

Riding & Training Perspectives

July 2006

REMINDERS:

A Skeptical Horse is the nature of most horses, rather than mean, stupid, stubborn or even unpredictable. They are just skeptical. Horses don't see the World as we do. As prey animals, they are preoccupied from birth to death with simply staying alive. They are cowards at heart, extreme claustrophobics and when their stoic level is above their tolerance level they all *instantly* become full-throttle-aholics.

Inconsistency with cues can add to horse's skepticism and can sour your relationship. For an example, if you lived someplace with no traffic rules / laws, where you could be given a ticket whenever it suited a policeman, you wouldn't like to live there. Yet that is what we do whenever we are inconsistent with our cues. Using "*unambiguous cues*" consistently is very important.

DON'T BORE YOUR HORSE TO DISTRACTION:

Keep your horse interested whenever you are exercising or practicing. At the same time, refine your actions / cues so that they become "Conditioned Responses" for your horse.

With regard to the three part single rein maneuvers while mounted, which I have discussed in previous articles, the following applies:

When in a corral / arena / ménage you can make use of soft, finger cues and gain more refinement when your horse is left brained and thinking about what you are asking for. That is, when your horse is thinking in a pragmatic style and not in an instinctive way or "right brained".

However, you need to also *intermittently* use more firm cues /signals, during all exercises, in order to confirm to your horse that you are a capable and trustworthy leader for his/her own benefit and protection. Whether you are applying soft or firm cues, you must endeavour to make all of your pressure releases very consistent as horses count so much on consistency in release of pressure. A horse will typically revert to instinct (right brained) and go into "opposition reflex" if you impose a constant pressure (without releases) and will instinctively / naturally fight your intentions.

I teach the use of a closed fist (fingers folded into a firm fist but not squeezed too hard) in order to encourage the use of consistent wrist movements for generating pressure and release cues. This better facilitates remaining very consistent in the distance the rein is moved during each pulse of pressure and release.

I teach the ground exercises for leadership with the same closed fist and wrist movements so that consistency is maintained. This also transfers to the rider when practicing / learning the conditioned responses.

All the exercises for direct and indirect rein can be practiced in the corral with much less firmness and with soft fingers / hands once the fist / wrist movements are learned as conditioned / habitual responses to use when needed. When practicing cues softly, you will be able to better generate suppleness in your horse as well as more refinement with your application of the cues. Eventually your cues will become nearly invisible to onlookers whilst still being unambiguous to your horse.

ONE OF MANY PARADOXES:

One of the paradoxes of dealing with our horse's psyche deals with when we endeavour to be a "*Passive / Benevolent & Firm Leader*". Passive leadership exists in herds where the second horse or "Beta" horse in the hierarchy (usually a mare) leads the other horses by example and not by force. The Beta horse is a leader not to be feared as opposed to the Alpha Horse. Whilst we need to be that Beta / Passive Leader, we must also convince our horse that we are capable of *protecting them* effectively and with sufficient power. Horses must trust that we possess the decision making ability to give directions that will be to their best interests and protection. *Therefore, from time to time we must display "Firmness" in our methods coupled with our benevolent / passive leadership.*

Try to keep your horse's point of view in mind as much as possible and in the meantime have fun and stay safe.

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