

Moving Horses

Our topics for this week are:

- Leading horses
- Longeing horses
- Using long lines
- Mechanical hot walkers
- Moving groups of horses while horseback

Leading

Leading horses is good mild exercise for horses, especially if done to cool off after strenuous exercise. Leading manners can be ingrained during this exercise. Mechanical walkers are boring and do not provide the opportunity to ingrain proper manners when being led.

Horses are traditionally led on the handler's right side, but there are exceptions. When leading horses around people or horse-scary objects, the handler should stand or walk on the side that puts the handler between the horse and the people or object. Leading a horse with a long lead and the horse behind the handler can allow a spooked horse to step or jump onto the handler. If the horse invades the handler's personal space, it should be calmly pushed over with the handler's right elbow. Yelling, staring at, or otherwise appearing annoyed with the horse will make the handler appear as an aggressive threat, opposed to just making the horse uncomfortable with a timely, assertive elbow.

The lead rope should be held about 1 to 2 ft from the halter with the right hand when leading on the near (left) side of the horse. The remainder of the lead should be folded back and forth like an accordion in the left hand. It should never be looped around the hand or arm. The halter should not be held without a lead line.

A halter broke horse should move forward, turn, and stop when the handler does. If it does not, the handler should not face it and attempt to pull it forward. Without facing the horse, the handler should pull it to the side or in a circle around the handler to get the horse's feet moving, then guide it to walk forward. A handler can also stand near a fence or wall and use a whip in the left hand to wave toward the horse's rump when he balks. Alternatively, an assistant can raise their arms or a broom when needed while staying out of kick danger range.

Backing a horse with lead rope can be difficult. On their own, horses do very little backing up. Handlers should never stand directly in front of a horse and attempt to get it to back up due to the risk of being struck with a front hoof or getting run over.

If leading a horse on a steep grade, the handler should always stay on the uphill side. If the horse spooks or resists, it could knock the handler down the slope or fall onto the handler.

Tying a lead rope to a rope halter with a double sheet bend is safer than using a snap. A metal snap is the weakest part of a lead rope and it can bump the horse's jaw.

Horses trained for western riding should be able to be led by bridle reins regardless of the type of bit used. Horses routinely ridden with an English bridle with two sets of reins and bits should be led only by the snaffle bit reins. The curb bit reins should be left on the neck and tucked under a run up stirrup strap.

A handler should never lead more than one horse if going through a door or gate. The door or gate must be completely open and fixed in a way that it will not swing while the handler or the horse passes through. The handler should go through before the horse and not permit the horse to crowd him. The horse should be backed up, if needed, to protect the handler's personal space. The handler must look forward and proceed with confidence so that the horse will follow. If the handler turns toward the horse or look directly at the horse, it will not follow.

A horse should be held by a halter and lead rope, not tied, whenever potentially painful or horse-scary procedures will be done. The person holding a lead rope should nearly always remain on the same side as the person (veterinarian, farrier, etc.) working with the horse so if the horse jumps or shies, it moves to the side away from both handlers. The only exception to staying on the same side is when assisting someone who is working on the head or neck and sometimes a front leg, the restraining assistant will need to stand on the opposite side of the horse to prevent crowding and obstructing the other handler.

Difficult to lead horses should be properly trained or retrained to be led in a respectful way. When time does not permit retraining before it must be led, a chain shank may be needed rather than a lead rope to provide additional control. ***Chain lead shanks*** should be used only when necessary and sparingly or its effectiveness is lost. A horse should never be tied with a chain shank under its jaw, over its nose, or in its mouth.

A chain shank can be run through the left noseband ring, over the nose and out the right noseband ring and clipped back to itself. This method causes only mild discomfort since it does not constrict on the nose, as do the other methods. Continuous pressure should not be applied with a chain shank since this will numb the tissue and the shank will become less effective.

A better means of control is run the chain through the left noseband ring, then over the nose and through the right noseband ring and clip to the right cheek ring. This method is commonly used in leading stallions and young race horses. Pressure on the chain encourages the horse to drop its nose and flex its neck.

