

EQUIBALANCE FOR RIDERS: THE FEET

ISSUE No. 20

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HORSEMAN



[BUILDING ON THE
BASIC REINBACK]



[GET READY FOR
SLICKER SEASON]



[RECOGNIZING A
SOFT FEEL]

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

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

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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

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."



Julie Leiken

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.

Julie Leiken studied and taught dressage in Germany for 10 years before discovering the benefits of Pilates for riders. She currently teaches both riding and Pilates in Boulder, Colo.



Sue Stuska

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.

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. Her book *Simplify Your Riding* has been such a hit, it's already in its second printing!

Sue Stuska wrote Equine Technology curriculum for her doctorate from Virginia Tech, then guided Martin Community College's change to a needs-based equine curriculum. Her broad-based equestrian science undergraduate study included dressage training at William Woods University. In addition to teaching equine studies at several colleges and universities, she has worked at various jobs in the equine industry; her favorite was head wrangler at an educationally oriented guest ranch owned by friends in Colorado. Her current position centers around the wild horse herd on Shackleford Banks, a barrier island in coastal North Carolina.



Sylvana Smith

Sylvana Smith spent her first 10 years of horsemanship in the hunter equitation tradition, which gives only a nod to the usefulness of backing, and the next 10 years in the dressage tradition, which views backing as the cause of many un-forward ills. Those misconceptions were overturned in demos with Buck Brannaman, Bill Scott, and others. In this issue, Sylvana draws on insights from Bill Scott about how backing can be taken beyond the basics with specific exercises.

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303-449-3537 or Fax 303-404-2404



Hi All,

I hope this holiday season finds you and your loved ones healthy and happy. On this beautiful fall day I can actually say that I'm looking forward to the snow. Last year we had such a fun time trotting across the snow-blanketed prairie that I'm keeping my fingers crossed for big snow storms that leave enough behind to go trot through.

All of us here at *Eclectic Horseman* are thankful for another year of interesting articles, of meeting our readers at clinics and visiting with you on the phone about your horsemanship successes and challenges, and we're just plain grateful for your wonderful support and feedback about the publication and through the Eclectic Mercantile. Thank you. Each and every one of you is important to us; you are appreciated.

We are sad to see Val Cromar leaving us at the end of the year. Her second child will be born in February, which will mean that she will have *at least* one in diapers (depending on how the potty training of her first-born, Ryder, goes; come on Ryder!). Val has been a strong member of our staff since *EH* was just a dream. We will all miss her hard work and insight. Send your good-byes to val@eclectic-horseman.com.

I tried to pack this issue as full as I could, so hopefully between holiday gatherings and hurried shopping you'll find the time to enjoy it and to get out and ride.

Happy Holidays! Take care,

Classified Ads

Clinic Photos Wanted: for book on "How to Get the Most Out of Horse Clinics." Color or black and white prints any size or 300dpi scans. Payment in copies of the printed book. Full credit given, carnage releases required. Email ckimball@carriagehousebooks.com for details. Deadline for submissions 2/28/05. Please put "Clinic Photos" in the Subject line.

Athletic TB/warmblood cross gray mare: 16 hands; good jumping potential; super sweet. She has been nicely started, but was just started this year, as a 6 year old, and needs someone to continue working with her. \$3000 Call Clare 970-870-9729 CO

Too cute for words! Pony sized, registered Arab mare. Stout and strong with nice bloodlines and impressive movement. Very talented and capable little mare with a fairly high maintenance personality. She has so much potential, but I don't have time for her. \$3500 970-870-9729 CO

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Classified Ad Rates: For subscribers only. Rates are \$24 for ads up to 50 words. Ads will be run for one issue. Payment in full is required in advance. Call toll-free for issue deadline 866-773-3537 or 303-449-3537.

Community Listings

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Richard Winters Horsemanship
Richard and Cheryl Winters
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805-640-0956

Colorado

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

Last Resort Equestrian Center
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luannlresort@aol.com

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

Washington

Longmire Training Barn and Arena
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ktmac@ywave.com

Community listings are \$75 for one year. Please call 303-449-3537 to place a listing.



