

Riding Perspectives:

As so many riding and training quirks typically show up at this time of year (or for that matter during any change of seasons) when temperatures, grass growth and sugar content, hormones and overall weather is changing, I am inundated with equine behavioral questions from clients & new customers, some of which I will try to cover here this month and more over the next few articles.

One main point I wish to make is that it doesn't help to worry about what can or could go wrong especially when it "does help" to think and focus on what can go right. To strengthen positive thoughts it is best to spend time learning and practicing your abilities to deal with unexpected actions by the horses. Good ways for developing confidence in being able to deal with whatever might go wrong, is to practice "redirecting your horse's energy and direction" and "riding on balls of your feet" when unexpected moves occur - so that you are not sitting when being propelled in any direction by shying, bucking rearing, etc.

The best and safest place for learning and practicing these things is by working in "horse safe" round pens then expand to a ménage before going out.

It is not unusual or irrational to feel fear in riding or dealing with horses when considering their size and strength. However, since they have such effective and sensitive E.S.P. and can feel our mental state, it is important to believe in ourselves and our ability to deal with the things that we fear such as; if the horse bolts - we must know we can deal with it; if we are tense - we know can deal with it; if we fall off - we know can deal with that as well. We may as well do this as there is no other choice if we expect to be able to ride.

Leadership Communication is important to establish before each and every ride. I consistently repeat to folks that they should establish good communication by always doing the 30 second exercise of "lateral movement to each side and reining back" prior to riding out. Make sure the horse can clearly see you during the lateral movements.

About "Horse Safe" Round Pens:

I describe how to build "horse safe" temporary and permanent round pens on my site. For now I want to clarify a few worrying points that I have seen missed lately. The pens should be at least 30 feet in diameter and 40 feet is even better. The sides need to be a minimum of 5 feet tall and 6 or 7 feet tall is much better. Wooden poles are best although the ever present and popular plastic poles can be bought in 5 foot height and of course two 4 foot poles (or one 4 foot and one 5 foot) can be put together overlapped using duct tape spaced about 10 inches between wraps or better yet bolted together at 10 inch spacing - in order to make 6 or 7 feet heights. If using electric tape - three strands are better than just two. Be sure to locate the pen on the smoothest ground available, without holes of course and it is not necessary to have specially prepared surfaces - if the pen is only used for light duty. Please do review my site instructions for more concise information and for where heavier use is expected or where permanent pens; wire fencing; pipe or wooden slats are used.

Training Perspectives:

I am often asked by customers about the causes for their horse's problems and/or bad habits, fears, phobias, etc. My response has always been the same in that it doesn't usually pay dividends worrying about the causes or reasons, whereas it does give results to focus and work on solutions. Besides, many of the problems folks must deal with

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began as one thing or another in the past and after being repeated enough times became habits so the initial reason is no longer a big factor anyway. One example is when a horse pulls on the reins, when you are simply holding light contact and not in process of issuing cues or signals. I find the best solution for solving this problem (or habit) is to allow the reins to slide through my hands so that there is no tug of war contact and as soon as the horse raises its head I spread my hands in order to instantly retrieve the slack created. If he pulls the reins again I repeat that movement and if necessary as many times needed for the horse to realize it is a waste of his time. Generally, it doesn't take many initial repetitions to cause the realization. However, you need to stay aware since horses will likely "check" to see if you fall back into the battle or tug of war at other times. If the horse doesn't raise his head as quickly as you would like (once the reins have been pulled through my hands without the fight from me) then issue impulsion cues to speed up. The horse will then get its head up more quickly in order to see where it is going.

One of the important points to keep in mind for dealing with any habit/problem and which is much more efficient - is the effectiveness of causing a horse to realize that it is wasting time and effort with it's actions. If we continue fighting or battling with them, in an effort to impose our will, it most often becomes a contest of wills or worse a game to the horse. Things then can get much worse before they get any better. It is up to you to use intelligent methods instead of brute force.

I have recently noticed and overheard some strange discussions and misunderstandings about equine chewing and licking. I would like to make a short comment on this and will say more next month if again prompted. Most (if not all) mammals generate endorphin release into their brains when they are chewing. The company "Wrigley's" in the USA made a fortune from this fact with their chewing gums. When horses lick and chew (during training as well as when simply eating) they are generating endorphin release, which tells them they are experiencing comfortable and positive effects. This is a very important thing to recognize when training and also is a factor in the banning of bit less bridles in professional racing. Dr Cook in USA proved that going bit less increased running effectiveness by as much as 10 to 12% by the removal of the eating reflex caused by non-irritating bits. Of course chromed bits generate electrolysis against the teeth and that avoids the eating reflex as well as being very uncomfortable to horses due to the nickel included in the plating. I always recommend sweet iron, copper or brass for the teeth contact portion of any bits clients use for their horses.

Closing reminders:

A good training adage is "When you give a lesson in meanness to a horse (or other critter or even a person) you should not be surprised if they learn the lesson".

A horse will always know the truth about who we are and will generally respond in kind to how we treat them. Your true point of view can go a long way in support of your Firm but Benevolent Leadership position in your herd of two.

Good judgment comes from experience and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.

Ride safely and I hope this has been helpful for most of ya'll.

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