

A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW THE HORSE FUNCTIONS

ISSUE No. 15

ECLECTIC

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HORSEMAN



[THE HORSES OF THE CALIFORNIOS]

[A QUICK LOOK AT BRACES]

[DON'T MISLEAD YOUR HORSE]

ECLECTIC

- 1 : selecting what appears to be best
in various doctrines, methods, or styles
2 : composed of elements drawn from various sources

HORSEMAN

- 1 : a rider or driver of horses;
especially, one whose skill is exceptional
2 : a person skilled in caring for or managing horses

In This Issue



5 Build the Cow in the Cow Horse by Martin Black

Martin offers suggestions for educating a well-rounded cow horse.



6 Don't Mislead Your Horse with Buck Brannaman

Buck demonstrates how to get your horse "hooked on" to you while leading.



10 The Horses of the Californios by R.F. Prudente

A unique opportunity to purchase an educated ranch horse at a select stock sale.



12 The Elements of a Saddle Part 3 by Chuck Stormes

In the final installment of this series, Chuck examines rigging types and placement.



14 Balance vs. Motion in Dressage by Jec A. Ballou

Jec explores the different philosophies of French and German Dressage training.



16 What's Right for Geronimo by Emily Kitching

What's more important: a successful show career or a happy horse? Ask Geronimo.



18 A Quick Look at Braces by Diane Longanecker

Diane examines the nature and causes of braces in your horse and ways to fix them.



23 A Closer Look at How the Horse Functions by Wendy Murdoch

Wendy uses X-ray vision to compare how a horse can use itself well or poorly.

In Every Issue

4 Community Listings

30 Directory

29 Eclectic Mercantile

32 What Were They Thinking?

On the Cover: Larry Fleming on Geronimo, looking for a calf to rope. For Geronimo's story please turn to page 16.

An Eclectic Mission: *Our mission is to bring "Just What Works" information to a knowledge-hungry public. We will create and present only ideas and techniques that work with and educate humans about the nature of the horse.*

Contributors



Buck Brannaman

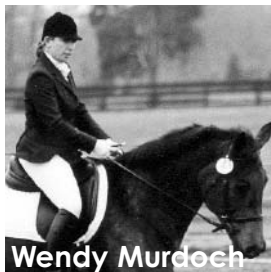
Jec A. Ballou has trained in Holland, Germany, Portugal, Hawaii, and under the tutelage of Dr. Sherry Ackerman in the tradition of classical riding. Her writing appears regularly in *Dressage Today* magazine and *USDF Connection*. She has also contributed to *Western Horseman*, *Chronicle of the Horse*, and *Practical Horseman*. Currently she edits the online dressage magazine *Eponia*.



Diane Longanecker

Martin Black is a 5th generation Idaho rancher and 4th generation rodeo competitor. He has a lifetime of experience in handling horses, cattle and roping. In his youth there was a strong influence of the California-Spanish style of horsemanship. He has earned money in stock horse events, NRCHA events, rodeo events, and more. His basic philosophy is to "build the horse's confidence in everything he does. A confident horse is more capable in competition and less likely to injure himself. A confident horse is more willing to learn, and more comfortable to ride."

Buck Brannaman, a phenomenal cowboy and clinician, has traveled the United States and Australia conducting colt starting, horsemanship, cow working and ranch roping clinics. He has authored the book *Groundwork*, and *The Faraway Horses* and has produced many educational horsemanship videos.



Wendy Murdoch

Diane Longanecker has worked with horses for over 40 years. A serious student of the horse, she came to the horse's-point-of-view approach after 25 years spent showing a variety of breeds. She lives—and writes—in a rustic, two-room log cabin tucked away on a mountain ranch in eastern Washington state. When not attending clinics herself, she enjoys teaching horsemanship to students who come to stay at the ranch. She has written for a variety of horse publications. Her new book, *Halter-Tying Success*, is a comprehensive guide to making rope halters.

Wendy Murdoch has taught riding internationally since 1987. She trained with Linda Tellington-Jones in 1985; she has trained with Sally Swift since 1986, and apprenticed with her in 1992. She has written articles for many equine publications and is releasing a collection of those articles called *Simplify Your Riding* in January 2004.



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303-449-3537 or Fax 303-449-7599



Hi All,

This last month I started taking a Pilates class one day a week. Spending hours hunched over a keyboard is not the best way to improve your riding posture, or your muscle tone for that matter. So at the recommendation of a friend, I went to a local instructor who specializes in teaching Pilates for riders.

The work is incredibly difficult, and very rewarding. Although it's too soon to expect much in the way of huge results, the sessions have given me a renewed respect for the importance of being a patient and supportive rider.

Doing the Pilates work, for someone who is, shall we say, not the most coordinated human being on the planet is very taxing both physically and mentally. Trying to get my body to move in places that it's pretty sure it can't can be very frustrating. Last week, attempting a movement where I was quite sure I

was going to end up doing a face plant made me think of what our horses must feel like when we are asking them to use their bodies in a way that is new or particularly challenging for them.

I was thankful that Julie, the instructor, was positive and helpful, pointing me in the right direction until I was able to complete the movement. I knew that just the wrong words from her and I could get so frustrated I would quit trying or end up in that face plant. How many times have I asked my horse to do something difficult and then not given him the support he needed until he found the answer? "Ah ha!", something to change in my riding!

For those of you who are in the Boulder area and are interested in learning more about Pilates, you can give me a call or call the instructor, Julie Leiken at 720-422-1592.

Take care,

Classified Ads

AQHA Bay Gelding: Bred, raised and started by Ray and Carolyn Hunt, 9 yo, 15.1 hands. Strait Silver/Docs Glowin Image bloodlines. Nice mover, good on trails, ties, loads, clips, vacuums. \$6,500.00 Patti Haddon 719-590-1133

Marc Brogger full roughout Wade Saddle: John Micheaux tree, 15 1/2" seat, 7/8 flat plate rigging. Never roped out of. \$2,800.00 Ken Haddon 719-590-1133

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Community Listings

California

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Ranch & Horsemanship Center
Richard and Cheryl Winters
www.wintersranch.com 530-260-0464

Colorado

Carolyn Darley Miller Bodies In Balance
(Human and Equine Training/Repair)
970-948-6462 bodsinbalance@aol.com

Last Resort Equestrian Center
LuAnn and Jim Goodyear
970-568-7682 luannresort@aol.com

NI Bar Quality Horses
Erin and Larry Franks 970-323-0115
www.nibarqualityhorses.com

Iowa

Rick Cornwell Horsemanship Co.
319-240-0242
rick@lazycrc.com www.lazycrc.com

Kansas

Krebs Quarter Horses
Cheri Krebs 620-872-5864
www.krebsquarterhorses.com
cckqh@pld.com

Montana

Sunshine Ranch John Balkenbush
www.sunshinehorse.com
johnb@sunshinehorse.com
406-278-3569

New Mexico

Dick Byrd Paints
Dick and Judy Byrd
505-584-2377
www.dickbyrdpaints.com
rmbbyrd@plateautel.net

L & R Cattle Co.

Laurie and Randy Ballard
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laurieballard@hotmail.com

Riggins Quarter Horses

Bill and Laurie Riggins
505-472-5864
www.rigginsquarterhorses.com
lriggins@plateautel.net

Virginia

John Sanford
Rocking T Ranch
540-672-2986
rockingtranch@ns.gemlink.com

Washington

Longmire Training Barn and Arena
www.vaqueroway.com
360-894-1582
kmac@ywave.com

Community listings are \$75 for one year. Please call to place a listing.



Build the Cow in the Cow Horse

by Martin Black

When a horse learns some basic principles, he doesn't need to be limited to only one discipline of cow work. Like a person learning different games with a ball, the horse can learn to play different games with a cow.

Like an all-around cow horse, a good, intelligent athletic person can be a star football, basketball, or baseball player, or star in many other ball games. It takes but very little experience for the horse to recognize the environment and to differentiate the ball court or playing field, and know that there are different rules and objectives. Like the prepared athlete, the horse will know to be offensive and defensive, fast and aggressive, or soft and smooth, maintaining a lot of feel with the flow of the play.

The action of the cow, or the ball carrier, will determine the reaction of the horse, or the opposing player, and to a great extent the position of the opponent determines the action of the ball carrier, or cow. The player can affect the outcome by anticipating the play and taking a position to direct the play in a favorable way. It's all about reading, outguessing, and responding to the cow, or the ball carrier.

I believe, given the opportunity, a horse can learn to read and anticipate the cow at least as good as a good stockman and better than a big percentage of today's riders. The horse and cow speak the same language: as babies they race, they play aggressively or defensively, and then as they mature, for hormonal or nutritional reasons, they are constantly positioning themselves to dominate or submit to others.

Through experience comes judgment. The more and better experience the horse gets, the better his judgment will become. Being limited to one game, or one way of playing, will only limit the development of the judgment.

If a horse has some confidence or aggression and lowers his head to look the cow level in the eye, the cow will know from experience when another cow positions itself with that demeanor it is being challenged. With the horse having the large stature, the cow would likely submit to the horse.

If a young horse can first learn to dominate and control a

cow, and just maintain this interest in the early stages without overwhelming him with restrictions and rules, like "position," the cow work can be fun for him. Like the ball player keeping track of the ball, the horse needs to be able to keep track of the cow and not be distracted by a trainer's pulling and spurring that doesn't relate to the cow. Effort to rate the cow shouldn't be hindered; if corrections for positions are needed, they can be in a subtle way that doesn't discourage the horse's interest in the cow. Like a young kid, let the fascination of the ball moving and their ability to control it create and maintain the interest. A horse that is truly interested in cattle will make a better cow horse down the road.

"I believe, given the opportunity, a horse can learn to read and anticipate the cow at least as good as a good stockman and better than a big percentage of today's riders."

Don't Mislead Your Horse

with Buck Brannaman

Do you sometimes feel a little low on your horse's priority list when you're leading him in from the pasture? Does he lead a little dull, leaving you feel as if you're dragging him up to be saddled? Since the education process begins, for better or for worse, the moment you head out to catch your horse, it stands to reason that how you lead him is a pretty important detail.

At a recent clinic Buck Brannaman demonstrated how to get your horse "hooked on" to you when you are leading him. By making transitions from walk to stop to backing as well as leading past you to change directions, this simple exercise can help your horse pay more attention to your body language, and to respond to what you ask of him.

"You're just trying to get them hooked on to you. You need to have your horses to where they will lead a little bit

and pay attention because their heads are in the clouds. But sometimes so is yours when you're leading them because you're not particular," said Buck Brannaman.

In the following photos Buck demonstrates how to ask your horse to lead up, back up, lead by you and change directions. Be sure and practice these exercises next to a fence; otherwise, your horse might flare out to the side when you ask him to lead forward. Although Buck demonstrates this in a snaffle with a mecate, you could also practice in a halter.

"I did this demonstration so as to get you to be more particular, to get your horse with you on the ground because if he's with you on the ground, he's with you when you are riding him. Hopefully this will give you a clearer picture," said Buck.

Lead Up Back Up



1. Buck asks his horse to lead forward by extending his leading (right) hand forward. This is the good deal, and he would like his horse to follow this feel.

