

Howdy Folks, this month I have listed a few pointers needing attention recently that are important for ya'll to keep in focus whenever training as well as when riding your horses. These are some of the more prominent points that have come up client / horse training sessions over recent months. I plan to expand information on these and others in following articles.

Round Pen Values: "the value of round pens should never be overlooked".

Horses place immense importance on their ability to move, control and use their feet, freely. To be able to escape danger, real or imagined, minor or major, they have evolved their ability to repeatedly run hundreds of yards, often from a dead stop, without much if any pragmatic thought and casually return to their starting point without becoming neurotic - as we humans would surely become if we acted that way. To them they simply expel built up stress. A round pen allows them to run continuously for as long as they need in order to believe that they are safe. Having no corners to impede progress round pens are extremely efficient. Their perspective is much different than ours and is much to our advantage when we use a round pen for training, whether from the ground from the saddle. A horse feels free to run and we are able to keep them moving for as long and at whatever pace we deem necessary for training purposes. We are also able to "turn" them at will giving them a view that we can control their movement in a non confrontive manner.

Training Perspectives:

Never forget that you are "Always Training" when around a horse : Not only do horses learn faster than we do, but whenever we are around our horses, whether riding or not, we are training our horses. If we are not aware of that fact, we may be training them to act in ways we do not desire.

Avoid "Overly Aggressive" methods : Use of overly aggressive action, whether riding, training, leading or loading, only serves to trigger their prey animal or right brained instincts rather than eliciting the desired pragmatic or left brain thinking capabilities. Thereby blocking / defeating real training/ learning.

Importance of "Consistency of Leadership" : I wish to remind folks about what can happen if you do not continue with firm but benevolent leadership and communication exercises regularly. This applies to both ground work as well as saddle work. Horses, in their own world and without our presence, tend to "try things out" on one another often and for most of their lives in order to make sure "who is who" in the pecking orders. They will do the same thing with us periodically. Therefore, if you don't continue reminding them by applying the leadership exercises I advocate (in appropriate degrees from time to time), you will begin to lose their respect and problems will surely ensue.

When riding circles don't always stay on correct lead : Typically in inclement weather we do more ménage riding. Any horse needs to learn to be more ambidextrous for better balance whilst carrying our weight. A horse needs this to better maintain balance in awkward or difficult circumstances. Therefore, periodically use a counter canter. Try not to blithely ride on one lead all the time.

Time to absorb : When training horses we must allow sufficient time for them to absorb each segment of a lesson before going on to the next. Lessons should be broken down into small segments in order to make it easier to focus on and absorb. One of the clear signs of their absorption is *licking and chewing - which generates endorphin flow in the brain and feelings of comfort.*

Fast learners: Horses generally learn very much faster than we do, however they do not learn in as intricate a fashion or in large input amounts as we can without becoming confused. Therefore, we need to break their lessons down into easily understood portions and sequences. As they quickly learn the individual sections, it doesn't take as long as one might expect. "Feed them small bytes".

Riding Perspectives :

Looking down at the foreleg when asking for a specific lead : Instead, look where you are going at all times and keep your weight centered in the saddle.

Holding the reins too tight when asking for departures : Remember to always allow sufficiently loose reins when asking for an increase of speed, whether this is into a faster walk, trot or even a canter / lope or gallop.

Leaning too far forward into a lead departure or change : When you lean forward, you add weight to the shoulders of the horse making it more difficult and uncomfortable for him to carry and lift. You are making it much more difficult for him to want to follow your cues and successfully execute a departure or change in lead. By adding your weight this way, you likely will cause him to speed up in trying to keep his balance when executing your request. Therefore, sit up centered and only very slightly leaning forward (near imperceptibly). Stay centered with your weight. Your legs and pelvis position will then keep you in better position which helps you to remain in better control of your balance in case of any sudden variance.

Using too much leg : Some riders use too much leg pressure (sometimes too sudden as well) – not trusting their horse to understand their cues. Instead of asking more softly and less frantically, they ask "hard" right from the get go - which can startle the horse and cause a whole passel of other problems. So be sure to use not overly firm but clear leg, heel or spur cues. Also avoid nagging, which is a form of impatience and can indicate to your horse that you are not listening to his replies to your cues.

Asking for a particular lead when the rear / driving foot is in the wrong position : Often riders ask for a change of lead (even specific departure leads) when it is not physically possible for the horse to do what it is asked in a timely fashion, only then to be reprimanded when it gets it wrong. Sadly, as in fact it is the riders fault. Be sure to ask for changes of lead when it is physically possible for your horse to accomplish what you are asking. Learn how to recognize the positions of the horse's feet & legs and when to ask for a change of gait, lead or anything you wish him to accomplish. There is more than one way to recognize correct footfalls, some simple and some more complicated. It is not effective to add more cues, putting pressure on your horse to correctly execute a change of lead when its feet are not in the correct position to allow a good response. It is only more frustrating for you both.

Closing Reminders :

Good lunging should be brief and requires placing pressure for impulsion **no farther back than the girth.** By using a series or multiple of cues for transitions and changing direction lunging becomes more interesting as well.

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

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