

Human/Equine Nature, Trailer Loading, Lungeing & Winter

Nature of Humans

“Homeostasis” which is the problem we humans have of not being able to make change and of wanting to stick with what we are already comfortable with. This makes muscle memory difficult for us to effectively change without direct intervention or aids, which I tend to do for all clients whether doing ground work or in the saddle in teaching leg positioning for control maneuvers, centering body weight and especially for direct and indirect rein applications.

As Opra often points out, Women are “multi task” individuals whilst men are not. Horses are not multi task individuals and are apparently more like men. That may be why so many women ride; as they are already so practiced at directing men around without us realizing it (even my 9 yr old daughter is good at it so it could be genetic). Of course this mostly applies when horses are using their “left brain” or pragmatic side rather than being controlled by their “right brain” or instinctive side.

Nature of Horses

Horses, being single minded creatures, give us an advantage. For example, when a **horse shies or spooks** from something, we can readily, via using direct and indirect rein controls amongst other things, change their focus and cause them to forget (at least for a moment) what is bothering them and causing them to shy or worry rather than trying to stop them which is a mistake that only serves to cause them to act stoically and wind up inside. When a horse “bolts” and goes completely right brained or instinctive, rather than making the mistake of trying to stop our horse, we then need methods for gaining their attention in order to be able to turn their heads slightly and effect direct rein control for redirecting their energy, as well as show them that we (and not some wildcat, etc.) are in fact that weight on their backs. They tend to forget who or what is on their backs when they go into their 40 + million year instinctive (DNA wiring) actions. These methods should be taught as part of the basic foundation for all riders and horses.

Why Horses accept Humans

We all generally agree that it is incredible that horses allow us to sit on them holding a pair or reins. Horses are highly social animals, as are many other domesticated animals, and as such need companionship. Their innate sociability has led them to associate with us and eventually to accept human ownership and direction. A wonderful book to read on this subject is “Animals in Translation” by Dr. Temple Grandin (an autistic lady that earned her PHD in animal science)

Lungeing

To continue from the brief lungeing comments I made last month; driving from the girth area and shoulder teaches the horse via using his left brain or pragmatic side as he can see what is going on instead of being caused to use the right brain / instinctive side when we are moving him forward by causing him to run away from pressure by applying pressure his hind quarters. Generally, there should be no need for a stick or whip and the end of the 22' rope is sufficient to provide cues. This is not to say that there aren't times when putting pressure on the hind quarters is appropriate and effective.

Trailer Loading

The goal of teaching loading should be to have our horse confidently load into the trailer with us standing outside the back of the trailer and allowing them to stand quietly inside without feeling the need to rush out. We should be able to close the door behind them before tying them as tying them first can be dangerous if they try to back out and feel trapped by the tied lead.

Before beginning, the horse should be fairly compliant with ground work as I outlined in January and February articles as well as the lunging method I advocate using pressure from the girth/cinch area forward. Trailer loading training can be broken down into two segments (1) ramp and (2) compartment. This applies to both trailers and horse boxes.

I typically teach horses to walk across the ramp sideways (from both sides) near the bottom of the ramp then higher up small bit at a time. All trailer loading training should be done in small bytes so that the horse can absorb it. Next, teach the horse to stand with eventually all four feet on the ramp sideways, again facing both ways. Following successful ramp training, then going up (and down) the ramp, into (and out of) the trailer training can begin with much less stress and more understanding by the horse.

In all parts of trailer loading training, intimidation or high pressure (constrictive) methods should not be used. By using intimidation or high pressure (constrictive) methods, the horse will not be learning that the trailer experience is not a bad thing and will not be learning to make decisions, one by one, with our coaxing. One exception to this would be in an emergency where it is imperative that a horse load with no delay in order to rush it to a veterinarian / clinic to save its life, alleviate extreme pain or some other extremely urgent reason. In such an exception I typically use a "Dually" (trademark by Monty Roberts) halter or something similar (there are a few similar constrictive halters in the market) and constrict (above - not on - the cartilage) the nose of the horse in order to force its submission and get into the trailer, which of course causes a more difficult loading problem to solve later but at least solved the urgent problem at that moment. Lastly, intimidation style teaching of loading is not a long term lesson as is teaching with a cooperative, albeit firm method.

Good trailer loading lessons should make long lasting memories for horses and when, as they sometimes do, decide for some reason or other that they don't wish to load (usually at the most inopportune time), it is much easier to apply a small amount of pressure in order to coax them to go ahead. Of course, the easiest for a horse is a stock trailer with no

ramps or dividers. The horse can see well and it is light inside and horses can ride naturally in company or alone.

Winter Thoughts:

Help with treatment for Mud Fever.

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. Your pharmacist can advise you as to what product would be best to expel all water inside the cuts as to fail to do so allows the body to form a film over and trap water (thus trapping bacteria inside the water) and preventing the topical medications from doing their job effectively. Two UK chemists have told me that there are products that will do the job very well without causing too much discomfort to the horse in the process. These products have effective antibacterial properties and will effectively dry out the wound and outer skin surface effectively and immediately. 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. 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 high water pressure from a hose pipe. Use, for example, a handful of hay to wipe off excess mud in a downward single direction, then once the remaining mud is allowed to dry, lightly brush it off using a downward motion. I have purposely avoided naming any products and leave that to the pharmacist or veterinarian to advise an appropriate product that will drive out the water and help get rid of the bacteria lodged down low.

One interesting preventative method that is not fully understood by me, but has proven to work many times, is grazing cattle on the same land as horses (even together when possible, but not necessarily).

Calorie Content of feed,

Even though horses use as much as 75% of their calories keeping warm in winter it is important to provide those calories without doing so with too much quick release sugar or we end up with a hyper horse due to the reduced amount of work we give them during winter.

Next month I will continue to add comments to these points and more, in the meantime have fun and stay safe,

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