2. Since his horse did not respond to this suggestion, Buck uses his driving hand (left) to drive his horse forward with the tail of his mecate. If your horse is wearing a halter, you would use your lead rope. Buck doesn't change his position to drive his horse; he uses the lead rope behind his back.

3. When Buck stops, his horse should stop his feet. When he backs up, his horse should back up with him. If he doesn't, Buck would use his lead rope to help his horse find the stop and then the back-up.

4. Here you can see that Buck's horse is nicely hooked on to Buck. Their feet are timed up together; his horse is really listening for what Buck will ask for next.

Leading Past You on the Left

5. Buck suggests that if you aren't too handy with a lead rope, you might instead use your flag to drive your horse forward. You'll offer a leading hand, and if he doesn't follow that suggestion, your flag can come in and get your point across. Here Buck practices driving his horse past him, rather than waiting for it to happen by accident. He offers a good deal with his leading hand (right), and his flag is in position to drive his horse forward if he needs to.

6. His horse leads forward, and since Buck wants him to lead past him, he keeps his feet still and arm extended.

7. Once his horse is past him, Buck uses his leading hand to untrack his horse's hindquarters. Then Buck opens up and leads his horse to his right.

8. He extends his leading hand and leads his horse past him, back down the fence.

9. Again, Buck untracks the hindquarters, which will put his horse back into position next to the fence.

10. From here, Buck is ready to ask his horse to lead forward along the fence, his leading hand extended, and his left hand ready to drive him forward if needed.





Bumping Back

A. When you ask your horse to back, you need to make sure that you are putting a bubble back into the rope. If you just pull the rope tight like this, then your horse will just



bend his head toward you and not move his feet backwards. And it wouldn't be his fault, because that's what you were asking him to do.

Leading Past You on the Right

11. Buck checks out how his horse is to lead off of his horse's right side. Now Buck's left hand is his leading hand. His horse is a little sticky, so he uses his flag to get him to lead up.

12. Buck's horse came forward, but went a little too far past him. At this point Buck could still stop him and back him up, but for demonstration purposes, he shows how to adjust if your horse goes too far past you.

13. Buck simply untracks his horse's hindquarters, adjusting his hand position to encourage his inside hindleg to step to his horse's left.

14. Buck keeps the hindquarters moving until his horse is facing in the opposite direction.

15. Buck's ready to lead his horse back across in front of him. He extends his hand out to his left to lead his horse forward.

16. Buck uses his right hand to drive his horse past him, along the fence.

17. Then he untracks his horse's hindquarters again, and they are both back in position to lead forward. If his horse is too far off the fence, he could use his right hand to drive him over to be parallel with the fence.

18. Buck offers a good deal to see if he can avoid having to come in with his flag to drive his horse forward. This time when Buck walked forward, his horse came with him.

19. Buck gets ready to stop, and his horse also gets ready to stop. At first Buck might take very deliberate steps and give his horse lots of warning so that Buck can help him to be successful at getting hooked on to him.

20. Buck takes a few steps back, and his horse moves backwards right with him, so he wouldn't need to do anymore with his lead rope.

11



12



13



14





B. When you ask him to back, you need to start by asking with less. Then when you do bump him, remember to put a bubble back in the rope. C. Then take the bubble out and give him a little bump. D. Then put the bubble back in. This should be done rhythmically, bump, bump, bump to get to the feet.





The Horses of the Californios

New visions from an age-old art

by R.F. Prudente

With spring in the air and the freshness and promise of all that is new, *The Californios Ranch Roping and Stock Horse Contest*, covered in *EH # 3*, promises to bring yet another fresh new idea to the horse world. This unique event, now in its fifth year, has grown in leaps and bounds, thanks, in no small part, to its innovative creator and director, Gwynn Turnbull-Weaver. She built the event "on a wing and a prayer" in 2000 and has since expanded and developed its "purist/traditional" focus along the way. She developed a youth class, expanded the stock horse competition and now, finally, this year has added *The Horses of the Californios Select Sale*.

THE VISION

"I wanted to have a sale with the event from the very beginning", she states, "but I felt I had to take some time and lay down a good foundation for it. I wanted to educate folks to these particular disciplines and build an appreciation for these kinds of horses."

Turnbull-Weaver accomplished this by starting *The Californios Quarterly*, a subscription-based newsletter that tackled the task of teaching the general horse public about the world of the Buckaroo and "old California" bridle horsemen's principles. Steeped in the real-life, working world of the "big outfit" buckaroo, the newsletter was well received. Issues became immediately collectable by both the well schooled and the novice.

As knowledge grew, so did interest. People kept asking her when she was going to have the sale. Turnbull-Weaver wanted to have it in 2003, but she felt the concept was "still too green." She recalls, "I wanted to do it right and have all the things in place to have the best sale I could." The delay has proven beneficial; she has confidence in the quality of the April 24, 2004, sale.

A UNIQUE PRODUCT

One might ask what sets this particular sale apart from the pack. The progressive director reflects, "This is more than a ranch horse sale, not to take anything away from the ranch horse sales out there. They provide solid, durable horses, most of them. But I don't think those ranch horses are as broke as they could be. Durable is great, but we still want something nice to ride with some sensitivity." She continues, "There are lots of show horses out there that are very sensitive and very broke, but maybe due to genetics or modern competitive pressures, they might not be as durable or as likely to stay sound over the long haul."

Turnbull-Weaver speculates, "There will always be specialties—cutting horses—reiners—ranch horses—pleasure horses and such, but there is also an emerging market of folks who appreciate the blending of all these things. I think people are really gonna like what we've got to offer."

What makes the sale unique is the consignor base *The Californios* has to draw from. The sale is an invitational event that taps into the real working buckaroos, past and present, with the cattle, the country and the time to fully develop their horses. With thousands of cattle to doctor, rodear (work out of the herd) and brand every year, most of the horsemen have had ample opportunity to expose their horses to productive situations. Working only for personal satisfaction and any prestige gained among the small community of his peers, the buckaroo escapes the time limitations of the show arena.

She notes, "Not everyone has the luxury of endless time, country and cattle. What that means is that these horses have a good solid foundation behind all the razzle dazzle."

In spite of these horses' seemingly humble beginnings, razzle dazzle is something the sale should have plenty of. "We're getting some nice horses lined up. We are focusing on horses from 4 to 14 years of age, trained in the traditional disciplines—hackamore, two rein, and bridle. A few nice 3-year-olds and some older bridle horses, kids' horses, etc., will also be available." Approximately fifty horses have been accepted. "It would be easy to get greedy and let more in," she states, "but I have to keep the quantity down to keep the quality up. I want this sale to be the premier place to go for this kind of horse."

MEETING THE NEED

The need for well broke, "finished" mounts is growing just as fast as our stress loads. Turnbull-Weaver claims, "With more and more people working on their horsemanship every year, folks have a new appreciation for a nice horse that they can have a relationship with. It needs to be the kind of horse worthy of their good care and attention." Demographics play a part as well, as many buyers are over the age of 40. "They just want a quality mount that's going to relieve their stress and carry them away from their problems, not create more of them. They want a horse they can keep."

Recently the need for this balanced "real world" experience has trickled up into large groups like the AQHA, fostering the creation of new "ranch horse versatility" classes and

similar competitions around the country. "I think there are lots of people out there struggling to find a horse they connect with, one they don't plan on selling. We've got that kind of horse."

A LOOK INSIDE

Turnbull-Weaver is excited and hopeful about yet another new idea she plans on implementing at the sale: The exploding technology of digital radiography.

"I really have high hopes for the use of this technology at sales all across the country." She continues, "I want to use my sale to help bring it to the forefront. It will take some adjustment, but I think it will make the horse world a more truthful, honest place."

She is talking about a new technology manufactured by U.S.-based Varian Medical Systems and available through Vetel Diagnostics. This new X-ray machine takes digital X-rays and makes them immediately available (approx. 20 seconds) on a computer screen.

Not only does the machine take images that are slightly higher quality than conventional x-rays; the immediate availability of the image is the key. Vets at the sale can review the images in real time (with the horse standing in front of them). They can evaluate the quality of a particular image and immediately retake it if needed. Problem areas can be immediately defined and more extensive views of that particular area can be taken.

The quality of the image can also be processed and enhanced to improve the clinical diagnostic content while on the computer. Adjustments can also be made to accentuate soft tissue detail to bring forth diagnostic information that would have been difficult to get with the "old style" radiography. Images can then be burned onto CDs, or printed to produce films, transparencies or paper copies down the road.

"This is going to be a big deal in the horse sale world," Turnbull-Weaver believes. "I want to be one of the first sales to make it available to buyers during the preview. Folks can work with the vets provided or email images back to their favorite vet at home for review before the actual sale."

Turnbull-Weaver comments, "I don't anticipate a lot of soundness issues at our particular sale, but I want to promote the idea of full disclosure and truthfulness. We've tried to build the entire event on integrity. I hope the addition of digital radiography to the sale is a theme that will catch on and carry to some of the bigger sales across the country." She adds, "Horses have given me so much. Anything I can do to elevate the quality of the buyer's equine experience is worth doing."

"CALIFORNIOS" BEWARE

Turnbull-Weaver laments, "I'm sure, if the sale is received the way interest indicates, there will soon be a lot of cheap imitations out there; traders will be slapping spade bits in everything's mouth and telling you it's a 'Californios style horse.' I want to caution folks about this now. Due to the



amount of time it takes to make a good one, there aren't that many of the 'real thing' out there. The consignor pool of these kinds of horses is small. We've built a good relationship with the communities that produce 'the real thing,' and I hope folks take advantage of that at our sale."

THE EXPERIENCE

The first sale of its kind, The Horses of the Californios is shaping up to be an experience all its own. Buyers can spend all weekend, shop at the select trade show to outfit their new equine companion and enjoy the greatest hands of all time roping all classes of cattle, whether it's the challenging "Masters" Calf Branding, buckaroo team doctoring or the only event of its kind anywhere—the powerful "Big Medicine" Bull Doctoring Finals.... buyers and spectators alike are encouraged to enjoy the pre-sale party at 5 p.m. with cowboy singer Mike Beck and other cowboy crooners. The show features good food and the festive hospitality of "old California" with a full bar, all day, every day.

Turnbull-Weaver adds "This sale was designed to match up great horses with good people who will appreciate them." Her goals are in place. She hopes to make enough to cover the expenses of the contest, provide a market and added incentive for the real buckaroo to continue his work—making nice horses—while providing the general public access to some of the coolest horses they could hope for. It looks like the makings for a great weekend.

The Californios Ranch Roping and Stock Horse Contest

April 23-25, 2004,

The Horses of the Californios Select Sale

April 24 (Presale party- 4 pm Sale - 7 pm)

(Preview on April 23, 5 pm)

Pauline Davis Pavilion, Red Bluff, CA

www.thecalifornios.com

530-896-9566



Elements of a Saddle

Part 3: The Rigging

by Chuck Stormes

The original

"saddle", a simple cloth much like a saddle blanket, and the later pad-saddle version were held in place by a surcingle—a strap encircling horse and pad, secured by tying.

