

Training for Endurance – Part 3

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Last month we discussed two simple exercises that help gain your horse's respect and teach him where he is supposed to be under lead. Assuming that we now have his attention and that he will walk calmly on your shoulder in a straight line, stopping and backing up when you stop, let's expand that to include turns left and right.

Exercise 1

1. Walk off with the horse on your right shoulder, lead line in your right hand with a little slack. Turn the dressage whip around with the butt end toward the horse.



2. Make a wide, slow turn to the right toward the horse, poking him high on the neck with the butt end of the whip to get him to move away from you as you make the turn.
3. Make the turn tighter and tighter until the horse is effectively turning in a tight circle, then walk off in a straight line for a short distance before going back to the tight circle.
4. Work on this till the horse will move readily away from you as you move toward him in a tight turn without encouragement from the whip. If he gets ahead of you, tap him on the front legs with the whip to remind him to keep his head even with your shoulder.
5. Switch sides and teach him to turn to the left.

Exercise 2

1. Stand facing your horse slightly to his left with the lead line in your left hand and the dressage whip in your right hand.



2. Tip his nose toward you slightly with a little lead line pressure and at the same time, tap him high on the right hip with the whip. Keep tapping until he moves his hip over. He may take multiple steps, but

that's OK. Ideally, we would like him to take one step under with his left rear foot, then square up with the right one. However, if he moves his right foot first, that's OK.

3. Work on this until he will move his hip over every time you raise the whip without tapping him. The objective is to get him to take one step over when you tip his nose toward you and just raise your arm without the whip.
4. Once he readily moves his hip over, you will notice that he begins to anticipate the step over when you tip his nose toward you.
5. Go back to the leading position with the horse on your right shoulder. Walk off and then make a slow turn to the left, tipping his nose gently toward you with the lead and encouraging him to swing his butt away from you by reaching around behind you toward the hip "cue spot" with the whip.
6. Make the turn tighter and tighter until again the horse is turning in a tight circle without pressure on the lead line, then walk off and repeat the turn.
7. Switch sides and teach him to move the other hip over.

Practice both of these exercises every time you lead your horse. In addition to teaching the horse to lead and stay on your shoulder when you turn, we have taught him how to let you position his body if he is just standing still. If you tip his nose toward you and just think "move your hip over" by looking at the hip cue spot, he will move his butt away from you. (Try it...a horse can read the most subtle cues) If you push his head away from you and think "move your shoulder over" he will move his shoulder away from you. If you move toward him from in front with the proper "attitude", he will step back. Assuming the "lead position" and taking a step will cue him to move forward. (The "chin leading" described below is a better way) Again a reminder that this training should be accomplished with many small lessons over a long period of time.

This is also the first step in teaching your horse to ground tie and to stand quietly, with or without restraint. Whenever you are working or just hanging out around your horse, halter him, drop the lead line on the ground and "park him" somewhere while you are working close by. If he moves his feet, walk over and put him back...don't get physical or vocal, just reposition him exactly where he was and walk away again. Be patient. For example, when I'm sweeping the barn, or cleaning a stall, or working on something in the barn, I park Magic in the hallway. It teaches him (and me) patience. Initially, you might want to do this in a small confined area, such as a barn, small paddock, or round pen. With Magic, I just closed the barn doors...the most he could do was wander around the barn. When I bought him two years ago, he was a bundle of energy...couldn't stand still for 5 seconds tied, much less unrestrained. Now, he stands without restraint in the hallway for grooming and saddling and on the wash rack for his bath. This is very useful training for vet checks. You don't ever need to tie your horse. Just park him in front of his food and water, drop one rein on the ground, and enjoy your break. Ground tying also comes in handy when you're clearing trail.



Controlling Head Position

It's interesting to watch how people interact with their horse. Have you ever seen someone stand on a stepladder in order to trim their horse's bridal path and ears? Or trying to bathe their horse's head when he's imitating a giraffe? This is not only unnecessary, but also dangerous. It's important to teach your horse to allow you to control his head, both from the ground and from the saddle. We want to be able to position his head anywhere we want it and have him leave it there. The objective is again a "give to pressure", this time on the poll, and you should teach it two ways.

Hand Pressure on the Poll

1. With a halter in place, stand beside your horse's head facing him and place your hand on his head between his ears.
2. Apply light pressure...just a little more than the weight of your hand.
3. The horse will tire of the pressure and start trying things to relieve it. Continue the light pressure until the horse moves his head downward, even slightly. Keep your hand still and let the horse's head move away from your hand. If he raises his head, continue the same light pressure, but remove it when he drops his head from the elevated position.
4. Wait a few seconds then repeat until the horse will drop his head immediately on poll pressure. Work on getting him to drop his head and leave it where you put it. If you release the pressure and he raises his head, ask him to put it back down. He will eventually just leave it there, even with his nose almost touching the ground.



Halter Pressure on the Poll

1. Before teaching this, you must first teach the horse to drop his head on poll pressure as described above.
2. With a halter in place, stand in front of your horse facing him and place one hand on his head between his ears. With the other, grip the snap on the lead line right where it attaches to the halter.
3. Apply gentle pressure downward on the halter followed by poll pressure to get the horse to drop his head.
4. Eventually the horse will recognize that pulling down on the halter is the same as hand pressure on the poll and will drop his head readily with either cue.



Giving to poll pressure from the halter, by association, teaches your horse several other useful things:

1. Have you ever had your horse step on your reins, jerk his head up and break your reins or bridle? If you have taught the horse to drop his head on poll pressure from the halter, he will DROP his head instead of raising it when he feels the pull on his poll from stepping on the reins.
2. If you ever get dumped off and your horse starts to walk away and steps on the reins, he will stop.
3. It helps with a "pulling back" problem when tied.
4. It simplifies giving wormers and electrolytes.
5. It's useful as a "calm down" when your horse spooks under lead.

One other beneficial thing to teach is "chin leading". By "chin leading", we mean being able to lead your horse with just the light pressure of your palm on the offside cheekbone. I have found this to be one of the most useful things I have ever taught my horses. Let's say you need to move your horse a short distance from Point A to Point B. For example, taking him from his stall to the paddock or from one pasture to

another. Have you ever had your horse escape and everybody running around trying to catch him using belts or anything else they can find for restraint? Here's how you teach "chin leading".

Chin Leading

NOTE: This technique assumes that your horse readily performs all the other techniques described so far.

1. Stand on the left side (right side if you're left handed) of your horse in the normal leading position, with his head even with your shoulder.
2. You can do this with or without the halter. If you teach it in a confined space, like a stall or round pen, then you don't need the halter.
3. With the lead line in the off hand, reach under the horse's chin with your near hand and lay your fingers lightly on his cheekbone just above the curve. Apply pressure forward, step off and "kiss" to get him to move forward. Try to apply the pressure FORWARD, not upward. Most of the time, he will easily figure out what you want. If the horse raises his head and his feet are "stuck", then turn slightly toward him, place your other hand on his poll to get him to drop his head. With one hand under his chin and the other on his poll, push him around in a circle AWAY from you. Make the circle larger and larger until you can remove the poll pressure and he will walk along with you using only the hand under the chin to guide him.
4. Make turns toward you by just pulling him around by the chin, again starting with small circles.
5. If you want him to back up, place your other hand on his nose and apply gentle pressure till he backs up.



Keep in mind that your horse can leave anytime he chooses, so don't use this method of leading in an unsafe situation except in an emergency.

Next month: Teaching "Come to me".