

Training for Endurance – Part 8

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In Article 3, we taught the horse to drop his head on poll and lead line pressure. To the horse, this is a “calm down” head position as well as a “submissive” action. Article 3 also discussed methods to teach “ground tying” and later we introduced the use of the “WAIT” command which says “park your feet”. These exercises teach the horse patience and to be “polite” at all times.

PRACTICING FOR VET CHECKS

It is important to prepare your horse physically and emotionally for what he will experience at Endurance ride vet checks. We have already accomplished some of that as part of ground manners training. However, your horse will be expected to not only stand quietly under lead, but to do so while being poked and prodded all over by veterinarians and P/R staff. In addition, his recovery to pulse criteria will be much quicker if he is calm and relaxed. We can cue a horse to relax by creating an “environment” that he associates with pleasure and relaxation.

Grooming is an important part of the equine social environment and is the best way to accustom the horse to being handled. It’s very common to see horses standing around grooming each other. Horses have “good spots” that they like scratched and quickly learn to enjoy the human touch. You will hear big sighs, drooping lower lips, a lowered head, and even neck stretching when the horse is being groomed. You should do it often (daily, if possible) and note what actions are most pleasurable. Sunny doesn’t like being groomed with a stiff brush. Magic would enjoy being groomed with a yard rake! Magic will twist his head around and “point out” a spot he wants scratched and both horses will tell me about a fly in a spot they can’t reach, even under saddle. Grooming gives you the opportunity to bond with your horse, build trust and accustom him to being handled anywhere on his body. If the grooming procedure includes all the things he sees in vet checks, he will relax and accept the handling as just another “grooming session”.

You may find that there are areas of your horse’s body that he doesn’t like you to handle. If this is the case, spend more time grooming him there. However, don’t create a confrontation over it unless he becomes aggressive. For example, if he doesn’t like you to play with his ears touch his ears briefly and move on before he reacts. Groom elsewhere, and then come back to the ears again. Be patient and give him time to deal with it, but be persistent. The same can be said of other “stuff”. If he doesn’t like raincoats, then “Mr. Raincoat” should visit every night at dinner! If he doesn’t like spray bottles, he gets sprayed every day...even if it’s only with water. Avoiding an “issue” with your horse only leads to other “issues”.



Sunny is enjoying the scratching of an “itchy spot” under his tummy.

During grooming, some horses will attempt to groom you in return and you should decide if you wish to allow this. Be aware that horses sometimes use their teeth and you can end up with a cut, scratch, or even a bite. I have taught Sunny and Magic to NEVER open their mouths, so I allow lip grooming as long as they don't get too enthusiastic.



Joan is scratching Magic's back and he is scratching her back in return.

Horses will also rub on just about anything, including you. This can be very annoying and dangerous. It creates a problem in Vet checks if the Vet is trying to examine him while he is rubbing on you...and even more of a problem if he rubs on the Vet! If a horse whacks you under the chin with his head, it can result in serious injury. There are two ways to deal with this. When I trained Sunny I never allowed him to rub on me with his head in any form or fashion. With Magic, I allow him to rub his head on my HANDS only and taught him that a "WAIT" with either of my hands on his nose means to stop rubbing and keep his head still. The easiest way and probably the best for most people is to NEVER allow rubbing.



Magic is rubbing on my hands, not my body



Placing my hand on his nose, saying "WAIT" and giving a light squeeze means "stop rubbing".

Start each grooming session by brushing the coat, mane, and tail while feeling for any spots of “rain rot”, cuts, scabs, etc. When you brush his head, peel back his lips and press on his gums on both sides. Stick your finger in the bit path. When he becomes accustomed to this, inject a small amount of applesauce or honey with a syringe to get him used to this procedure. (Worming and electrolytes are a necessity)

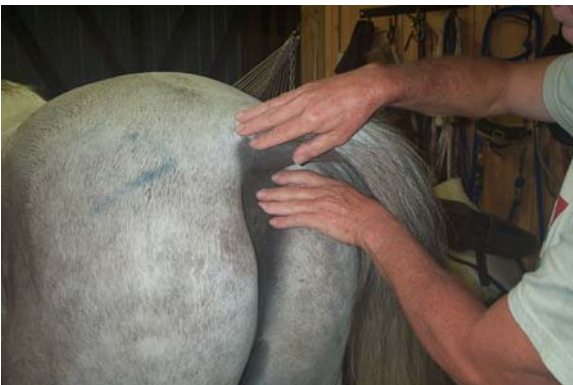


Use an old terrycloth towel wrapped around your index finger to clean the inside of his ears. Start with just the outer ear first, then gradually increase the depth. Eventually, you should be able to clean as deep as you can reach. Buildup of bug bite scabs and other debris can result in head shaking problems and ear sensitivity. It is a good practice to clip only the protruding hair, leaving the inner hair as protection. A LIGHT coat of SWAT™ cream on the ear hairs will keep bugs out. Always insist that he drop his head for any activity around his head and mane.



Slide your hands down all four legs and massage them gently, feeling for abnormalities, bumps, injuries, etc. Most horses will relax and drop their head when you do this. Feel behind his pasterns for any indication of dermatitis (“Scratches”).

Feel along his belly line all the way to between his back legs. Scrape away any accumulation of crud around the sheath/bag. You will need to be able to sponge and clean under here. If the horse objects to this, be gentle but persistent, until he accepts this as normal. In the summer, you may wish to apply some SWAT™ cream deter bug bites.



Scratch around the dock and under his tail. He will enjoy this and raise his tail in pleasure. When he does, palpate his anus and all around under his tail. If you have a rectal thermometer, practice with it or just use a rubber glove and your finger.