What Kind of Experience Will Your Horse Get Out of Your Next Ride?

by Martin Black

Think of the big picture and what it is you are trying to achieve and what kind of steps you may take to reach your goals. If every ride could be a positive step in the direction you want and you can keep building on each step, the farther you go the more momentum you start picking up. When you get in trouble and cause some confusion with your horse, it may take away from some of what you had working, and it may also cause some doubt in the horse's mind as to what you are trying to accomplish in the future.

Horses are amazing animals. With a little motivation and exposure doing whatever job they need to do, they can figure a lot of things out for us. Think about how long we spend fixing mistakes versus how much time we prepare for the right thing to fall into place with our horses.

Horses are extremely honest. All they want is to be comfortable. They don't look for trouble with us, they don't take advantage of us, and we lose the advantage over them at times, and get in trouble with them.

Look at where your horse has come from in your training, where he is at, and where you would like to end up. What have you done in the past to contribute positively and what have you done negatively? Most of us need to control our impulse, think our way through our problems or progressive steps. Think about where the confidence level is with your horse, and when you were done with your last ride, was it better, worse, or maintained?

Think about this: when a horse is on his own how often do you see him take something in his mouth and pull? A stallion may in certain situations or a young horse may pick something up to play with, but if he is going to pull on something with his mouth, it would be with his teeth clenched. When we see a horse with a bridle in his mouth and he is pulling against it, it is not comfortable for him; he would be confused, panicked, or at the least irritated. This is an example of where we can analyze what we are getting done. Are we teaching the horse to pull against our hands, accepting and wearing a pull from us, raising or flipping his head to try to deal with the pull by fighting for some relief from the pressure?

I guarantee if the horse knew where to position his feet or body to avoid getting his mouth pulled on, he would. It takes pressure for relief to be effective, but it also takes relief for pressure to be effective. When the horse experiences more pressure than relief, he will basically fight what he can't tolerate, and tolerate what he can't avoid.

Look at the big picture; if you spend a lot of time pressuring the horse, maybe a different presentation could be more effective. If the horse isn't putting in the effort you think is necessary, then you need to carefully decide if he understands and is not motivated, or if he doesn't understand or is not ready physically or mentally. The correct diagnosis could be the key to your success.

“When the horse experiences more pressure than relief, he will basically fight what he can't tolerate, and tolerate what he can't avoid.”

Before You Slip Into Your Slicker

with Buck Brannaman

So much of groundwork is not only about preparing your horse, but helping you to be able to see when things don't look right before you get on. If you can see the trouble and work through it, you can stay safer.

If it's summer and it's 90 degrees by 9 o'clock in the morning, many of you get by on horses that aren't very well started. But in the fall, when it's frosty in the morning and they've been shivering in the night, if you think you're just going to saddle up and trot off into the sunset, it's those kind

of mornings that you might get bucked off.

I would like my horse to have no reaction when I toss my slicker up on the saddle. Someday I might need to tie my coat behind my saddle and I would like to be able to walk up and do that with no reaction on his part I want him to be gentle.

But first I have to pay my dues so he knows this slicker is not going to hurt him.

Back Issue Reference:

EH #1 Getting off on the Right Foot with Buck Brannaman

EH #8 Flag Work on the Ground with Buck Brannaman



1.

This slicker is no different than my flag. He might be comfortable with the flag and still need exposure to this.



2.

He has to be comfortable with the slicker while his feet are moving, so I'll use it to move him out.



3.

As he moves around me, I'm mindful of his form. If he takes his head to the outside of the circle...



4.

I will bump with my lead rope so that his nose is tipped to the inside of the circle.



5.

If, when I toss the slicker there is any concern on his part, I will bend him and let his hindquarters work.



6.

He can stand whenever he wants. I want to be careless with the slicker; I don't want to have to sneak around.



7.

I won't make him stand, but I will bend him and sort of "slip the clutch" as he travels around me.



8.

He is thinking that this slicker is going to hurt him, but pretty soon he will realize that it is not.



9.

If he tries to push forward, I will use the angle of my lead rope toward his hip so he steps over behind.



10.

He is pretty used to the flag, so I can come in here at his shoulder while keeping his hindquarters working.



When he chooses to stand, I will let him. And I will rub him with the slicker in a soothing way.



