

**I sure wish everyone a Great New Year !** Of course I would like to remind everyone of the many winter related things to be aware of, such as slippery roads. These are hard on the joints of our horses. Also, extra need for vigilance of the bad winter driving habits of cars and truck drivers. There has been more good news in the growing behavioral awareness by DVM Professionals, is that many more of them are recognizing and better dealing with, the heretofore much ignored, firm yet benevolent behavioral aspects of dealing with horses. I am very pleased to see more of them applying their efforts in this respect.

I was again asked by a few clients to repeat my instructions for building temporary round pens, so here that is: **Building Temporary Round Pens**

If a more permanent round pen is not allowed where you are, a Temporary and relative easily moveable Round Pen can be built from either wooden 8 ' tall by 2 1/2 " or 3 " diameter wooden poles or by the commonly used plastic posts used in paddocks, which are generally 48 " in height. If the 48 " plastics are used then each post needs 2 plastic posts bound together in order to get a sufficient height - as described further below. Either type posts can be strung with 1 " electric tape, preferably 4 strands. The better diameters for round pens are 40 ' to 50 ' . A smaller diameter can be hard on the leg and foot joints of most standard sized to large horses, although fine for smaller horses and foals. This is particularly important when making temporary pens as there is not generally a foot board around the circumference of the base (as in a permanent pen) where a slope can be built up allowing the horse an incline to push against whenever running at speed. The circumference measurements for a 40 ' diameter pen is  $(40 \times 3.14 \text{ PI})$  125.6 ' or 38 meters. With a post spaced every 7 ' you will need 18 posts for a 40 ' pen. The circumference measurements for a 50 ' diameter pen is  $(50 \times 3.14 \text{ PI})$  157 ' or (rounded up) 48 meters and with a post spaced every 7 ' you would need (rounded up) 23 posts for a 50 ' pen. To make the plastic posts sufficiently tall, you need a minimum of two 48 " posts for each post location on the circumference at the 7 ' spacing. The plastic ones can be taped together by having the bottom 12 " of one overlapping onto the top 12 " of the other and securely taping at three or more places along the 12 " overlap - making them 6 feet tall. Then four strands of electric tape around the circumference : one about 1 " from the top, one 12 " from the ground - then two more evenly dividing the distance between the top and bottom tape strips gives a good enclosure. This requires 152 meters of tape for 40 ' pens or 192 meters for 50 ' pens. A power supply is needed if the horse doesn't already respect electric fencing or until the horse learns to respect it, then it is generally no longer needed. You need relatively flat ground with no holes or sharp rocks, etc. If you can get wooden poles, they are available in the better lengths such as 8 ' at most fencing suppliers and if sunk one foot into the ground they work well at 7' height (you would need 4 of the screw in insulators for each wooden post to hold the wire).

**There is also a picture of one temporary round pen (specifically for tall horses , using only 3 strands) that a lady client in Bedford built.**

**Re: Permanent Round Pens:** Information on building permanent round pens can be found on my site in a section titled "Training Equipment", which gives one good explanation for these.

### ***Re: Tack applications***

**Re: Nose bands:** I have been noticing a repeated error in tack application by owners on many horses over the last few months. I do hope I haven't simply been too blind to it in the past. Nevertheless, I want to make an important point about nose bands and how they should be applied. When using a noseband, there are two specific points of

January 2010 Essex Rider Magazine  
(Winter training, tack, cues and temporary round pens)

importance: (a) do not fit them too tightly, as it can stop the horse from being able to open it's jaw when needed and (b) be sure to keep it lodged "above" (higher up the bridge of the nose) the cartilage to bone junction (located normally about "one hand" above a regular sized horses muzzle). Having it located below that junction can be painful if not only irritating and distracting to the horse. There is no worthwhile purpose to keeping it tight.

**Re: Bits:** I observe all sorts of bit application errors being made - but for this article, I would like to point out just one major error that causes much discomfort as well as claustrophobic mental anguish to horses. Far too many riders tighten / set the cheek straps on their bridles far too high which holds / fixes the bit far too high in the mouth. This prevents the horse from being able to carry the bit comfortably in the folds they normally create with their tongues and can (as it often does) cause the horse to put its tongue "over" the bit to get relief. I have corrected this error in hundreds of dressage rider bridles as well as for horses in other types of riding disciplines. In every case this relaxing of the bit improves the action and solves the tongue over bit problem. This does not leave the cheek pieces loose, as it is a trained / learned cooperation between rider and horse that creates proper tension in the reins via the riders hands & the horses use of its tongue holding the bit firm which generates a much better communication between the rider and the horses mouth / brain. This keeps the reins relatively tight but not forced to a ridiculous degree of tightness.

**Re: Cues**

Regarding cues: I have been reading a few group sites where lengthy discussions ensue regarding use of voice cues versus tactile cues. I would like to make a point that I teach all clients / students of mine. Voice and tactile cues are not exclusive from one another. I do like voice cues, especially as I like to stop horses with a gently and quiet "whoa" as I softly lift a rein to get a stop whether easy or instantly for a slide, etc. Whilst voice cues are interesting & can be very effective, as well as somewhat enjoyable to many folks in their two way communications with their horses, there is a flaw in that if it is a very windy day or a helicopter is hovering or some other outside loud noise is occurring, *voice cues can be lost in the din.* There is an easy and multi applicable solution to this problem. I advocate that all voice cues be combined with tactile / physical cues so that the horse can understand the riders intent even if not clearly hearing our voices. This will allow, even dressage, riders to better enjoy being able to speak to their horses when riding out on trail rides in order to give their horse a break in routine.

**Closing comments on winter training:** Many folks will use winter time for training their horses and it is a good time for this as it is more difficult to enjoy hacking out. Also, **ground work** is never a waste of time and effort, especially as your horse can "see" you.

**A wonderful, ancient and accurate quote I love: *Anything forced is seldom understood and can never be beautiful - by Xenophon***

**Not to forget ; I am available to come out and assist during the winter.**

*I trust this is has been useful and again I wish ya'll a  
Happy New Year!*

*Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn, [www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com](http://www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com),  
[blackieb@btconnect.com](mailto:blackieb@btconnect.com),  
01799-543711, 0771-8317654*