The development of the saddle tree offered new possibilities for securing the saddle to the horse, using the tree as an anchoring point for the "rigging."

This seemingly simple advance paved the way for the invention of the stirrup and, ultimately, effective mounted warfare.

The outward appearance of the modern western saddle retains little resemblance to that of previous millennia, but its strong, rawhide-covered tree, adapted to roping and handling livestock, still provides a sound structure for attachment of the rigging. A strong rigging, positioned for optimum security while minimizing bulk under the rider's leg, is the criterion for designing this crucial element of a stock saddle.

The positions in which the rigging may be mounted vary from centered between fork and cantle (center fire) to full or Spanish, directly below the fork. As the diagram shows, the designations 5/8, 3/4 and 7/8 simply refer to divisions of the distance from cantle to fork.

Since the tree is placed on the horse in the same position in all cases (where it's designed to fit, just clear of the shoul-

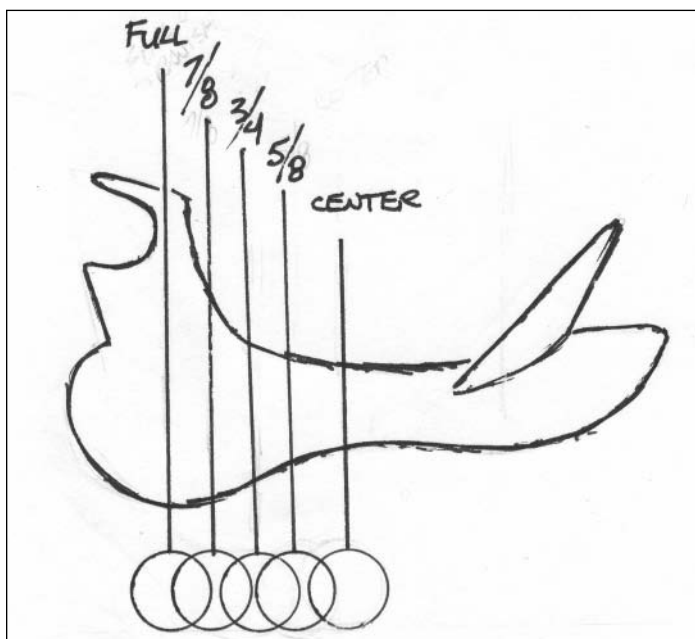
der blade), changing the rigging position shifts the placement of the cinch and the amount of pull on the front and rear of the tree.

Center fire and 5/8 are single-cinch positions seldom used today, although they served nineteenth-century California vaqueros well. Centered rigging exerts equal force through the rigging on both fork and cantle. It requires a wide cinch—8 to 9 inches was common in its heyday—to stay in place around the fullest part of a horse's barrel.

Three-quarter position can be used either single or double, although it offers minimal separation between the two cinches. The best choice as a single rig, 3/4 holds the fork well while still stabilizing the cantle.

Seven-eighths double is the most versatile and most popular modern rigging position. It anchors the fork well without placing the cinch far enough forward to interfere with the elbow/armpit area, even on straight-shouldered horses. A rear cinch, mounted below the base of the cantle, stabilizes the rear of the tree.

"Spanish" refers to the full, or farthest forward, position



Standard Rigging Positions



Center Fire Ring Rigging

but used with a single cinch. While widely used on traditional charro saddles, full double is the standard ropers' rigging used in American stock saddles.

Tightening both cinches of a full double rigging gives maximum stability, preventing movement of the tree even against heavy jerks on the horn, making full double the standard for arena ropers. The full double rigging's only drawback is its tendency to crowd the elbow with the cinch on straight-shouldered and overweight horses, generally not a problem for the working cowboys who use them.

Apart from the varied positions, there are three usual methods of rigging construction used in western saddles: round or dee-shaped rings, flat plate, or in-skirt rigging.

Although all three styles can be designed to use in any of the positions, some are better suited to a particular position or to a specific requirement of horse or rider.

Round ring and dee-ring riggings are made by doubling a strong piece of skirting leather around the hardware and attaching it to the tree with screws. While simple and effective, it can cause extra bulk and restrict stirrup leather movement, especially in positions other than full.

Flat plate rigging consists of two layers of skirting with the hardware sandwiched between the two with rivets and stitching. It can be made in any position, single or double, and overcomes much of the problem of bulk and stirrup freedom while still attaching directly to the tree, isolated from the skirt.

In-skirt rigging acquired a bad reputation years ago due to poor design and construction by some of the early makers, especially some of the factory versions. When properly made, it can have the required strength, direct pull on the tree, elimination of bulk and stirrup leather freedom that the concept

promised. It can be designed for any position. In-skirt rigging's main drawbacks are inherent. Being built into the skirt, a greater likelihood of rotting out in hard use and greater expense to reline the skirts. As a result, in-skirt rigging has never become popular for ranch work but has found some favor with horse trainers.

I hope this series of brief articles on trees, seats and riggings has been helpful. Further offerings on aspects of the western saddle are being planned for future issues.



7/8 Double Flat Plate



Full Double Dee-Ring Rigging



In-Skirt Rigging



Balance vs. Motion in Dressage

by Jec A. Ballou

The *development of dressage horses falls more or less into two camps, with a lively debate dividing them over the proper foundation and training progression.*

For example, should a horse in the early work achieve precise and stable longitudinal balance prior to developing the motion of his gaits? Or, should the horse learn first to push himself forward with loose and rhythmic strides before knowing how to balance and carry himself at all times?

The two prominent sides of this training argument are commonly seen as a “German” method versus a “French” or classical Iberian method. It is not as simple as that, though. Historical dressage traditions have melted together so much in our country that it is impossible to say any technique is purely German, French, or otherwise. There certainly are at least two prevalent philosophies regarding the dressage training scale, but it is fair to only loosely ascribe national ties to them. Yet, it is interesting to examine how the traditions may have evolved.

Modern trainers and riders—competitive or otherwise—strive toward the standards upheld by the F.E.I. and classical riding academies around the globe. With one uniform set of goals, it might seem logical to have just a single path to get there. But that is not the case. Each training system has its own progression to arrive at the same place. So, the question remains: which is the best way?

Sometimes, this question is tackled in forums about classical dressage versus competitive dressage. The former prides itself on a slow, tedious training program that teaches a horse to round and carry itself in an uphill manner in early work. The latter, meanwhile, teaches pushing—as opposed to carrying—power in the beginning, and a primary achievement of horizontal balance prior to uphill carriage.

The difference in methods is sometimes wrongly referred to as “balance before motion vs. motion before balance.” But it is incorrect to say that one school of thought favors balance while the other does not. Both are in pursuit of balance; the difference lies in how each seeks to achieve it. A historical perspective helps explain why different methods evolved.

Prior to the French Revolution, dressage was expressed in ways that emphasized extreme collection and agility. The Renaissance and Baroque eras saw riders excelling in the piaffe, passage, and airs above the ground, the preparation for which included collection and shorter strides in early training. The very “forward” and thrusting movements like the extended trot, on the other hand, were only seen in carriage horses working to cover great distances.

For the most part, this changed during the 19th century

when dressage became less of an aristocratic pastime and moved into the cavalry schools. Now, the equitation emphasized longer, flatter strides and greater adjustability of the horse’s frame between varying degrees of collection. Dressage competitions grew out of this environment, and therefore, the medium and extended gaits became part of the tests while the most highly collected movements (i.e., canter in place, etc.) did not.

At the same time, larger and less compact horses like Thoroughbreds and Warmbloods replaced the previously popular Andalusian and Iberian mounts. So, the focus became building thrusting power in these taller, lankier horses with naturally horizontal balance as opposed to an accented uphill body structure. The German system could be said to have grown out of this period.

A current instruction handbook from the German National Equestrian Federation states that by acquiring looseness and by stretching through his back and lowering his neck toward the ground, the horse demonstrates that he is then ready to be pushed into contact and to develop a posture or “frame.”

For those who follow a program like the German training scale, it is through motion that a horse finds his balance. But it is likely that in many cases the training scale is wrongly interpreted and has led to riders being single-focused on creating long, swinging strides and a low neck carriage. This possible misinterpretation may be contributing to an even greater division between today’s prevalent training systems.

Modern-day author, judge, and clinician Charles DeKunffy believes that the hysteria of driving young horses “forward” has led to a decrease in riders’ awareness of balance. He said that he sees numerous riders chasing their horses faster with no attention to how the horse carries himself in the movement.

“Teaching your horse balance before riding your horse forward is so important because forward is so misunderstood now. A forward-moving horse takes weight behind and lifts up in front like an airplane taking off. The horse must be balanced back into the haunches to take the rider forward,” said DeKunffy recently.

For those who follow an approach that favors developing posture and poise early on, more time will be spent in the beginning getting the horse to yield his jaw, relax his poll, and release his neck at slower paces. Through this release and sup-

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pling of the front of the horse, he will lift his forehead on his own and will carry himself free of contractions—and therefore in a collected balance from the beginning. This progression differs substantially from the German training scale.

In the 19th century, the French horseman Francois Baucher conducted a series of experiments with a horse standing on two scales that arguably became the cornerstone for this theory that balance should be emphasized before movement. He asked the horse to raise and lower his neck to various positions at the halt and then measured the amount of weight on both forehead and hindquarters at each level.

The results of this experiment led him to develop a truism: balance must be obtained with no interference with movement while, on the other hand, movement in the act of being produced must not interfere with balance. This idea certainly influenced many dressage trainers in the past few centuries, even though it can be interpreted and applied in various forms.

Tina Veder, who has trained Andalusians and Lusitanos horses for the past 20 years, employs these methods to some extent at her facility in upstate New York. She recommends that for horses built naturally uphill, riders should focus on developing collection in the beginning of training. She believes that there is no purpose in driving a horse more forward than he is able to keep his roundness. From the start, her horses learn to go in shorter, more elevated gaits than the training of most young Warmbloods in a German approach.

She said that for her horses, creating big ground-covering strides in the beginning does not have any benefit. Working on collection and yielding the body and jaw, however, puts him into the balance that he will be perfecting for the next several years on his way to High School training.

“We find when you have a horse that finds it comfortable to become round by nature, if he loses his balance, he can come back to roundness. Riders learn to bring them back to balance without tension,” she explained.

Laying down this concept in 1949, the French riding master General Decarpentry wrote:

“By first obtaining a relaxation of the mouth by means of special exercises called flexions of the jaw and getting the horse, by shrewd progression, to move in all directions with-

out deterioration of the relaxation, the rider will have the certainty of keeping his horse constantly and perfectly balanced.”
Academic Equitation

He goes on to suggest a lot of walk work, because in that gait, a rider can monitor the form and poise of his horse, making it his primary aim to stabilize and confirm the horse's posture. This form is not sought for a flattering appearance. The rider maintains the proper form and poise for

each individual horse at the point where he is balanced into his haunches, light to the hand, and responsive to the aids. It is the foundation and preparation for all following advanced work.

This early concentration on the horse's uphill form and contact is a notable contrast to creating balance by developing active, rhythmic steps (mostly in trot) and a downward posture in the horse's neck, as proposed by the German approach. A trainer could easily be confused which method to choose, with two equally successful—and very different—training systems available to them.