Additional control is gained by the chain being run through the left noseband ring, under the jaw, through the right noseband ring, and clipped on the right cheek ring. Clipping to the right noseband ring should not be done as it will twist the halter to the left when the lead is pulled on. Placement of the chain under the jaw may encourage desired forward movement in sluggish horses or raising of the head if shown in halter classes. However, this method makes the horse throw its head up, and it is not recommended for saddle horses because it can create a dangerous reaction when the horse is bridled with a chin strap or curb chain. When the strap or chain puts pressure on the lower jaw, the horse may rear or throw its head injuring a rider.

The most severe use of a chain shank is placing the chain in the horse's mouth, under the upper lip, and on the gums above the upper incisor teeth. This method, called a gum chain, is often used in the horse racing industry on stallions, but this should be a last resort when normally handling horses as it violates the rule of using the least pressure possible to get the desired result. There is no stepwise correction for correcting a horse misbehaving when using a gum chain. This method does permit a handler to control a horse while having another hand free to complete an examination or treatment procedure. Gum chains require constant pressure to stay in place.

A chain shank should never be run through the halter tie ring and then snapped back to itself. A loop can be formed that the horse can catch on posts or other objects. If the horse lowers his head, he could step through the loop and trap his head down causing a violent effort to get free.

A loop of rope around the poll and through the mouth above the upper lip works like a lip chain. This is one form of crude head control referred to as a “war bridle.” There are other rope restraints of the head or mouth in horses called war bridles.

A *Chifney bit* (invented by a jockey, Samuel Chifney), also called a round bit or anti-rearing bit, is a restraint device for difficult to control horses. It typically has a straight portion that goes in the horses’ mouth as a bit. The circular part goes over the horse’s lower jaw and has 3 rings. The side rings are attached to the halter or a headstall with clips. The middle ring is an attachment for the lead rope clip. A down pull with the lead rope will put pressure on the roof of the mouth as well as the tongue.

Leather halters designed for use on stallions during breeding or undisciplined horses are made of thicker leather and have round rings for use with a chain shank. The increased weight of the halter is a signal for the stallion in preparation for breeding. Lead ropes should be longer for handling stallions in case they try to rear and the handler needs to move further away. Stallions should not be led closer to 20 ft from other horses.

Foals that have not been trained to lead should be moved by following its mare that is led. A halter and lead rope assisted by a rope loop over the foal’s rump can be tried if the mare is not available to be led. A handler should never stand in front of a foal and pull on a lead rope. The foal may balk and then jump forward into the handler.

Longeing

Longeing (from Latin *longa* meaning “to lengthen”) is often spelled phonetically and informally as lungeing or lunging. Lunging is the preferred term in the British Isles.

Longeing is an exercise that helps a horse stretch out and expend initial excess energy (“freshness”) before riding or working with the horse. Longeing a horse aids in training in response to handler body language and voice commands. Other reasons for longeing include examination for lameness and mild exercise. Longeing should not be used to physically exhaust the horse. Splint boots, brushing boots, or leg wraps should be used on horses when they are longed to protect their legs during sudden turns.

Longeing can be done as free longeing in a round pen, or long line longeing on a 25-30 ft lead line. Short lines of 16 ft are safer for either handlers or horses that do not have much experience in longeing. Longeing should not be performed for more than 20 minutes, and less, if the horse is under 3-years-old. Round pens for free longeing should be 40-50 ft in diameter. If used for mounted training, round pens should be at least 60 ft in diameter. The pen gate should only open to the inside and abut the post gate to prevent it from accidentally opening if the horse bumps it. Solid walls, 6 to 8 ft high that slant outward are much safer for the horse than modular steel pipe pens. Solid walls also eliminate visual distractions during training. However, because of all the openings between horizontal rails, modular steel pipe pens facilitate emergency escapes by the handler if attacked by an dominance aggressive horse. Horses should be allowed 20 minutes alone in a round pen to acclimate to the surroundings before free longeing begins.

When line longeing, the handler should point the direction for the horse to go with the hand holding the lead line and re-enforce command by raising a whip in the other hand. To move the horse to the handler’s left (clockwise), the lead line is held in the left hand, the left hand is raised to the 10 o’clock position, while a whip is held in the right hand. If the horse is reluctant to move, the handler should raise the whip with his right hand. If raising the whip is insufficient to get the horse to move, the handler can escalate the pressure to move by slapping

the whip on the ground. The whip is also used to psychologically push the horse away from the handler if it gets too close while circling by pointing toward the horse's near shoulder. The lead line and whip must be switched if the direction of movement is changed to the handler's right (clockwise circles).

