

Springtime Awareness

As springtime is upon us, you will likely have noticed the changes in attitudes of the horses. Much more rowdy as well as more difficulty in keeping them focused in general.

One important SAFETY point for mounting up: The point I am about to make is important at any time of the year, however in springtime it is even more so. Before stepping up into the saddle, be sure you have your horses' head turned laterally around toward you and hold that rein fixed on your saddle until you are safely seated with both feet in the stirrups before letting it go. This will assure that, as you mount, if anything should cause your horse to become startled - the direction of movement will be limited to circling around in a circle - toward your side ! This would keep centrifugal force in your favor. If you hold both reins evenly and leave his head facing ahead he can leap forward, or worse - run a distance forward whilst you are dangling with your weight in only one stirrup. This can cause / allow the saddle to begin slipping as he exhales in stride and you will be in dire circumstances to say the least. Not much better would be him turning away from you at speed and throwing you backward onto the ground or if you manage to hang on you could be run against anything stationary and be knocked off. Therefore, it is an easy safety measure to bend your horse laterally toward you and fix your inside rein hand as described above.

Dissuading bucking : Springtime rambunctious bucking can be dealt with effectively via rein cues for turning, as horses cannot bend in the rib area and it will generate discomfort as they begin turning whilst bucking. This will end the session relatively quickly. To further explain - every time the head comes up in preparation for throwing it back down to achieve the weight shift needed for the next buck, simply throw your hand and the rein up and out to the side with a quick pressure release to give a cue for a turn. Once his head turns slightly you can pull him around using firm pressure release movements. This is even easier when they are standing on the front feet and have the back feet off the ground.

Recent Re-trimming effort example:

This is further to the story I began in my February article regarding poor trimming and the correction for the New Market Quarter Horse that runs naturally barefoot. He is already 80% recovered from the foot ailments which were caused by the poor trimming. However, he had developed a stifle ailment from the poor imbalance caused by the months of poor trimming. This is currently being effectively dealt with via shiatsu therapy and he is recovering steadily. Lastly, the thrush which had developed from the overgrown frog area is now completely gone and his hoof base and wall are both much improved.

Training tool tip: An excellent tool for training is a simple happy mouth plastic, chewable straight bit (D ring or simple round ring). By using such a bit when training horses, it will enable them to relieve stress, by chewing, as well as generate endorphin flows in their brain. That tells them that whatever is happening is a good thing and lessons are much more likely to be retained quickly and permanently.

More on Lunging: Expanding on my Feb. article lunging comment - Lunging can be an effective tool in improving cues and developing better two way communication with horses or it can become a pressurizing and problematic - negative activity. Lunging should be used to produce good communications between us and our horses as well as to loosen & warm their joints a bit. It should not be used to run them around in multiple circles, at various speeds in an attempt to tire them. They recover from this ill-conceived tiring method within only a short while in any case. Effective lunging (whether straight line lunging or in circles) generally only requires a short period of work. It is VERY important to apply pressure from the girth area forward and no farther back as otherwise they cannot see (with their peripheral vision) what is happening and it only serves to increase unnecessary stress. Using a whip is optional (so long as no body contact is made) only if the pressure is always placed at or in front of the girth area so it stays visible. You should quickly see that the whip becomes completely unnecessary as your hand or the end of the rope dangling and wiggling is more than sufficient when it is visible to the horse.

Closing Safety Reminders:

As the weather continues to improve and we begin to ride out again (with our horses holding in so much pent up energy), do not forget to execute the "leadership exercises" that I continually badger folks to practice via my articles as well in sessions. The use of the direct and indirect single rein control (which takes only seconds) indicates to the horse that you do have control over their feet and direction. Even more importantly, if you cannot get them to turn well laterally you will be warned / reminded to STOP and work on the lateral movements before hacking out and putting yourself at unnecessary risk. This simple exercise is an often unused / overlooked option that can be most valuable to your safety and your horses peace of mind with your capability as the leader.

Lastly, remember that if all else fails Get out of the stirrups and Bail Out. Keeping as much control of the exit as possible. It is advisable to learn how to safely bail out, including over the rear end. Do not blithely believe it will never happen or be needed. Always know and admit in your own mind when your ability to control has been exceeded.

Ya'll ride safely and I hope this information has been helpful.

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