One system appears to balance a horse in the beginning by shortening his strides slightly and yielding his jaw, while the other seems to balance a horse by sending him well forward with larger strides and doesn't concern himself with contact or the jaw until much later in the training scale.

So, how do we choose among the traditions available to us?

In the end, the debate of methods seems to come down to the type of horse in question. We must keep in mind that each training tradition grew out of a historical context where particular kinds of horses were being prepared for certain styles of riding. Different styles and horses require different approaches.

For somewhat phlegmatic Warmbloods, an early approach that confirms forward energy and a horizontal frame seems to be the right recipe. But for a horse with notably uphill conformation and naturally elevated gaits, like Iberian horses, it appears best to capitalize on their ability to sit into the haunches early on. Also, since they are generally more animated than Warmbloods, more focus can be placed on eliminating jaw and bodily contractions, rather than developing a forward, rhythmic stride. And for horses that fall between these two types, perhaps a blend of both methods is best.



What's Right for Geronimo

by Emily Kitching

Across the branding pen, horseman Larry Fleming is riding a large bay gelding. He handles himself well, calmly dragging calves over to the ground crew to be branded. Watching him work, you would hardly guess that only a few months earlier, this beautiful Dutch Warmblood was unhappy with all of humankind and dangerous to ride.

His owner, sixteen-year-old Amelia Newcomb, and her mother, JoElyn watch Larry and Geronimo, obviously pleased with horse and horseman alike.

Flash back to nearly one year earlier. Amelia had found Geronimo after trying several horses in Holland. After returning to Colorado, the horse began training with a local dressage instructor. After three months of training, Amelia began to ride her horse, mostly in lessons, and that is when things started to fall apart.

"I started having lessons and he started rearing and he started getting worse rather than getting better. I was mostly having lessons and the trainers

weren't riding him, just me. We took him to Dr. Beeman at Littleton who found some early signs of navicular. He recommended 4 months off. We took him to Larry a month early, and after his stall rest was finished, Larry started working with him," said Amelia.

"Joelyn called me because she said that they had a horse that was rearing; she, of course, was concerned about the safety of her daughter. At first all she wanted, was for her daughter to be able to get on him and ride him and be safe," said Larry Fleming, who starts colts and works with problem horses.

"Geronimo was mad at everybody and everything. Taking ahold of him was like taking ahold of a rubber innertube. There was nothing there. He would frame up and be in position with his head. But there was no feel there, he felt dead and lifeless."

"When you reached for his head, he

would just brace up, especially to the left. So I rode him in the halter for about the first 10 rides until he felt really good. I spent a lot of time working him side to side before ever asking him for soft feel. It was probably another dozen rides before I asked him to get soft at the trot.

"It was a good two months before I really saw a change in his attitude. About that time he started to let down and not be so cranky. One afternoon I was sitting on him in the arena, and I asked my three-year-old daughter to bring me my flag. She walked right up to me with it and he never batted an eye or flicked an ear, whereas before he would have wanted to leave the country.

"I don't know of another 15-year-old who could have done as nice a job and hung in there as well as Amelia has. There were times earlier when she would ride him maybe a couple of days



in a row, and then I would get on him and I would get frustrated and I'd come in the house and my wife would say, 'remember it's not about you, it's about Amelia learning to get along with her horse,' and I'd say 'oh, yeah'. Now I think I know how Tom felt, because he would always say 'do you feel that?' And I would say 'feel what Tom?' And now here I am asking, 'did you see him try?' And Amelia would say 'no!'"

"The first time I saw Larry work Geronimo on the ground was really my first exposure to this kind of work," said Amelia. "He worked him on the end of the halter and I didn't understand what he was doing. Now I look back and I don't think I had an appreciation for what he was doing because a lot of it is so subtle. It took me awhile to appreciate it.

"It feels really good to be able to get on my horse and have fun. From before when I would ride Geronimo, I could feel that he wasn't very happy and that he didn't enjoy what he was doing, but now when I get to take him and go help Larry with cows, or just go for a trail ride, I can feel that he is a lot happier where he is now. There are still days when I will go in the arena and work on our dressage, but now it's with a different approach.

"The difference between dressage and what I'm going now is that when you're having a lesson with a dressage instructor and the horse does the right thing, it's like 'OK that's good, but now we want more.' But with this when your horse does the right thing, you make sure you release right then, so he knows exactly when he's doing the right thing. And I think that was so important to have a realization about how unclear I was being to him and how what happened to him wasn't his fault.

"Dressage was a lot more physically hard on me. With the horses I would ride I would have so much weight in my hands that I couldn't handle it for more than a few circles. This is a lot more mentally stressful; you have to think about what you are doing and why you are doing it, and if it makes sense to your horse. With dressage it was more just listening to what your trainer told you.

"For people in really closed disciplines I would tell them not to be narrow-minded and be willing to try other things because I never really thought that I would bring Geronimo here and that I would ever want to ride him again because he really scared me so bad. I thought I would want to sell him and get a new horse and just give up. But trying something different gave both of us a whole new opportunity and so I would say that you can't opt anything out. You have to be open to it.

"My favorite thing about my horse is his personality. He can get really excited and into things, and he's fun to be around, which is so different from how he was



before. I can just take him out and fool around with him and brush his mane or whatever. Before, anything I would do he would just get really bothered. I couldn't even touch his mane, because it had been pulled and he would just shake his neck and stuff, and so I think that just shows how much he's really figured out within himself what's OK and that we're not going to hurt him.

"For the future, I think that considering how unhappy he was with dressage, I don't want to take him back to dressage. Geronimo really likes going outside and I don't want to take him back to something that he is unhappy doing. I don't really think that there any way for us to have fun doing only dressage."

"I've had a lot of fun just going out and working with cows, and it's been a whole new thing to learn about. Maybe I would like to do a little dressage in combination, but for right now he's doing so well here, I don't want to mess it up."





A Quick Look at Braces

by Diane Longanecker

It's winter.

As you make your way over the ice-covered path to the barn, your feet suddenly slip out from under you. Automatically, your body braces for its inevitable impact with the frozen ground.

On another occasion, while heading toward the barn one night to investigate a strange noise, your mind conjures up a variety of menacing situations that might await you. Soon your body is braced with expectancy.

As these two examples remind us, whenever we find ourselves in what we perceive to be a dangerous situation—whether that danger is real or imagined—our self-preservation kicks in. The brace is simply a natural part of this hard-wired need to protect one's self from harm or destruction.

Of course, self-preservation is a characteristic we have in common with all creatures. In the horse, this self-preservation is not only very strong, it is easily triggered. Consequently, the quality of our interactions with the horse is directly dependent upon our ability to address his self-preservation concerns: As we become better at putting him at ease, braces become increasingly rare events.

From Braced and Bothered to Soft and Supple



On the first day of a three-day Buck Brannaman colt starting clinic, this pushy filly shows no interest in allowing anyone to direct her feet. Rather, her mind is set on charging, biting, and running Buck over. Her tight body displays the classic signs of a braced horse: rigid neck, raised head, clinched jaw, and busy tail. Because it's all she knows, the filly's self-preservation has her clinging to her braced ways. This, however, is about to change. Using basic ground-work maneuvers that focus on breaking down braces and freeing up a horse's feet, Buck begins her journey toward softness.



By the end of Buck's ride on the third morning, this filly has worked through a great many issues. The braces of the first day have melted away; she has, as they say, "come on out the other side." Not only has she found comfort in being guided by the human, this softer approach to living life appears to feel much better to her.

Waiting on the Horse



Shadow, a three-year old gelding, is concerned enough about crossing the tarp that he stops. If forced, the mild brace seen here would likely flare up into a major one. Therefore, while maintaining just enough pressure on the lead to keep the horse focused on following him, Kevin Kalawsky simply waits.



The pair's trusting relationship, which was carefully forged during two days of concentrated groundwork, carries them through. By being allowed time to think things over, Shadow feels comfortable that his self-preservation concerns will be respected—which means so much to the horse. As a result, Shadow's trust in Kevin is strengthened. The colt is now confident and comfortable enough to cross the tarp.



Shadow shows no hesitation about crossing the tarp along the longer, lengthwise direction, even on this first attempt. By remaining aware of and adjusting to his horse's needs, Kevin has successfully used the tarp to further their relationship. In contrast, had force been used when Shadow stopped and braced earlier—or if the tarp had been introduced before a solid foundation in the relationship was established—the horse/human relationship would have suffered a setback.

Perceiving Braces

When a horse braces, what we see or what we feel is resistance: He refuses to turn himself over to us for us to direct. Generally, the muscles throughout the braced horse's body are tight, thus pulling his frame into an unattractive carriage with his head held abnormally high, neck stiff, jaw set, and back dropped or "hollowed." This body tension results in stiff, choppy gaits—making the braced horse not only difficult to direct, but excessively rough and uncomfortable to ride as well.

A variety of terms and phrases are often used to describe a brace in a horse. Such descriptions depend upon the location and degree of the brace. For instance, when a horse refuses to allow us to operate his feet, we say "his feet are stuck," because it's as if his feet are glued to the ground. If his feet operate but not freely, we might refer to his feet as being "sticky." When a horse tips his head and neck away and uses his braced shoulder like a battering ram to cause us to move aside, he's said to be "pushing on us with his shoulder." A horse that travels with his nose out and head high, braced against a rider's hands, is said to have his "neck on upside down." When a horse is tight and wants to resist by rearing, we refer to him as getting "light on his front feet." A horse that tenses in the flank is referred to as being "grabby." A "start" occurs when a horse tightens and gives a quick step forward in overreaction to some small stimulus. Since it's small, a "start" often gets overlooked. Yet, because it can be the beginning of a chain of events that could get a person bucked off, a "start" shouldn't go unnoticed.

A Dose of Empathy

To enable a student to experience for herself where braces come from—and to help her better understand what she can do to avoid them—I'll sometimes walk her through a little exercise. The impact is greatest, of course, when a person experiences the activity firsthand. But since reading about it can also offer insight, I'll share the exercise here.

With no explanation as to what's about to take place, I blindfold the student. I say nothing and maintain my silence throughout the exercise. If she speaks to me, she receives no reply. Then, while standing at the student's left side, I grasp her left hand with my left hand and raise her hand so that her arm is comfortably bent at the elbow, which I grasp in my right hand.

I begin to take a step forward, relying upon my steady hold on her arm to indicate that she is to come with me. Initially, she may brace, reluctant to turn her feet over for me to direct. But my firm hold persists, and her feet



reluctantly break loose from the ground.

As we move off, I concentrate on offering the student a consistent, steady, easy-to-follow feel through my hands. I take her through turns, stops, starts, as well as over and around a few obstacles. The entire time, I'm constantly aware of my student's dependence upon me for support and direction. I'm diligent that each move I make is done in a smooth, consistent, predictable manner. In addition, I remain aware of where she is in relationship to what's around us so that I can keep her safe and avoid having her bump into things.