Put one thumb under his tail on both sides and push against his dock to simulate the pressure of a crupper. Grip his tail and gently lean back to simulate the pull of “tailing”. (Teaching your horse to “Tail” will be the subject of a future article)



Start at the withers and gently palpate along his spine with both hands all the way to his hips. Vets use this technique to check for back soreness. Some Vets are more “aggressive” than others and some horse’s backs are more sensitive, so practice here can prevent reactions to this palpation other than those due to pain.



Pick up all four feet. You should not have to pinch a tendon. Just sliding your hand down his leg and light pressure on the cannon bone or pastern as you bend over should result in him picking up the foot for you. Teach him to pick up the foot on the off side. This makes it easy to check his feet for rocks, missing shoes, etc. without having to walk all the way around the horse.

PRACTICING FOR THE FARRIER

It is not your farrier's responsibility to teach your horse to stand quietly for shoeing or to have his feet trimmed. The easier it is to shoe your horse, the easier it is to find and keep a good farrier. A visit by the farrier should not be a traumatic experience for your horse. The easiest way to teach this is to include it as part of the grooming procedure. Every time you groom your horse, go through the same procedures that the farrier will use. If your farrier does not shoe in the area where you normally groom, make a point of grooming in that area frequently and emphasize handling his feet. Use “props” to simulate the environment used by the farrier.

- A small metal stool will simulate the farrier’s workbox. Leave it close by and “kick it around” during your grooming.
- A 5 gallon bucket with a lid filled with sand will simulate a hoof stand.
- A forced air kerosene heater sounds just like a farrier’s forge.
- A hair dryer makes a good blower.
- Keep a hammer around and rap on each foot when you pick it up to clean it.
- Accustom your horse to the sound of drills, grinders, and other tools.

When you clean your horse’s feet, do it in the same way the farrier would do it when shoeing. Hold the front foot between your knees. Lay the back foot over your near knee and hold it fairly high to get him used to having his hip stretched and learn to balance his body in this position. For a young horse, do this at the BEGINNING of the grooming session and again at the END of the grooming session. Gradually

increase the time you hold the foot up until he will do it easily for at LEAST a minute. He should be VERY comfortable with this by the time your farrier shoes him the first time, since this is a necessity for any maintenance on his feet. Discourage him from “noodling” on you while you have his front feet up.



Magic is relaxed and has spread his front feet for better balance while his hind is up.

Sunny is leaving his foot on the foot stand where it was placed without moving.

The horse must also be comfortable standing with a foot on a hoof stand without the farrier having to hold it there. This is just practice and repetition and is not uncomfortable for the horse.

When it's time to shoe your horse for the first time, bring your horse out and start a “normal” grooming session while your farrier sets up. Continue to leisurely groom and scratch the “good spots” as the shoeing operation continues. Although the horse may see some “new” stuff here, it's basically a familiar routine and shoeing “behavior” never becomes an issue since it is part of a pleasurable experience. Afterwards, it's a good practice to ask your farrier what areas of your horse's behavior need work.

Losing shoes is always a problem in Endurance. There are many riders (including me) that can put a shoe back on for you. We usually have the basic tools, but seldom have the capability to shape a new shoe, assuming we have one of the correct size. It's a good practice to keep a set of old shoes that are not too badly worn in your vet bag or trailer in case you lose a shoe and no farrier is available.

HOW TO KEEP A GOOD FARRIER

1. Either confine your horse in a small area or be there to catch him for your farrier. Don't expect your farrier to round him up from the “north forty”.
2. If it's raining, confine your horse to a stall, barn, run-in shed, or even your trailer so he will be dry and clean when your farrier arrives to shoe him.
3. If you can't be there, leave a halter out with a note attached listing any items of importance.
4. Provide a smooth, clean, level, clutter free, and well lighted area for your farrier to work and a trash can. Shavings on the floor make it difficult to see the horse's feet.
5. Spray your horse for flies to reduce stomping and moving around. (If you're not there, leave fly spray with the note and halter)

6. Provide a 5 gallon bucket of water and/or access to a hose or faucet. A clean towel, soap, and a cold drink are usually appreciated.
7. If shoeing on a concrete floor, provide a broom and dustpan. Most farriers will clean up after shoeing, collecting old nails and cut off nails with a magnet.
8. Do not give the horse treats during shoeing. This is distracting to the horse and may cause him to move around. Treats and a scratch afterward are acceptable and a reward for good behavior.
9. Be aware that your farrier works much like a Doctor or Veterinarian. There are always situations that come up which may delay his arrival, especially if your appointment is late in the day.
10. If you are on a shoeing schedule (Every 6 weeks, for example) call him a couple of days before the shoeing date to confirm. Don't wait for him to call you. Six weeks is a long time and emergencies sometimes come up which may take precedence over your shoeing schedule.
11. If you have an emergency that requires immediate attention, (You're leaving tomorrow for a ride) call your farrier and offer to trailer your horse to him at a location where he is shoeing.
12. Pay your bills promptly. If you can't be there, leave him a check.

Shoeing for Endurance requires a highly skilled farrier. The miles take their toll. Specialized shoes, pads, clips, etc. are common. A good farrier is proud of his work and enjoys working with a knowledgeable, considerate owner and a well behaved horse. He enjoys sharing in your accomplishments and contributing to your success. Conversely, a farrier does not enjoy being kicked or bitten, and may decline to shoe a horse that he considers dangerous. An untrained and unruly horse can change a simple one hour shoeing into a 4 hour confrontation, and can result in injury to you, your horse, or the farrier. If you have such a horse, consider having your Veterinarian sedate the horse for farrier work until you can correct his behavior. Your farrier is much more likely to show up promptly, work with you on special problems, and consider your suggestions when you have an easy horse to shoe, are appreciative of his skills, and considerate of his time.



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