

Longeing Horses

Our topics for this week are:

- **What is longeing**
- **What are the benefits of longeing**
- **How is longeing a horse performed**

Longeing (from Latin longa meaning “to lengthen”) is often spelled phonetically and informally as lungeing or lunging. 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.

A rider should longe a horse to be ridden with a halter or neck rope with a cavesson and a longe line 12- 15 ft long to assess the horse’s attitude before getting on. This can be done with the bridle on as long as the reins are security wrapped or tied to the saddle. The rider should longe the horse both directions and pay particular attention to how calmly the horse makes the change in direction. 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 to the horse’s shoulder and slightly backward. When the horse can make the change in direction without excitement or resentment, it can be considered to be in a proper frame of mind to consider riding. Longeing should not be done in an arena where other people are riding.

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 15 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, 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 reinforce command by raising a whip in the other hand. To move the horse to the handler's left (counter-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. 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.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

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

- 1. Longeing a horse is an aid to assessing its attitude before being ridden, checking for lameness, training for voice commands, and providing a means of mild exercise.**
- 2. Most longeing is performed with a halter and a 12-15 foot lead line.**
- 3. Longeing of young horses should not be done for more than 20 minutes or in a manner to exhaust the horse.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 250 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

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.