In a short time, the student feels comfortable in my ability to honor her innate sense of self-preservation; she trusts me. Consequently, she relaxes and willingly allows me to direct her feet. The hesitation is gone and we move smoothly about as one. I ease off on my hold on her hand and her elbow. I maintain very light contact with her, yet I can still smoothly guide her. At times, I can even just "hover" my hands off her hand and her elbow, allowing the warmth from my hands to guide her. When I move my hands away slightly, she'll "reach" for me to maintain our fragile connection; we are now operating solely on a feel.

Next, I switch gears. I again take a firm, steady hold of the student's hand and elbow. But now, instead of focusing on doing all I can to keep the student comfortable and safe, I let my mind drift. I don't plan where I'll go or concern myself with how it will affect the student. My movements are random, unpredictable; my stops and starts abrupt. I even let her run into things.

It doesn't take long for the student to figure out that, although hooked to me, she's actually on her own. With her self-preservation triggered, she begins to brace against me in an attempt to look out for herself. Her feet become "sticky," and the oneness to our movements is gone. It's an uncomfortable situation for us both.

Just short of causing the student to shut down completely and refuse to move, I end the exercise. But the student's heightened awareness and newfound insights carry over to benefit her interactions with her horse.

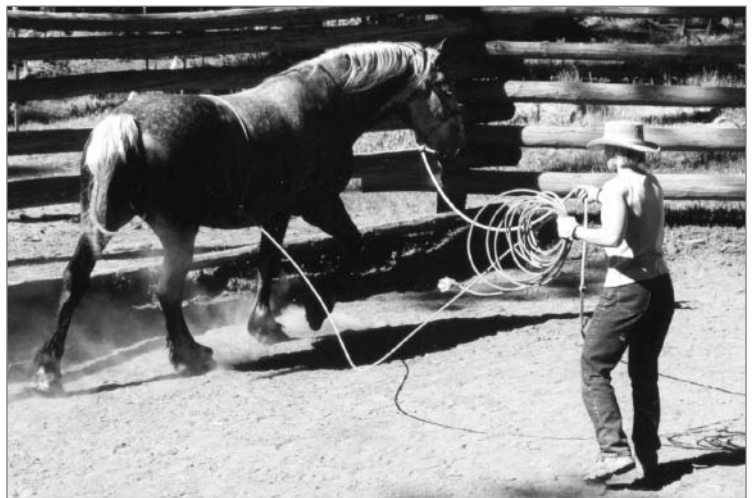
Dealing With Braces

A brace can show up at anytime and in all types of situations. When a horse is learning something new, for instance, and he's searching for the release we have in mind, he may

Waiting on the Human

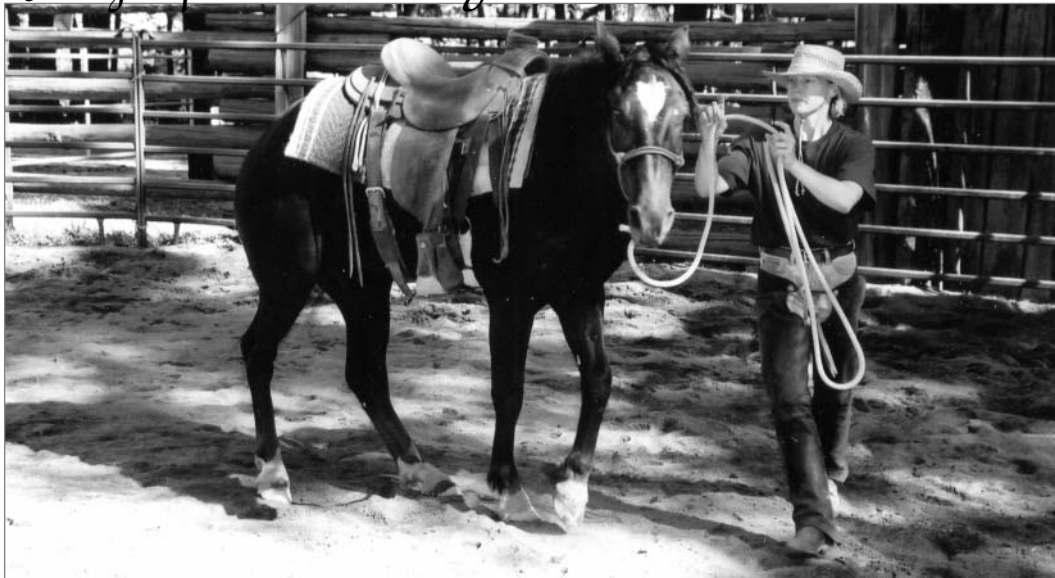


Sometimes the way a person makes a request isn't readily understood or willingly accepted by the horse. Such is the case here as Cindy Kalawsky undertakes her initial introduction to the unfamiliar experience of using a flank rope. Understandably, Cindy's tentative, unsure initial approach has caused this patient Percheron mare's self-preservation to kick in. Although this horse knows about moving forward in response to the rope, concern over this person's worthiness to operate her feet has caused Willow to shut down. Rather than "filling in" and responding to the jumble of inconsistent messages being sent through the rope, this mare chooses to simply wait for the human to sort things out.



Once Cindy got her timing and rhythm correctly coordinated, Willow understood clearly and felt comfortable about accepting the request. She responded by willingly moving forward in search of a release, which Cindy provided. Had the release been late or not given at all, the "try" in the horse would have been adversely affected. By being late occasionally, the horse becomes dull; by being late often enough, the "try" is soon snuffed out. Self-preservation would likely direct this horse to mentally withdraw from the relationship, shut down completely, and refuse to move.

Taking "Square One" With You

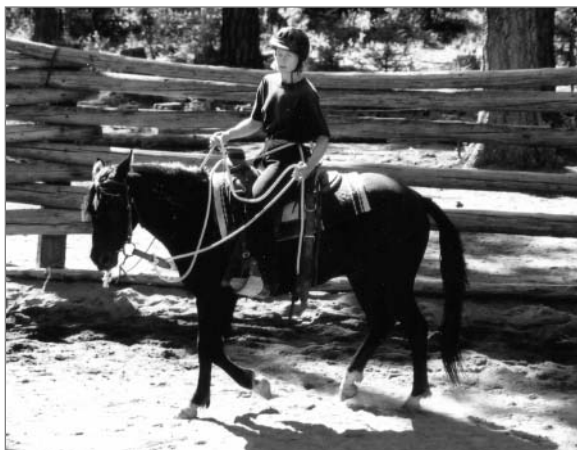


Given their inherent role in a horse's self-preservation, braces are best handled by simply reducing the need for them. This is done by starting on the ground at "square one" and building a relationship with the horse based upon a solid foundation of understanding, trust, and cooperation—rather than force. As she carefully works through a progression of groundwork exercises, Cindy Kalawsky is building that foundation with Shadow, the Kalawsky's recently acquired three-year-old BLM mustang gelding. The softness and "feel" shown here are the result of a week's worth of careful groundwork that Cindy has done in preparation for this colt's first ride.



Part of the foundation building process includes working through a variety of situations in which the horse learns to yield from—rather than brace against—pressure applied through the lass rope. Here, for example, Cindy has worked her way up to having Shadow transition smoothly up through all his gaits in response to a light tug on the rope around his flank.

Time invested in building a solid "square one" does pay off. On this pair's second ride—their first in a snaffle—Shadow willingly accepts and follows Cindy's feel as she guides him onto an arc. By using groundwork to get softness well established first, it's softness—not braces—that carries over into their undersaddle work.



become braced. But if we wait for him to come off the pressure, his brace will dissolve the instant he finds this release.

In another situation, we may be dealing with a horse that has tuned us out and stops searching. Here, we'll have to firm up enough to get a change. This change might simply be that he tries searching again.

With a horse that's so tuned out or dull that he's shut down, our focus is on rekindling his "try." This usually means we have to firm up enough to make ourselves significant to the horse. He needs a reason to come out of the shell he has shut himself in and explore something else. By making ourselves significant, we

become that reason. Finding or creating that first try is the starting point for rebuilding an interactive, trusting relationship with the shut-down horse. This may be accomplished best by working on something very basic, like having the horse lower his head or step a foot back in response to pressure on the halter.

Pushing Through

When dealing with a braced, pushy horse, the breakthrough usually comes when we confront a brace and simply hang in there—in some cases, "no matter what"—until the horse yields. A few years ago, I saw one of these classic, no-matter-what moments unfold in California while attending one of Buck Brannaman's clinics. It took place back when Buck was starting all the horses in the colt class himself.

Buck was in the arena aboard a very pushy warmblood gelding he was restarting. The big, attractive colt wore no halter or bridle. Instead, Buck was using his coiled lass rope to guide the horse. When Buck asked him to yield to the coils and turn, the pushy colt simply braced his neck and took off at a gallop, straight for the fence at the other end of the arena.

Not the least bit impressed, Buck maintained his hold on the cantle of the saddle, leaned well up the horse's neck, and redoubled



his efforts to turn the colt with his coiled rope. It soon became obvious to the spectators seated in lawn chairs outside the fence at the end of the arena that neither the human nor the horse barreling down on them was about to weaken. Wisely, the group jumped up from their chairs and scattered.

Just as the horse gathered himself to jump the fence, he had a change of heart and yielded to Buck's coils instead. "It was a good thing you guys vacated the area," Buck said afterwards. "If this horse was going over that fence, I was going over with him. And I'd be insisting that he make that turn the whole time. And when we landed, I'd keep on insisting until I got it."

While this example highlights the importance of following through with a request until we get a change, hanging in there to this degree is beyond what many of us are up for. Consequently, if we do find ourselves in a situation beyond what we feel comfortable dealing with, it's really safest for us to back off, break things down, and address the horse's braced tendency over an issue that better fits our ability. Granted, backing off will cause the process to take longer. However, given our circumstances, focusing on something we're sure we can follow through on is best for the horse in the long run.

In Summary

Braces are an inherent part of a horse's self-preservation nature. When the horse perceives he's in a harmful, uncomfortable, or dangerous situation, he braces in an effort to protect himself.

To reduce the horse's tendency to brace, we get him "gentle." That is, we work with him on a variety of exercises on the ground and under saddle to expand the range of situations in which he feels comfortable. In the process, we build a relationship with him that's based upon a foundation of trust. On occasion when something does trigger his self-preservation and a brace shows up, we can then tap into this foundation and help him regain his confidence.

Simply Hold and Wait



When Buck Brannaman asks this filly to take a step back for the first time in a snaffle, she gives a braced, self-preservation reaction. However, Buck knows that by being patient, he can tap into the foundation established earlier during groundwork exercises in which the filly learned to back willingly in response to pressure on the halter. Therefore, he maintains his hold on the reins and simply waits.



By not being rushed, the filly soon softens in search of the release she had discovered was there during her groundwork experience. She has already stepped her left front foot back, for which Buck gave a release. Now, she's in the process of stepping back with her right front foot and left hind foot. When the right front foot starts to the ground, Buck will provide another release.

Beware of What We Release For

by Diane Longanecker

When we encounter a brace in the horse, we must be careful about the timing of our release. If we release while the horse is braced, from his point of view, bracing works. Since what works is what gets repeated, the horse is encouraged to use the braced behavior in the future as a way of obtaining a release. In short, when we release for a brace, we encourage that brace.