Once he is standing, I might toss the slicker up like I would to tie it on to my saddle for the day.



If I want to work the other side, I just tip his nose across in front of me with my leading hand.



I let him move his feet to put me on his other side, rather than me walking to his right side.



I want him to be comfortable with the slicker while his feet are in motion, just like he'd be if I were riding in it.



If he is worried, I will bend him and let his hindquarters work, making it difficult for him to just race around me.



17.

He chooses to stop, which is good. He is feeling better about the slicker moving around him.



18.

Now I'll use the slicker to ask him to go. This time he leaves a little more softly.



19.

This is the separation that they need to learn with the lead rope, the flag, the slicker. Once he says I think I can...



20.

tolerate you throwing that all over, then he needs to be able to move away from it when you ask.



21.

I'm really careful by his shoulder. A troubled horse might jump by and kick you. Make sure your flag work is solid first.



22.

With more time spent on these basics, there will be no reaction at all when I toss my slicker up on the saddle.



It's The Little Things

Recognize a Soft Feel

by Diane Longanecker

While sitting on your horse as he stands quietly, you decide to give picking up a soft feel a try. After shortening the reins and making contact with his mouth, you wait for him to “soften” or yield to your hands and flex longitudinally so you can respond with a well-timed release. You know that’s the program anyway.

Then the horse moves his head. The moment for you to identify the correct movement to release for is at hand. But you are suddenly filled with doubt. Unsure, yet knowing you must decide, you release. “Was that it?” you ask yourself. “Maybe... but then again, maybe not. Gosh, how’s a person to know?” Realizing the elusive nature of the unfamiliar target you are aiming for, you are left to wonder.

A Way of Knowing

Recently, on an afternoon when my mind was particularly busy sorting through the information for this article and mulling over how best to present it, I dropped in on a friend and asked her this simple question: “When you pick up the reins and ask your horse for a soft feel, how do you know whether or not he has responded with one?”

Given that this person rides a bridle horse she made, has a few young horses coming along, and is passionate about ranch roping and the quality horsemanship it demands, I wasn’t put off when she eyed me suspiciously for some telltale sign that this was a trick question or obvious joke. Realizing I was serious, she looked at me squarely and with conviction she simply said, “I feel it.”

When I asked her what it was she felt, she thought about it for a while before attempting to put it into words. “When I pick up on the reins to prepare to do something,” she explained, “I feel the horse under me preparing himself, too, getting himself ready to do whatever I may ask. And he’s very soft—no braces.”

It was no surprise that, for a rider at this level, a soft feel was just that, a feel. Not until I inquired about what she might notice visually did she mention something other than what she could feel. “I can tell by how his neck shapes up in front of me,” she said, “where his head is, and how much of his ears I can see. But he’s also very light and soft in my hand, too.”



A Picture of Softness

While loping a circle, Buck Brannaman’s two-rein horse easily carries a soft feel. This horse’s loose reins, arched neck, dropped chin, and gathered, balanced way of travel indicate he has learned to shift his weight back onto his hindquarters and step further under himself with his hind legs to better carry his own weight as well as that of his rider. Such softness begins mentally as a yielding response to the rider’s picking up on the reins. This softness then radiates throughout the entire horse, as evidenced at each stride by the rhythmic forward-and-back swing of his tail. Observing horses being ridden at this level is an excellent way to form an image in your mind of what a soft feel looks like. In the process, you’ll also gain a sense of how soft, balanced, comfortable, and effortless a horse in this frame of carriage is to ride.

Visual Aids

While recognizing a soft feel by feel alone is the ideal to shoot for, right now, when you pick up on the reins and ask the horse to soften, you need a way to visually verify that he has responded with the correct longitudinal flexion. That’s just what you’ll find here in this group of accompanying photos and sidebars. They take a detailed look at the same visual aids mentioned by my friend. The information will help you learn what to look for in the horse’s head and neck so you can identify when they are correctly positioned. Suggestions on ways you can double-check this position are also offered.

Use Key Reference Points

To aid you in your search to recognize a soft feel, we’ll examine the three pairs of head and neck photos presented here. It’s one way of helping you learn to match what you see with how it feels. As we go along, however, please keep in mind that a soft feel is about the whole horse, not just what we see out in front of the saddle.

