

Wishing everyone a very Happy New Year!

Lunge Training Advice

I often assist folks who are having problems with lunging that does not take into account the horse's viewpoint and understanding. I did a lunging work solution demo, for an audience of 60 students at a well-known equine college in Essex last year, on a group of former racing horses to prove the effectiveness of the following advice.

In keeping with my last article, written in December 2011, concerning the vision limitations - we need to stay aware of this difference in their visual perceptions and apply our training with it in mind. Also keeping in mind that pressure is not only applied via our use of equipment (ropes, whips, etc.) but just as well by our body language and our eye focusing points on their body.

Applying impulsion pressure from behind the heart girth line of a horse (and especially from the rear as an extreme) is a very negative method of trying to lunge, as it is ignoring the viewpoint of the horse. In so doing, they are not able to see clearly, what we are doing when we apply pressure via a whip or rope from that position and we exacerbate their flight response instinct. They end up using their instincts rather than their pragmatic brains. They end up running away from pressure rather than learning from our cues, as they should be doing. *This visual advice is similar to my December 2011 issue explanations that I gave for various benefits of using round pens for initial foundation training.*

Pressure should be applied no farther back than the heart girth (cinch) area. Application toward the nose, eyes, and neck and shoulder areas is also very effective. In these areas, the horse can “see” our intent/application of pressure and learn many subtle responses. Applying pressure, so that it is visible to the horse, allows the horse to move and learn our cues whilst using its pragmatic brain rather than its instinctive brain. Application of pressure farther back than these points is outside their vision span (unless they have turned their heads of course) and they tend to operate in their escape instinct mentality sorely limiting their understanding and learning.

Although there can be times when putting pressure on the hind quarters is appropriate, especially for our safety in emergencies, lunging for training is not generally one of those times.

For lunging work as well as all training, I favor using a single marine grade nylon, braid on braid, **12mm, 22' line** which has a very good transmission of feel with only small movements whilst retaining sufficient weight to stay in contact on a relatively loose line. I also hand make and advocate the use (with all horses, including the many stallions that I deal with on a regular

basis) of **simple rope halters** made of **6mm or 8mm**, marine grade, braid on braid, nylon rope in the typical, 4000 year old, Mongolian invented style and not a pressure halter of any type.

In lunging, there is another very useful tactile cue that you can include with your verbal cues. I call it a "**Waggle**" and it is effective to use with lunging as well as ground driving aka long reining. It is also a very effective and important cue to use when requiring space between you and your horse, whenever you might need it - for any reason. This cue is taught relatively quickly as a part of the "**Basic Leadership Exercise**" that I advise all my clients to use on a daily basis with their horses. These exercises (which include the waggle) take less than a minute to accomplish from the ground and are the same exercise that should be used from the saddle by riders each and every time they mount up with the exception of omitting the "waggle" portion.

This "**Basic Leadership Exercise with its Waggle**" movement is more fully explained in my previous July 2011 article. The waggle portion is explained in **The Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Movements**. Briefly it is a sine wave of a width /span of approximately 12" to 18" and consists of using a side-to-side cue, shaped as a horizontal "Sine Wave" waggling motion. This motion allows the horse to be able to see it with its monocular vision without having to turn its head. You can also use your voice and tell them to "whoa". This waggle movement helps you stipulate / teaches your personal space requirements. Once the cue is learned, it can be used on a lunge line to communicate slowing between gaits and with consistency - stopping.

Closing Reminders:

1. Remember to stay at least a half step ahead of your horse in order to be able to effect redirection of energy more easily. This applies to lunging work, all other ground work and riding as well.
2. If you do not want your horse to become numb to your foot cues (or any other cues for that matter), it is important not to nag them with repeated cues once they have given a response or at least given an honest attempt to comply.
3. If your horse does not think you are listening to his / her responses to your cues, there will be much less motivation for cooperation. Therefore, be sure to release any pressures, whether for riding or ground working cues once a response is made by your horse. You can later refine responses, once he / she is in better communication with you.

Ya'll ride safely and Aware.

Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn,

www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com,
blackieb@btconnect.com, 01799-543711, 0771-8317654