To help us focus on releasing for softness instead, use this phrase as a little reminder: What we release for is what we get!



If only we had X-ray vision...

A closer look at how the horse functions

by Wendy Murdoch

Previously I have discussed a simplified model of looking at the rider's and the horse's skeleton using the analogy of a bowling ball (the head), a flexible straw (the spine), a bowl (the pelvis) and one or two pairs of stilts (human or horse, respectively). In EH #14 I presented the concept of a counterbalance using a seesaw image to illustrate how the horse can carry its head easily.

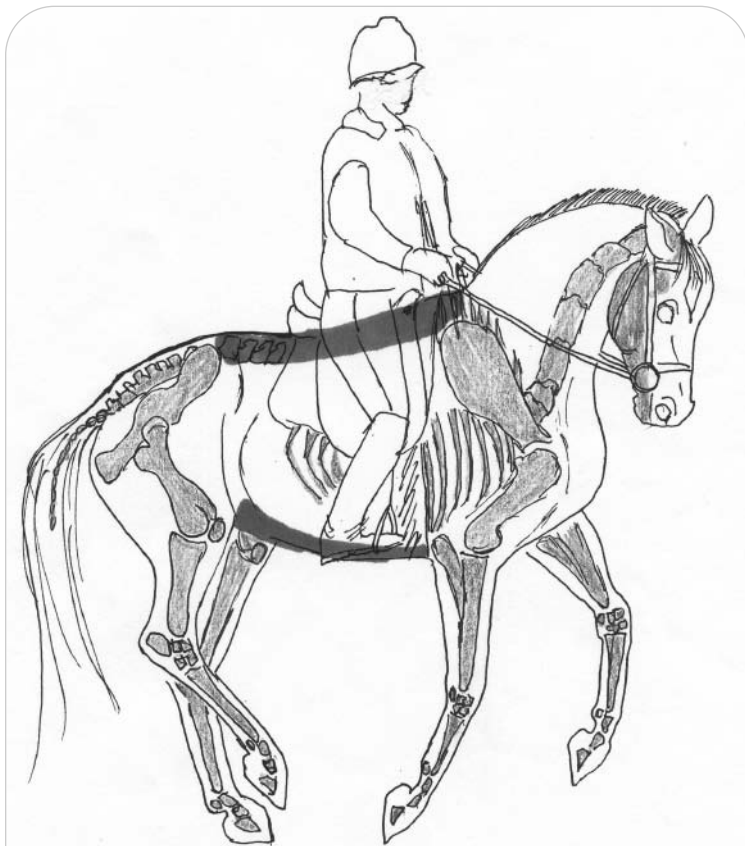
It is readily apparent in humans that if we align our skeleton vertically, our bones in a standing position support our head. This is not so apparent in the horse, since the horse stands horizontally. Therefore, in order to efficiently carry his head, the horse has to use his skeleton in such a way as to counterbalance the head with the pelvis, which is about six feet away.

In EH #14 I presented several seesaw models as examples of how horses can be ridden. Each way affected their ability to carry their head. The easiest way is when the hindquarters lower in order to raise the front end up.

Ultimately, the overall quality of movement is governed by the ease with which the head is carried. Since gravity

is acting on us at all times, our ease becomes a function of how well we can move in gravity. Freedom of movement is determined by how little effort is required to carry our head.

If our skeleton is aligned in a manner that makes carrying the head easy, then we (both horse and human) have more time, energy and ability to focus our attention on

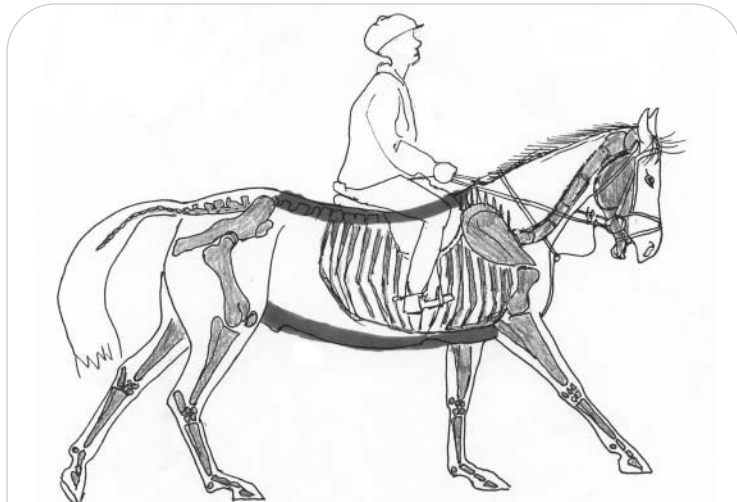


1a. The horse has lengthened his topline and underline. Notice the wedge-like shape formed between the two lines representing the distance from the wither to the croup and the elbow to the stifle.

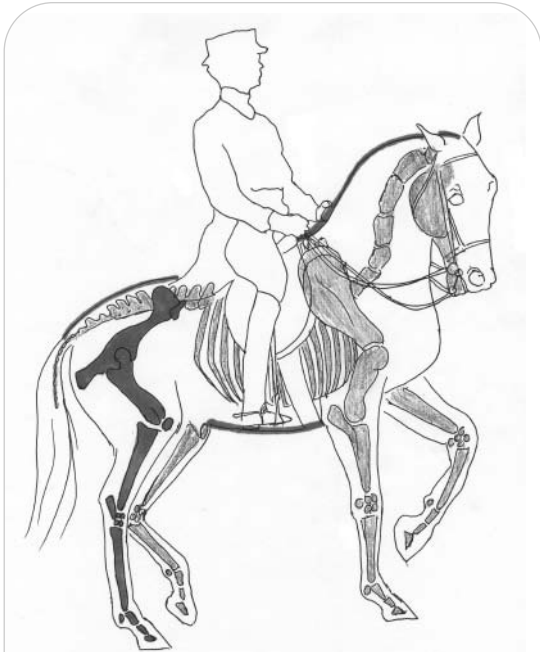
other things (i.e., jumping over a large obstacle, canter pirouettes or chasing a cow). If we are constantly struggling to balance our head, we are less available or capable to move when and where we like because we must first deal with the issue of balanc-

ing the head. Therefore, harmony, grace and beauty are lost because both horse and human are struggling with the basic issue of survival—not letting their head hit the ground.

In all of these discussions I am making the assumption that you want to find a way for you and your horse to carry your heads easily, although you might not think of it in these terms. That is a pretty big assumption on my part. However, while you might not think of it as “ease in carrying your head,” you probably express these ideals



1b. This horse has hollowed its back and dropped his sternum. Notice that the topline is concave and shorter than the underline. Also notice that the hind legs are trailing. The horse is on the forehand and the weight of the rider seems to be causing the back to sink further down.



2a. Notice the angle of the pelvis. The seat bone (point of the buttocks) is pointing down toward the ground. There is a sense that the horse has good support coming up from the foot on the ground into the hip joint and pelvis.



2b. The angle of the pelvis is tipped up and out. The seat bone is pointing back rather than down. The point of the hock and cannon bone of the hind leg is in line with the seat bone behind the horse rather than underneath the horse. There is no feeling of support from the hind leg. Notice the angle of the joints in the hind leg are more closed than in 2a. The sense is that the weight is coming down into the hind leg rather than the horse pushing up through the hind leg.

frame and adequate struts, this amount of snow can easily be supported. Therefore, the strength and alignment of the structure (skeleton) is critical to its ability to support the load (the horse's own body weight and that of the rider) in movement.

So let's look more specifically at what needs to happen in order for the horse to be in self-carriage. I am going to break it down into 9 specific points. The order in which each of these occurs will depend on the individual

think of a tent with aluminum poles trying to hold up 4' of snow. The canvas will tear if it is weak (muscle

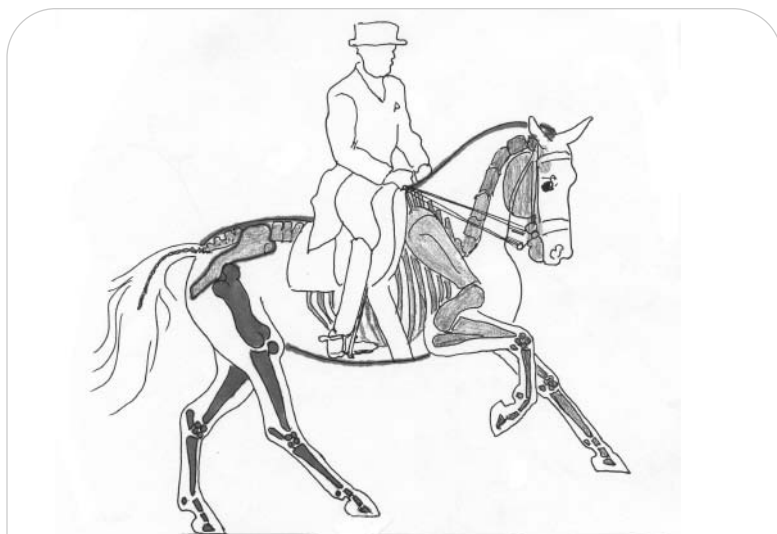
horse and how it is being trained. Also keep in mind that conformation, injury,

in terms such as riding in: "lightness," "freedom," "harmony," "partnership," etc., with your horse. The ultimate state of freedom in riding is called "self-carriage."

In *Dressage Terms Defined* by Eleanor Russel and Sandra Pearson-Adams, "self-carriage" is defined as "the ability of the horse to accept full weight-bearing responsibility through the hindquarters for himself and the rider. The horse maintains his posture without any support or restriction from the rider." In order to do this, the horse must use his skeleton to support his own weight and that of the rider. Otherwise the muscles will be overloaded with the job of weight-bearing, and the joints would be under tremendous stress. Ultimately this will result in breakdown and injuries, not to mention the mental and emotional stress in both the horse and the rider.

To better understand overloading,

injuries), the aluminum poles (bones,) are going to fail, the ropes supporting the poles will be pulled out of the ground (tendons and ligaments) under the weight of the snow causing the whole thing to collapse. The poles will give at the joints first, since they are points of weakness, which are unable to bear weight. But on an angled roof with a wood



3. This horse is able to freely swing the hind leg forward through the hip joint. Notice how far under the body the leg has landed. The other hind leg is coiling in order to support the horse and then push off the ground. The horse is lengthening the canter stride. Notice that the back is up and the pelvis is under, allowing the hind leg to swing forward.

pain, saddle fit, rider position, temperament, etc., will play a part in whether or not your horse is capable of doing all of these things.

Bear in mind I am talking about the ideal in this discussion. Often reality is far from ideal! However, it is important for you to have some idea of what needs to happen for the horse to be in self-carriage if you are ever going to get there. I am not going to discuss how to achieve self-carriage right now. I just want to get you thinking about what is happening underneath your horse's skin for self-carriage to occur.