The handler must be careful to avoid coiling the lead line around his hand or arm or letting it get wrapped around one of his legs. Talking with observers should not occur while longeing. Only verbal commands should be given to the horse. Other conversations should not occur. The horse should be asked to change pace and directions frequently. Cutting horse trainers prefer to have the horse turn its head toward the fence and pivot more sharply when turning. Most other trainers prefer the horse to turn toward the handler when turning rather than turning its rump toward a handler.

After the horse has performed well, it should be stopped and allowed to relax. The horse should never be allowed to run out of air from exertion or excitement as this can result in horse panicking, becoming uncoordinated, or acting resentful. The horse should turn toward the handler during rest but not approach unless invited. If uninvited movement occurs that could invade the handler's personal space without invitation, the horse should be stopped and backed up.

When longeing a horse in a regular halter, a change in the horse's direction just requires a switch in the hands in holding the lead line and whip while simultaneously stepping ahead of the horse's shoulder and slightly backward. When the horse changes directions in a fluid movement without heightened excitement, its attitude indicates a safer mental state to be ridden and that continuing to longe is unnecessary.

Long Lines

Long lines (British, "long reins") are 2 lines more than 8 ft long that run from a bridle through rings in a surcingle around the horse's chest or through stirrups on a western saddle. They are first used with a horse in a round pen. The handler walks a safe distance behind the horse and directs its movements with the long lines. Long lines are used in preparing horses to go under saddle, i.e., be ridden, with proper responses to rein pressure. They are also used in the training of horses to pull carts or wagons and to perform tricks. The Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria uses long lines managed by a handler while assisted by a second handler with a whip to train their famous Lipizzan stallions.

Mechanical Hot Walkers

Hot walkers are equipment that mechanically lead (lead or tie walkers) or push (panel walkers) horses in a circular path to cool the horse down after exercise or to provide primary exercise. Horses in a mechanized hot walker should be supervised at all times. Horses are usually walked in pairs and should be placed on opposite sides of the hot walkers. If used for exercise or rehabilitation, the duration should be 20 minutes, or less. Horses should never be ridden in a hot walker.

Moving Groups of Free Horses by Horseback

Moving groups of free horses while on horseback can be dangerous. A group of saddle horses is called a *remuda* or *cavvy*. The western term for herding horses is "wrangling" from the Spanish word *caverango*, meaning herder of saddle horses. "Jingling" is another term for herding horses

when one or two dominant mares have a shiny bell tied around their neck to enable handlers to locate them audibly or visually in environmental conditions with poor visibility.

Two riders, wranglers, are typically used to move horses. The wranglers' horses need to be accustomed to being in groups of horses and not herd bound (bothered by other horses moving away from them). Experienced herds will follow a lead wrangler's horse while the second wrangler follows behind to move stragglers a little faster. Horses unaccustomed to being wrangled have to be moved by both wranglers behind the herd moving them quietly by invading the herd's, primarily the dominant mares in the center, flight zone.

A horse has to be trained to be a wrangler's horse and not every saddle horse can become one. If the herd begins to run, the natural tendency is for a horse to run with the herd. A wrangling horse has to move at the desired speed of the rider in all circumstances and move away from the herd at the rider's will. Older more dominant horses are usually used for wrangling and are warmed up under saddle long enough each time to focus on the rider before approaching a horse herd to be moved.

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. When leading a horse, do not look at it or loop the lead rope around your hand or arm.**
- 2. Longeing a horse is for reducing excitement and instilling discipline, not for exhausting a horse.**
- 3. Long line training can prepare a horse to respond to rein pressure before its first ride under saddle.**
- 4. Mechanical hot walkers can help exercise or cool a horse down but leading on a lead rope can also provide training for many other aspects of being a working horse.**
- 5. Horses used to move groups of horses must be carefully selected for size, age, training, and especially temperament.**

Abby says it is time to wrap up this episode.

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.