Let’s start with a side view and establish a few key reference points. We’ll then see how these points look from the saddle and notice how they change as we follow them through the set of photos. (If you would like to compare the measurements we will be looking at for yourself, a length of string a few inches long will allow you to check things as we go.)

Relaxed

Head and Neck

Viewed from the Side

- **Shape along the Top of the Neck** - From the poll to the front of the withers (at the edge of the saddle blanket), this particular horse's neck is nearly straight with just a very slight rise in the middle. (What you see with your own horse will vary according to his individual build, conformation, and physical condition: long neck, short neck, lightly muscled, heavily muscled, in condition, out of condition.)

- **Length of the Bottom of the Neck** - The distance from the throat latch to the base of the neck is a little more than half the length of the top of the neck.

- **Relationship of the Face to Vertical** - Imagine a vertical wall rising up immediately in front of the horse and just close enough to touch him. Here, the only part of the horse's face to contact the wall would be his nose.



Viewed from the Saddle

- **Length of Neck** - Since it's relaxed, the horse's neck is at its longest.
- **Amount of Ears, Forelock, and Headstall Visible** - The full length of the horse's ears, the top of the headstall, and even part of the throatlatch as well as the base of the forelock are all visible.
- **Shape of the Neck** - With the muscles relaxed, the sides of the horse's neck have a flat, smooth appearance.

Soft Feel

Viewed from the Side

- **Shape of the Top of the Neck** - As the horse bends or flexes at the poll, the top of his neck takes on a nearly uniform arch from the poll to the front of his withers (at the edge of the saddle blanket).

- **Length of the Bottom of the Neck** - The length of the bottom of the horse's neck has shortened. The distance from the throat latch to the base of the neck is now a little less than half the length of the top of the neck.

- **Relationship of the Face to Vertical** - When the imaginary vertical wall rises up immediately in front of the horse (but no higher than to the base of his ears), the length of his face—from forehead to the top of his nostrils—would contact the wall.



Viewed from the Saddle

- **Length of Neck** - The horse's neck has become shorter.
- **Amount of Ears, Forelock, and Headstall Visible** - Less of the horse's ears and only the back edge of the headstall are now visible. Virtually all of the forelock has dropped forward and is just out of sight.
- **Shape of the Neck** - As the muscles along either side flex, the horse's neck widens fairly uniformly along its length, giving his neck a full, smooth, balanced appearance.



Overflexed Head and Neck (A Flexion to Avoid)

Viewed from the Side

• **Shape of the Top of the Neck** - The flexion or bend in the horse's neck now takes place farther down the neck (toward the saddle) instead of at the poll. Because the top of his neck bulges upward above where he's bent, the arch in his neck is less uniform.

• **Length of the Bottom of the Neck** - The bottom of the horse's neck has once again shortened. Now, the distance from the throat latch to the base of the neck is only one-third the length of the top of the neck.

• **Relationship of the Face to Vertical** - When the imaginary vertical wall rises up immediately in front of the horse (to the height of the base of his ears), his forehead would be the only portion of his face to contact the wall. Because being overflexed physically limits the horse's ability to achieve correct, balanced movement, you should remain aware of—and work to avoid—having him come behind vertical with his head and neck.

Viewed from the Saddle

• **Length of Neck** - The horse's neck has become even shorter.

• **Amount of Ears, Forelock, and Headstall Visible** - The base of the ears, the forelock and virtually all of the headstall are no longer visible.

• **Shape of the Neck** - As the muscles on either side of the horse's neck bulge outward, his neck takes on a short, broad, curled-over, stubby appearance.



A Place to Begin

With the concepts presented here in mind, you're now ready to do a little experimenting atop your own horse and fine-tune a set of visual "soft-feel" references that are calibrated to his conformation. As you become familiar with the feel that goes along with such references, you'll begin to associate what you see with how the horse feels under you. Soon, feel

itself will begin to serve as your guide.

Then whenever you pick up on the reins and feel the horse soften in response, you'll automatically recognize his willing effort by providing him with the well-timed release he deserves.