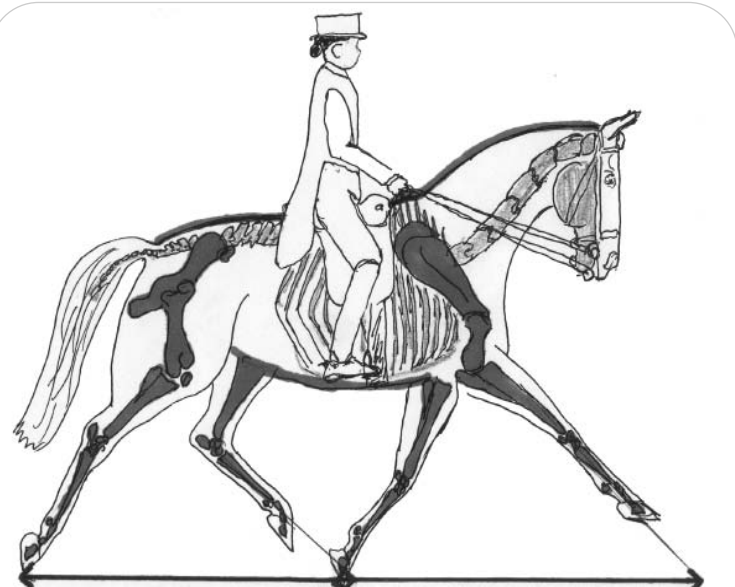
1. Topline and underline lengthened. Typically, the topline is referred to as the distance from the poll to the tail. For the purposes of this discussion I am going to limit it to the area from the withers to the croup and the elbow to the stifle. I will discuss the other areas separately.

We have mentioned this previously in talking about the board of the seesaw. The topline and underline of the horse need to be lengthened. If the topline is

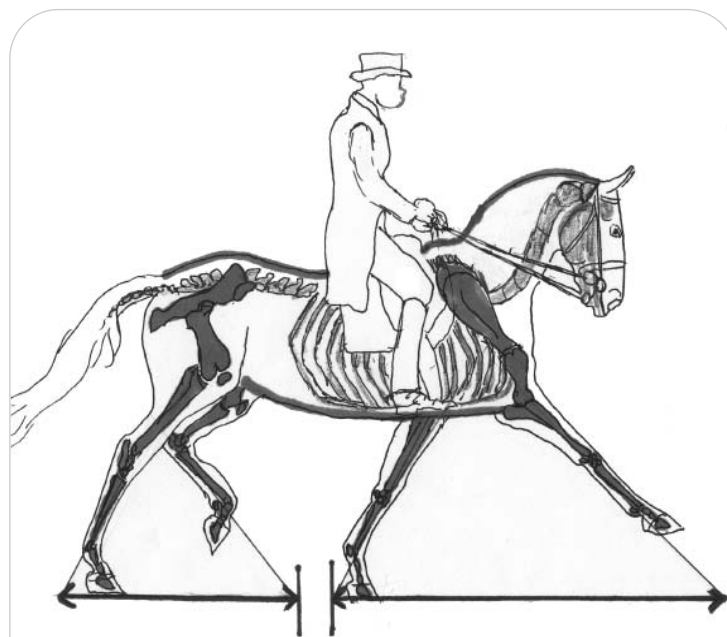
contracted (shortened), the back is down rather than up. A back that is down is incapable of bearing very much weight. Therefore, the weight of the rider is going to be transmitted to the horse's front legs rather than the hindquarters. Some of you might remember the example of getting on all fours and having someone press down on each side of your spine at the level of the shoulder blades when you have your back "up" vs. "down." You might recall that when your back was down you were on your forehand and were very uncomfortable in your arms, wrists and hands. If the topline is too round (again remember the seesaw example), it will also be difficult for the horse to lift the front end up.

2. Pelvis under. The lumbar region of the horse's back is capable of flexing and extending (remember it had virtually no ability to rotate). Therefore, the position of the horse's lower back will affect

his ability to engage his pelvis. Engaging the hindquarters means flexing the lower back and bringing the pelvis under, forward and up. In other words, a pelvic tilt. The lowering of the croup or tilting on the pelvis is extremely important in order to create vertical lift (again remember the seesaw) lightening the front end with the counterbalance of the pelvis (recall the definition of self-carriage is "to accept full weight-bearing responsibility through the hindquarters.") If the horse does not bring his pelvis under, he will have to use extension of the back (arching or hollowing) to lift the shoulders and front end. If the pelvis is tipped up and out, the horse's hind legs will trail out behind. Remember the example of standing up and changing the angle of your pelvis? If you tip your pelvis forward and down, you cannot lift



4a. Follow the lines drawn from the hind and front legs that are in the air. You can see where they will meet the ground. The front and back legs form two triangles. The length of the line on the ground for each triangle is the same. Therefore, this horse is tracking up even in the extended trot.



4b. Look at the triangles formed by this horse's legs. The triangle of the hind legs is much smaller than the front legs. There is a gap between where the hind leg will land and where the front leg is. Therefore, this horse is not tracking up. The front triangle is almost 50% longer on the ground line than the back triangle. The horse has shortened, hollowed or extended the back in order to throw the shoulder and front leg forward in an exaggerated manner. Notice also that the pelvis is tipped up and back and the lower back is hollow.



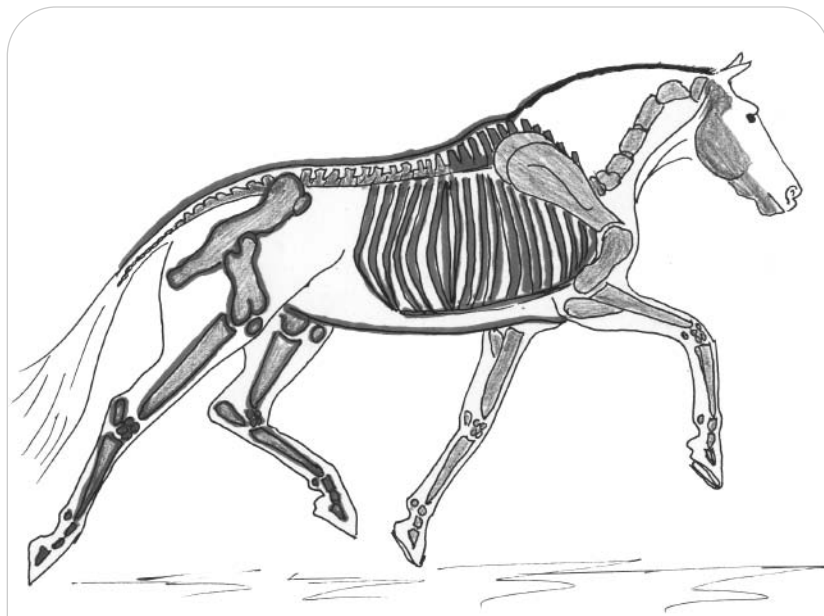
you leg very high. It is impossible to efficiently lift a load with your pelvis out behind you unless you use tremendous upper-body strength.

3. **Mobility in the hip joint.** If the hip joint is restricted, the horse will not be able to swing the hind leg very easily. Think of tightening your hip joints and then walking around. How easily can you swing your hind legs forward? All the joints in the hind legs need to move freely. If the pelvis is tipped up and out, the hip joint and the rest of the joints in the hind leg will be restricted. It will require a much greater amount of effort to get the hind leg under the body. You will have to force the horse through the resistance and make him bring the hind leg further under using very strong aids because the horse is not in a readily available position to bring the hind leg under. Often the sequence of the legs is interrupted and the quality of the gait is severely compromised as a result.

At this point you might already be

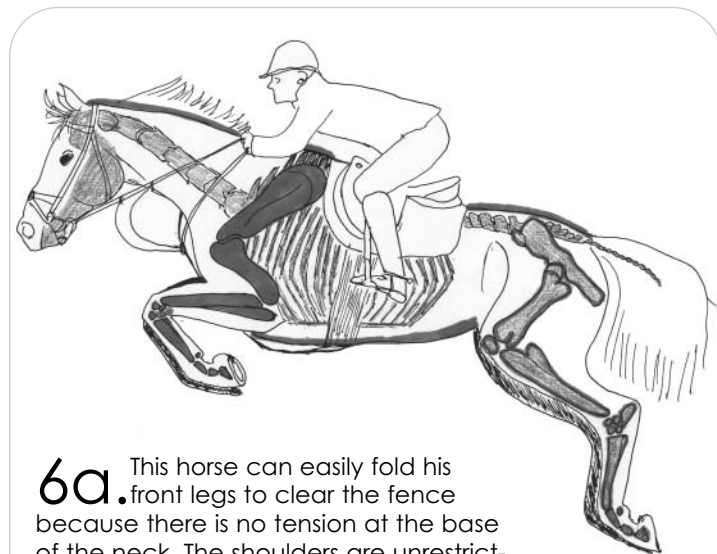
noticing the interrelatedness of each of these points. Actually it is impossible to separate them because it is the combination that creates the overall function of the skeleton and the horse.

However, without some way to isolate individual events, it becomes a difficult concept to discuss. Therefore, I am making these distinctions in order to give you some landmarks. Ultimately all these points must work together. If the horse is stiff in the

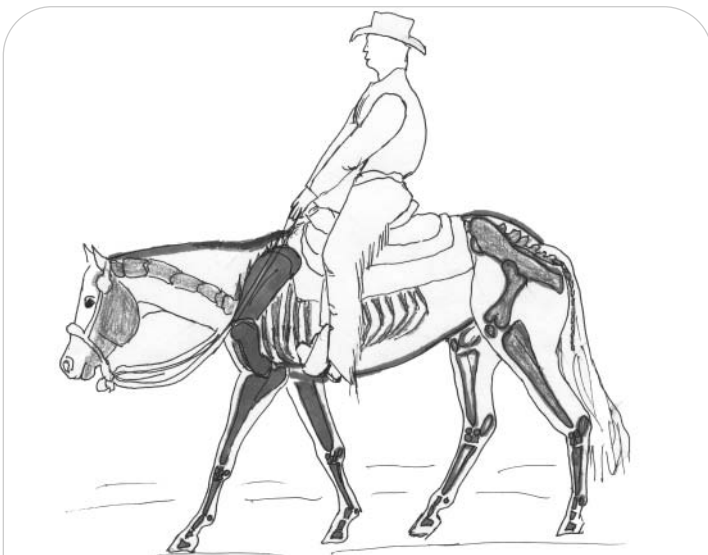


5. This horse has raised the withers. In addition, he has also lengthened through the back, lowered the pelvis and freely flexed the joints of the legs moving forward in flight while extending the legs that have just pushed off the ground. There is tremendous sense that this horse is moving "uphill".

lower back and has the pelvis tipped up and out, the hind leg will be restricted. If the horse is stiff in the hip joints, he will have difficulty engaging the hindquarters (flexing the pelvis under), etc.



6a. This horse can easily fold his front legs to clear the fence because there is no tension at the base of the neck. The shoulders are unrestricted so that they can move back as the front leg comes forward and up. The withers are up, the back and underline has lengthened and the pelvis is under, allowing the horse to clear the fence with a minimum of effort.



