

Happy New Year !

Opening reminders:

1. As winter is with us, our horses are inside their stables a lot more than in good weather conditions. One thing to keep in mind is to make sure that their hay feed is not offered “above their cannon bone level” as this does nothing good for their withers and forward spine. They are built for having their heads down when eating, which stretches their forward spine and neck cartilages.
2. This time of year is also a good time for concentrating more on ground work. Whilst doing so, keep in mind that ground work directly translates into better riding work due to improved general communications and understanding of cues by both our horse and us.
3. Another important and practical piece of advice, at this time of year or indeed at any other, is to plan all training in small bytes and for steady progress. Don’t rush or inundate.

Riding & Training Advice:

Bucking: Riding a potential bucking horse is best initially dealt with by convincing / informing the horse that we are capable of redirecting their energy and feet as well as verifying that they understand the rein controls that produce our control over their movements. This point of view is best accomplished by using the ***leadership exercises*** on the ground as well as in the saddle before riding out. By doing so, it is more likely the horse won’t try and if it does, we are much more likely to be able to successfully redirect the feet, neck and overall energy. If riding in an English saddle, an important piece of tack is a “balance strap” which attaches to and between the front two D rings on either side of the pommel or front of the saddle. In a Western saddle, riders have the option of using the saddle horn or attaching bucking straps around the pommel on either or both sides of the saddle horn. This tack provides the rider with a tool for “pulling up” and generating downward pressure on our seat and feet. By pushing us down into the stirrups we better prevent any air gaps forming between the saddle and us. The rider’s feet need to be forward with much weight on the balls of the feet (aka a Hunters seat).

One other important piece of tack is a “chin strap” (not a curb strap) to prevent pulling the bit out of the sides of the mouth.

When a horse bucks, the rider *should not hold onto the reins* as two big problems occur by doing so. Firstly it will cause the horse to become even more agitated due to the constraint and secondly it will pull the riders arms forward and unbalance us. Whenever a horse bucks, it needs to move its head up then downward in order to cantilever its weight to generate the buck effectively. When it raises its head the rider needs to use a single rein and redirect its head to the side and eventually to disengage its hind quarters. If we miss the timing, then allow the rein to slide through our hand when the head drops and try again when it is next raised. By pulling out to the side and around our body, with either rein when the head is raised, we can accomplish a bend that is uncomfortable to the horse and curtail bucking relatively quickly. We can eventually disengage the hind quarters and stop the horse without ever fighting by pulling back, which is seldom a winning battle for us.

Lunging can be an effective tool in developing two way communication with our horses or it can be a pressurizing and problematic. Lunging should be used to produce good communications between our horses and us as well as to loosen & warm them up a bit. It should not be used to run them around and around in multiple circles, at various speeds, simply tiring them. ***Effective lunging generally only requires a few minutes work and very few revolutions.***

We need to remember that as horses can't see behind them, where so many people incorrectly place a whip on the ground (assuming they don't actually strike their horse), pressure with a whip or otherwise should never be put behind the girth area, where they can't see it. To do so simply pressurizes them into running forward - escaping the pressure. In such cases, they are actually running away from pressure, so there is no calm communication being established. They are forced into assuming what is happening behind them and horses easily assume the incorrect thing.

It is important to apply pressure from the girth area forward. In that way that they can see what we are doing. Then, once the horse responds to our cues - do not to allow the pressure end of the rope or whip (the following hand/arm) to hang down where the horse still can see it and must then wonder about our recognition of its reply to our initial cue. Simply place our following hand at our navel, in front of our body.

Another important factor is never to lunge on a tight line. This can cause many muscle and/or joint problems as well as an opposition reflex to constant pressure. Always try to apply "pressure release action" for any corrections, such as correcting head position, etc.

Closing reminders:

1. Don't forget that control of horses, in any state of their mind, rests largely with redirection of their energy rather than by trying to overtly prevent their actions or stop their energy releases. Often this is best accomplished via completely non-confrontive methods whilst at other times it requires a bit of initial force followed immediately by release or pressure for carrying on.

2. I still run into some disconcerting situations where people trying to learn better ways of dealing with their horses are intimidated by "closed minded" people who are dead set against Natural Horsemanship. Regarding these cold hearted, closed minded people; try not to let them bother you and do remember that Natural Horsemanship is much older than the BHS system. Just a few examples are :

1. **Alexander the Great** was a Natural Horseman with his famous horse **Bucephalus**.
2. **Xenophon** was a great Greek Natural Horseman.
3. Thousands of years past, the **American Indians** were and still are Natural Horsemen.

Whenever faced with such cold hearted and closed minded people, don't be deterred - keep up the good work . There seems that there will always be closed minded and cold hearted people that will continue treating their horses incorrectly.

Don't forget the old adage "Life is simpler when you plow around the stumps".

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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