A Practiced Hand (Photo A & B)

As you begin your search for the soft feel, having a knowledgeable person on the ground to assist you offers a huge advantage. The tips, suggestions, and feedback he or she provides will speed the learning process and reduce the time it takes for you to become comfortable about picking up a soft feel on your horse.

At a recent Buck Brannaman clinic, Kelly Stinnett received just such assistance. In the first photo, she watches carefully from where she sits in the saddle as Buck begins introducing her horse to the soft feel. This gives Kelly a chance to see how the horse's head and neck change as he bends longitudinally and drops his chin.

With the image of what she's looking for fresh in her mind, the second photo shows Kelly—with a little assistance from Buck—taking a turn at picking up a soft feel herself. By placing his hands atop hers, Buck is able to help Kelly “ask” the horse to soften. When the softening occurs, she'll then experience the feel and the timing involved as Buck acknowledges the horse's “try” by delivering a correctly timed release.

Shadow Checking (Photo C & D)

Because of the instant feedback it provides, a mirror is an excellent resource for someone learning how to recognize a soft feel—or any other position of horse and rider, which is why most dressage facilities commonly use mirrors. If a mirror is not available, you might find a large window you can park your horse alongside of and view your reflection there. If none of these options is available to you, then when the sun is out (but not directly overhead), you might consider going shadow hunting.

As this pair of photos reveals, I found a spot to create a shadow by standing my horse right next to the horse trailer. Although you'll note some distortion (the horse's overly long ears), this shadow setup can still offer some instant feedback information about our soft feel. In this situation, the key visual reference I use is the relationship of the horse's face to vertical.

By first having the horse in a relaxed frame and then picking up a soft feel, I can quickly see how the side view shown in the shadow compares to what I see when I look directly down at the horse. This information allows me to identify how it looks and what it feels like when I have the horse's head positioned correctly in the soft feel.





Riding Broadside to the Sun (Photo E & F)

When you begin working on having your horse carry a soft feel, consider riding broadside to the sun when it's low in the sky and can create a shadow to help you out. The shadow will allow you to check on your horse's carriage; you can then relate that information to what you are feeling as you ride.

Since the shadow will be distorted, as you can see here by the overly long appearance of my mecate lead and the odd placement of the slobber straps, I suggest taking a few moments while standing still to orient yourself to your shadow.

For example, here in the first photo, I make note of the general shape of the horse's head and neck while they are in a relaxed position. Next, I pick up a soft feel and check my reference points. While things in general appear a bit odd, the shape along the top of the horse's neck and the relationship of his face to vertical still offer useful feedback information I can tap into while on our ride.

Recognizing a Try

When a horse is first learning how to yield to the reins and flex longitudinal into a soft feel, we are careful to ease into making contact with his mouth. We then hold and wait. As the horse gives, we must feel the very beginnings of this flexion—this try, this moment when the horse is going to soften—and acknowledge it at once with a release.

This lets the horse know that the direction in which he's decided to move his head and neck works: it's the way toward a release. And since what works gets repeated, the horse is encouraged to seek that direction the next time he feels the reins make contact with his mouth. Consequently, a rider will feel the flexion for the soft feel come in increments as the horse becomes more sure about where to go for a release.

Soon, if we've been consistent about delivering our releases in a timely manner, the horse becomes willing to hold a soft feel for increasingly longer periods of time—comfortable in waiting for the release he now realizes will always come.

A Soft Feel's Roots

A soft feel isn't limited just to horses that are being ridden. With your awareness now raised, you'll notice this frame of carriage in horses in other situations as well.

To view a few examples, the next time you see horses cavorting in a pasture at play or kicking up their heels upon first being turned out on a blustery day or even "wild" horses interacting within the herd in a nature film on television, spend a few moments observing. As you notice the arched necks, vertical faces, and gathered ways of moving that permit rapid turns, quick stops and starts, and precise maneuvering, you're sure to recognize the foundation upon which the soft feel is based.



The Reinback— Building on the Basics

Advancing finesse and versatility in under-saddle reinback-exercises

by Sylvana Smith

It was Day Three of the Horsemanship clinic, and riders were backing a specified number of steps, then walking forward an exact number of steps. Things were going well for a while, and then my horse started over-volunteering steps I hadn't requested. I'd ask for five steps back, and he'd back eight or 10. I'd ask for two steps back and get five.

