execute, again, the quick / simple exercise\*, which will accomplish two things. One is to let you know if the horse is tight or has any physical problems (stiffness, etc.) that you should be aware of during that days riding or training, etc. so that you can either avoid the physical problem or work on it, whichever is appropriate to your plans for the day. The other is that you will once again reiterate your position as competent leader and confirm to the horse that you are in control of its feet / body movements. This time, very importantly, the reminder will come from you, atop his back in saddle, where he cannot readily see you as he was able to when you were on the ground.

***The object of these exercises is multi-purpose;*** (1) *establishing your ability to move the horse's body around (reiterating yourself as a competent leader) from the ground, as other horses do* (2) *expediting tacking up* (3) *identifying any stiffness or soreness* (4) *assuring the horse that when you are in the saddle you are in*

control of his movements and (5) to improve respect. These exercises should be executed each time you approach your horse, tack up or prepare to ride. There is one exercise for each case. All very similar but with different benefits.

**The Exercise\*:** The exercise is a five part movement that requires, on average, approximately one minute to complete (for each instance applied) once the horse learns it. The movements are conducted via the lead rope, using a **direct and indirect rein**, and above all by applying a **pressure& release** method (a.k.a. half halt movement with your hands) and never use a steady / constant pull on the rope!

Once you have completed your friendly greeting and haltered the horse (lead rope attached) use a **direct rein** and move the fore quarters to either the left or right in a full circle, back to the beginning and stop, then reverse the movement to the opposite side, again back to the starting point and stop. Then use an **indirect rein** to move the hind quarters in a half circle, either to the left or right and to a stop, then reverse the movement to the opposite direction going back to the starting point and to a stop. Once you have returned to the original starting point and stopped, back the horse two steps, stop and then lead him back forward to the starting point again and stop. Then give a quick friendly rub, etc. You will then have completed one exercise routine. This routine should be accomplished for each of the three cases described above (followed by friendly rub each time). Each routine will take no more than a minute once learned by your horse.

#### **Winter Thoughts:**

**For Mud Fever 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, as explained below. One effective method of drying the wounds is to apply rubbing alcohol *via dabbing action with a cotton pad or cloth* (I learned that it is called surgical spirits in the UK). Two UK chemists have told me that Ethanol is also effective and somewhat less of an irritant. Both have effective antibacterial properties and will 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 could be provided with a good place to thrive beneath the ointments. 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. This is explained more fully, on my site, as identified below. One more pointer to reduce scratching is not to wash mud off with hose pipe water pressure. One way is to use a handful of hay to wipe off excess mud & once the remaining mud has dried then lightly brush it off.

**Natural Insulation Interruption;** we should keep in mind that every time we touch a horses body hair it tends to disturb the natural insulation properties created by the body oils, dust and hair. During cold and wet weather, they can be extra sensitive and can display bad tempers / reactions whenever we disturb their comfort, especially at times of

the day such as early mornings and late afternoons. They can also show extra sensitivity / bad reactions to tack items; for example treeless or flexible tree saddles, due to the lack of the inflexibility normally provided by a fixed tree and as such can allow pressure spots to touch their backs. It seems that some horses are not as Stoic as others in these regards.

**Training Advice, regarding cues/aids:** Be firm, clear and unambiguous when giving aids/cues, when riding and especially during training, whether on the ground or in the saddle. Once horse and rider communications begin to improve, gradually soften and decrease the number of cues/aids. Work toward reducing the overt cues/aids to **softer** and **fewer in number**. Once the horse truly trusts & believes that the rider or ground person/leader recognizes his (the horses) replies to the cues/aids - it will take fewer and softer cues/aids in order to readily gain the responses we are asking for. We must learn to speak in language understandable to our horses and thereby show them our recognition of their replies, by stopping/ending our cues/aids (pressure) immediately when the horse complies in the slightest manner.

This same method applies to lungeing, by using progressively softer and fewer pressures & cues and releasing them the moment the horse makes any kind of “try” (effort to comply). Our cues/pressure/directions should be given from the girth area forward and not from rear/from behind. This method will teach him to better use their brain (left or pragmatic side) to respond instead of running blindly and purely instinctively away from pressure applied behind them.

### **Hands;**

Practice correct application of pressure/release via ground work exercises. I generally provide clients with a list of 28 basic exercises and in sessions I work with them to verify effective application. This practice helps riders to carry a better feel into their saddle and riding cues/aids. I also teach more specific exercises for reining back, lungeing, long reining, roll backs, reducing cues/aids, improving impulsion, etc.

**Helping horses to succeed;** it is not a bad idea to help your horse succeed with whatever you are trying to teach them to accomplish. Once a lesson is learned, any extra “helping” aid can be removed / weaned away without much trouble and the good will established is valuable. This is especially applicable when requesting your horse to accomplish tasks only when he or she is physically capable of doing so, as I mentioned in previous articles.

Last but not least, keep your temper under control; be patient, consistent and persistent but firm then gradually work into softness whenever dealing with your horse.

*Next month I will be addressing some of the typical problems I deal with in training sessions with folks and their horses, as well as explaining more on the lungeing method I advocate and how to help your horse succeed. I will also list the 28 basic exercises to work with your horse from the ground, throughout their lives and some riding aids/advice.*

Have fun and stay safe

Lewis Blackburn