6b. The weight is coming down into this horse's shoulder and front end. Notice that the line from the croup to the withers is downhill in front. While the angle of the pelvis is under (this horse is really goose rumped), the hind legs are not tracking up, so the weight is going forward and down through the sternum.



7. Lengthening the neck is not limited to one discipline or type of horse. It is a question of function, not style or breed. If the other elements are there, the neck can lengthen from the base at the shoulder to the poll. This horse has all the elements, which allow his neck to lengthen. Notice that the jaw is soft and the poll is the highest point.

4. Hind leg “tracking up.”

“Tracking up” means that the hind foot lands in the print of the forefoot as it leaves the ground. If the horse “over tracks,” the hind foot has landed in front of the forefoot print. If the horse is “not tracking up,” the hind foot has landed short of the forefoot. The purpose of tracking (also known as engagement of the hind leg) is so that the hind foot lands under the horse’s center of gravity. If the hind foot does not track up sufficiently, the push from the hind foot is going to propel the horse’s body forward and down rather than forward and up. Instead of being able to lift the front end, the thrust of the hind foot will send the horse more onto the forehand. The ability to “track up” can be dramatically influenced by conformation. A long-backed horse with short legs (i.e., a draft cross) is going to have a much more difficult time tracking up than a short-backed horse with long legs (i.e., an Arabian).

There are two ways the horse can swing the hind leg under. One way is to pendulum swing the leg much like the way a racehorse moves. The other is by

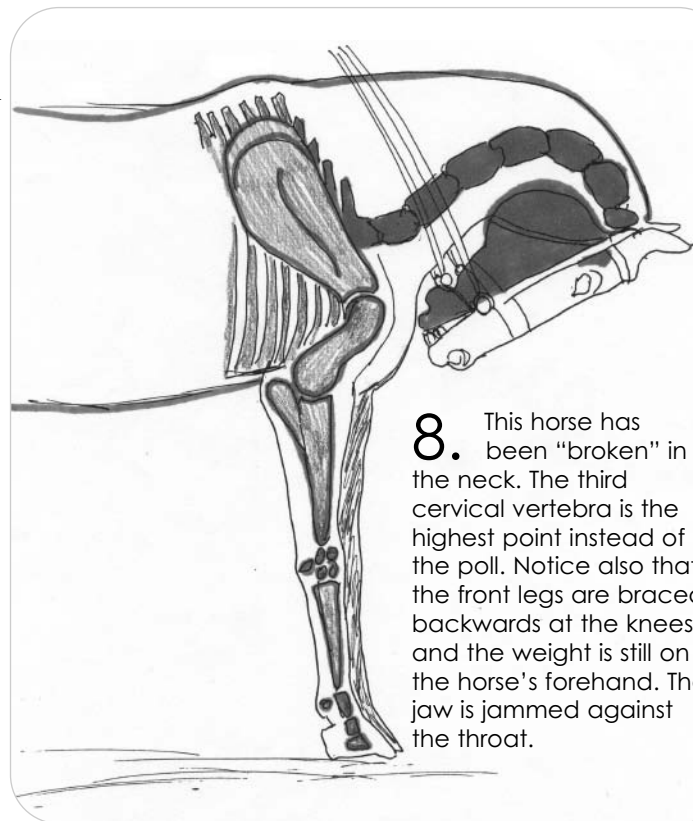
dropping the pelvis and coiling the leg underneath. For lifting power the horse needs to coil the hind leg (fold the joints of the hip, stifle, hock, fetlock). A hind leg that has swung under like a pendulum will not have any lifting power. It will provide more forward thrust.

5. Lift in withers. Perhaps this is the most important part. If the horse is up in the withers, the back can come up. There is room for the pelvis to drop and the hind leg can easily swing under the weight of the rider. Just because the horse’s back is up does not mean the horse’s withers are up. Many times the horse has dropped the withers

down (which also drops the sternum down, since they are connected through the ribs) even when the back is up. However, it is extremely rare to see a horse with the withers up and the back down.

Lifting the withers is critical to what happens in the front end of the horse. If the withers are down, the horse is on his forehand. The weight of the rider will be on the horse’s front legs rather than on the hindquarters. The ability to lift up in the withers is greatly affected by saddle fit and rider position. If you find your horse being unwilling to canter slowly, wants to fishtail his hindquarters to slow down or tosses his head in the canter transitions, it may be a result of his inability to lift up through the withers.

6. Release of tension at the base of the neck. As the withers come up, the horse no longer braces through the sternum. The base of the neck stops working so hard and these



8. This horse has been “broken” in the neck. The third cervical vertebra is the highest point instead of the poll. Notice also that the front legs are braced backwards at the knees and the weight is still on the horse’s forehand. The jaw is jammed against the throat.



muscles decontract. Once this happens, the horse will be able to raise the forelegs through the shoulders rather than primarily from the knee. The movement of the front legs will become more elevated and elegant.

7. Telescoping neck. As the withers lift, the neck is able to lengthen or extend from the base to the poll in a telescoping movement. If the withers are down, the neck will shorten rather than lengthen. Often the neck appears to “grow” out of the withers and shoulders rather than appear pulled down to the withers when the neck lengthens. Look just in front of the withers; if there is a dip there, the neck probably shortened. If this area is full, the neck is lengthening when the horse is working.

8. Soft jaw. The muscles of the tongue are connected to a small bone called the hyoid bone. This small bone floats inside the horse's jaw area and is

not connected to the horse other than through muscles. The muscles of the tongue attach to the hyoid bone as well as a number of other muscles including one that runs from the hyoid bone to the sternum. When the sternum is down (withers down), the under-neck muscles tighten and restrict the tongue via the hyoid bone. This often causes tension in the jaw. As the withers lift and the neck extends, it is common to see the horse's tongue come forward and rest on the back of the lower incisors. If the jaw is tense, the tongue is often busy and/or drawn back and the horse wants to open his mouth.

9. Poll the highest point. The poll (the atlanto-occipital joint) is the joint between the top of the spine and the horse's skull. When a horse is moving correctly, this point is the highest point in the arc of the neck regardless of the frame (shape of the outline of the horse). No matter whether the horse is

on a long rein or ridden in a high degree of collection, the poll should be the highest point in the arc. Often the highest point is not the poll but rather the joint between the second and third cervical (neck) vertebrae. The horse is not in self-carriage if this is the case.

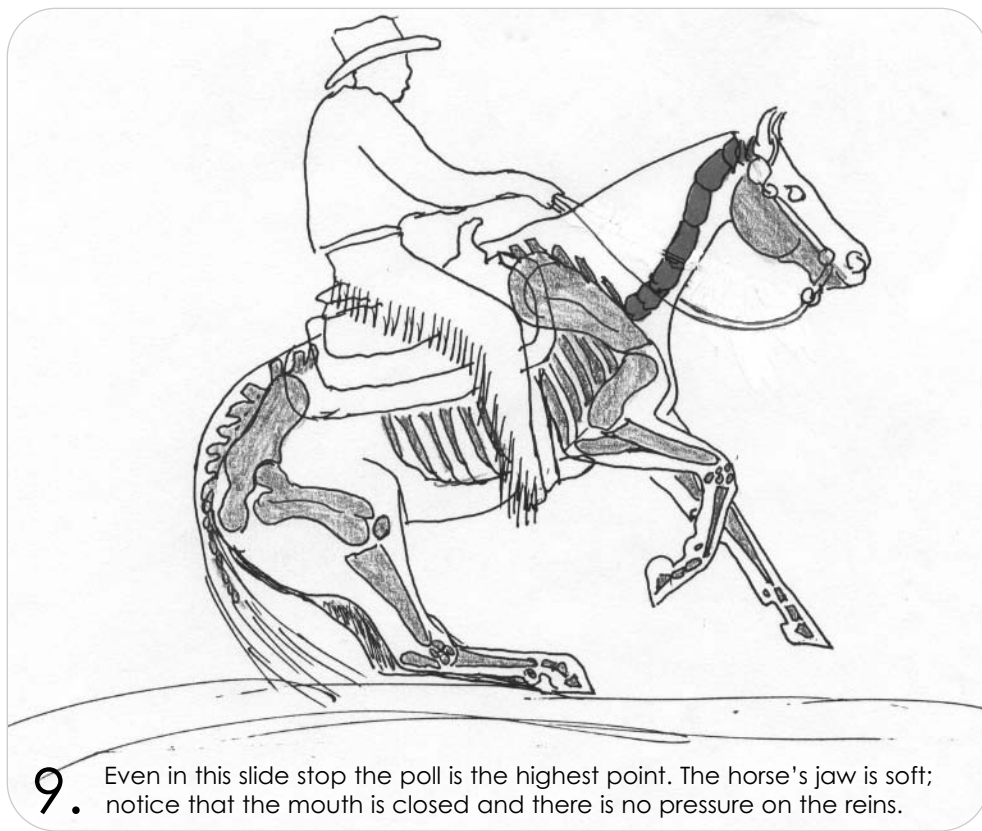
Is my horse carrying himself?

A quick way to check if the horse is carrying himself is to look for the poll as the highest point (the end of the arc), and whether there is a dip in front of and/or behind the saddle. This will give you a good indication of the overall picture. If there is a dip in front of and behind the saddle, the horse is most likely shortening its back rather than lengthening its back.

You can start looking for other details that confirm if the horse is in self-carriage, carrying his weight and that of the rider through the hindquarters or not. Another way to check if the horse is in self-carriage is to watch the poll. When the horse is moving, if the poll is pulsing forward and down (again this is regardless of the degree of collection or frame), the horse is lengthening through the back and is most likely correct. If the poll is pulsing back and up, the horse is shortening through the neck and back. The horse can be in self-carriage only if he is lengthening through the back and neck.

Hopefully this gives you a clearer picture of what the horse has to do to be in self-carriage. After you go through the drawings and captions once, go back again. Look at each for all 9 points in each drawing. Compare the images with and look for the overall patterns. Then grab a magazine and examine the photos. Begin to educate your own eye. Are the horses in the pictures in self-carriage?

In the next issue we will look at what the rider has to do. Perhaps you will have already figured it out before we get there!



9. Even in this slide stop the poll is the highest point. The horse's jaw is soft; notice that the mouth is closed and there is no pressure on the reins.

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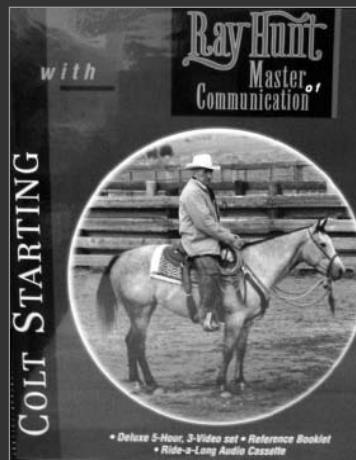
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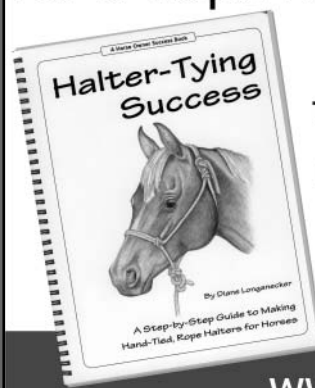
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