"What should I do?" I asked Buck. His response: "Do less."

I scratched my head for a moment, because I was sure there was no way I could do less to ask for the reinback. I was already doing next to nothing, on a limp rein. But soon I had to concede that there was an imperceptible level of "less" that worked; I just hadn't been open to the possibility.

This experience was yet another reminder that horses have an innate sensitivity, lightness, and feel that often exceeds our own—or at least exceeds what we give them

credit for. I was reminded yet again that these half-ton creatures are attentive to mere milligrams. Backing was fresh ground to come to that oft-repeated little epiphany, because backing was not something I had explored very thoroughly. As a hunter/dressage rider, I had come from traditions that ascribed very little value to backing, even deemed it dangerous.

"It amazes me how many people consider backing to be unimportant in their programs," said Bill Scott, a North Carolina horseman who uses backing liberally in his program, with horses of all ages and levels.

Rather than being the antithesis of all things forward, backing seems to offer significant benefits.

First, there are the obvious practical applications, such as unloading a horse from the trailer or getting out of dead-end predicaments on trail rides. Second, there's the gymnastic value, because correct backing requires the horse to engage himself naturally in a collection—thereby developing the horse's hip and loin without coercing him into a "frame." And third, there's relationship-building value. By asking the horse to move with precision in a way that is not necessarily natural to him, backing can be a valuable exercise to soften the horse mentally, as well as being a good barometer of his mental state.

"Backing enhances the athletic development of the horse and helps him learn collection and self-carriage without coercion," Bill says. "And backing in a nice, smooth, free and easy way shows unity between the horse and human. And yet, outside of the reining and reined cow-horse types of activities, you don't come across many horses that

back very well."

If backing is such valuable cross-training, why is it so often underrated or overlooked in the progressive education of the riding horse? Bill points to two possible factors:

The unique biomechanics of backing set the stage for many influential and healing positive effects – while at the same time developing the basics of collection as a volunteered behavior.

First, backing correctly requires a lot of finesse from the rider and harmony with the horse. It's certainly much easier to claim that the movement has no value and lightly dismiss it.

Second, several equestrian disciplines (most notably dressage)

believe that backing hinders forwardness, puts too much strain on the hocks, and will teach the horse to evade work by running backward.

However, rather than inhibiting forwardness, correct backing seems to enhance it. "If you have a really nice, correct reinback, you will have achieved balance, collection, and lightness—characteristics that are related to every other thing you'll ever do on your horse's back," Bill notes.

The first article in this three-part series explored ways of introducing and refining backing from the ground. The second installment showed how those groundwork basics carry over into riding, and how backing influences qualities of forwardness and collection. This third article builds on the basics to increase finesse, address common backing problems, and combine backing with lateral movements in several ways.

First, let's recap some basics from Parts I and II:

How do you ask the horse for a reinback? Always start with visualization, having a clear picture in your mind of exactly how you want the horse to move. Then shift your



A few steps of reinback set this horse's weight well over her haunches, making it easy for her to bring her forequarters across laterally.



seat slightly back in the saddle. The attuned horse will sense this subtle change and shift backward to keep you centered. If necessary, follow up with the reins, not by pulling backward, but by having a passive hand instead of a giving hand. You might need to add leg at or very slightly ahead of the girth to bring up more life. Release to reward the horse at each step.

As the horse gets more educated, each one of these signals will get more refined, and the ideal will be to phase out all cues but visualization, seat, and release.

What constitutes a proper reinback?

When backing correctly, the horse shifts his balance back, engages his hocks under himself, and steps back crisply in diagonal pairs. He appears as if he could strike right off into a canter from his last step backward. He is attentive and “on the aids”—that is, always ready to move in any direction desired—not escaping backward from rider pressure. He maintains a “soft feel” in the transitions from forward to halt to reinback and forward again, with his head down, chin in, mouth closed. He responds to very subtle signals and a very light contact or a slack rein, as befits the discipline.



If you have reliably used visualization, focus, and seat as cues, your horse soon understands how to back freely and correctly with no bridle or neck rope at all.

What if this isn't the picture you're getting?

Here's a quick compendium of common problems—and what to do about them.

“Sometimes my horse just seems stuck and won't take a step backwards.”

Revisit the groundwork and make sure he understands the most basic building blocks, and his feet are freed up. Then, under saddle, your strategy with the stuck horse will depend on the judgment of the moment.

- Is the horse actively searching for the right answer but just hasn't found it yet? Then wait on him, and give him all the time he needs to explore alternatives and find his way to release.

- Is the horse just tuned out? You could add a little leg to bring up some life and encourage him to get back to thinking about his options.

Resist the temptation to pull the stuck horse backwards. At best, it's a coarse strategy that undermines the fundamental unspoken contract we always want to maintain with our horses: “Horse, instead of forcing my will on you, I will always ask nicely and give you a chance to explore, understand and volunteer.” Pulling back could also trigger such undesirable behaviors as head-tossing or rearing.

Without pulling, you could engage in a subtle “warmer-colder” game with the horse, whereby you soften to him for minor tries in the right direction (such as shifting his weight back), and firm up a bit for explorations in the wrong direction (such as turning his head sideways or leaning on the bit).

“My horse is going backwards, but he drags his feet.”

Chances are, his weight is too much on his forehead, and he's pushing himself back with his forelegs rather than engaging his haunches underneath him and stepping back athletically. You

might lift your hands a little bit, only as much as it takes to collect him a bit better as you ask for the reinback.

You should feel that the horse's shoulders have lifted somewhat—a sensation that actually means the horse has tucked his haunches beneath himself for collection. Then, be mindful that you quit and release before you lose that quality of movement, or else you'll be telling the horse that heavy-on-the-forehand backing is what you want.

Secondarily, the horse that drags his feet often self-corrects and starts picking up his own feet when his reinback becomes more crisp.

“How can I get a dull horse to become more crisp?”

First, pay attention to the energy and rhythm you carry in yourself. In forward movement, we would speed up or slow down our horses by adjusting our internal cadence. “I'm always conscious of my internal cadence when I'm backing, too, so I can add crispness without having to pull harder or bump with my legs,” Bill says.

You might need to go forward and restore the horse's enthusiasm with a lively trot or canter, and then revisit the reinback later. Then be vigilant about technique, because dullness is usually caused by poor timing with the release—for example, quitting when the backup has become heavy and sluggish, rather than while it is still lively.

“My horse is stepping back, but not in neatly aligned diagonal pairs.”

An irregular rhythm often has the same root causes as lack of crispness. The horse might be backing off the forehand, pushing himself back with his forelegs and dragging his feet. When he initiates the reinback in poor form, out of balance, it will be difficult for him to step cleanly and athletically.

However, this problem often stems from inaccurate timing of the release. In Part II, we described two different rein releases: (1) releasing both reins simultaneously to reward a step with either foreleg, and (2) releasing each rein individually in sync with its matching foreleg. If you have advanced to the second type of release, you are probably well on

your way to having each foreleg "attached" to a rein. With close attention to timing, you can then begin to correct for misalignments.

"My horse curls behind the bit and gets his face behind the vertical."

This is often a sign that the rider has been inconsistent using visualization and seat as cues for the reinback, and is overly reliant on the reins. "I see this many times with riders who have intermediate skills in this type of horsemanship, where they have the horse giving a soft feel very nicely but they're not always working off the more subtle communication that is available," Bill notes. "The horse is soft, but the rider has to signal the reinback with reins to the point where the soft horse gets behind the bridle a bit. "In this case, it can be beneficial to go to the neck rope, because the horse probably isn't as soft to the rope, and it gives the rider a chance to realize that the other cues (visualization, seat) haven't been quite there."

"My horse opens his mouth and gets hollow when he backs."

These behaviors are good indications that the rider is still depending too much on the reins and perhaps has been impatient when the horse didn't yet understand. Those problems can cause brace in the horse, and poor release can perpetuate it. Often the rider inadvertently releases for the feet when the horse is hollow or open-mouthed, thereby saying, "Yup, that's just what I wanted." Even if the horse is stepping back freely, you might have to wait until you get through a bad moment so you can release at a good one.

"My horse wants to flip his head and even threaten to rear. Help!"

"Survival instinct can kick in when the horse doesn't understand that he actually can go backward," Bill says. "But if the horse understands through previous groundwork that he can go backwards even when there's something blocking his face, very seldom will that horse search for rearing as a way to get out of that."

Rearing can quickly become problematic though, because it's almost instinctual to release when the horse goes up. The rider, naturally fearful that the horse could flip over, lets go of the reins, and the horse learns a quick new way to get release. Go back and confirm the movement on the ground before attempting it under saddle again.

Similar but certainly less dangerous is

the horse that flips his head when asked to back. The green horse might have tried that in early lessons and discovered that he earned a release for it. His rider might have asked with insufficient tact in the reins, then released for the feet while the horse was flipping his head. Here's another case where you would want to wait on your release until you break through to a better moment.

"I can't get my horse to back straight; he cocks his hip this way and that."

Concentrate and ascertain that you are being truly equal on both sides. Make sure you're sitting centered in the saddle, legs and reins are equal, and you're not twisting your body to look behind you. If you are being equal with your request, and the horse still backs crooked, the best strategy depends on the horse's level of understanding:

- For the horse just learning to step back, give him some latitude for now. You don't want to diminish his "try."
- For the horse that's further along in understanding, make subtle changes before the horse has actually gotten misaligned, if you can.

If you are releasing each rein individually for its matching foreleg, you might only need to pick up a bit on one rein to set that diagonal pair of feet back in line. For instance, if the horse is tipping his hip left, you could pick up slightly on the left rein as the left fore/right hind pair are rising, to set them back in line. Or you could move your left leg slightly back to tip the hip back in line.

Whichever approach you use, beware the tendency to overcorrect. Just as when you're backing your truck and trailer, by the time you realize you've done too much, it's too late.

"My horse just backs and backs to get out of work. What do I do?"

You can hardly pull a "whoa" on the reins to stop the horse from marching around in reverse gear, and although a kick in the ribs might chuck him forward for the moment, you'd surely hurt the relationship in the process. So what do you do?

"This might be one of those circumstances where you could blend in until the horse's idea and your idea become one and the same," Bill says. "Consider that if the horse was too forward, you would probably take that opportunity to work on a lot of maneuvers that required forwardness. The same is true in reverse. Take what you've got at the time and build on it."



Sometimes it's helpful to visualize this exercise in parts, allowing yourself to stop and reorganize into proper position, then proceeding on to the next step.



You could back arcs and circles, back with real crispness, position the horse's feet with precision, and so on, keeping things active without being punitive. Pretty soon, the horse will be asking, "Is it okay if I tune in now?"

"I always lose the soft feel in the transition to backup and forward."

"That's going to happen at first," Bill says. "At first, we'll ask for the soft feel, then ask the horse to back, then ask for soft feel. As the horse gets more comfortable in his understanding, things will blend together through the transitions, and the soft feel won't get lost anymore."

Moving on—building refinement in the reinback

So, your horse understands the basics. He backs willingly in a soft feel, with his weight shifted over his hindquarters, stepping cleanly in diagonal pairs. He isn't escaping backward to escape pressure, but rather is in tune with you, relaxed, and fluid. Where do you advance from here?

Make your cues ever more subtle. "You would like to be able to back the horse with only your focus and your seat tipped back toward the cantle a bit," Bill says. "You might have to follow that up with a little bit of leg, but your goal is to phase out the reins."

You'd want to reserve the reins for more sophisticated uses, such as directing the placement of a specific foot. The key to success is to use focus and visualization every time you ask, even when the horse is so green you are sure he won't understand.

Become as refined as the horse. "A common problem I see is that the horse progresses in his understanding and becomes lighter, but the rider continues to ask for the backup in the same way they did when the horse was really green," Bill notes. Adjust to fit the horse from moment to moment.

Experiment with backing on the neck rope. Riding with only a rope around the horse's neck can be a great way to determine if you are truly liberated from the reins for basic control. You can refine your release just

as you did with the reins, releasing alternate hands in time with his matching foreleg.

Enhance the qualities of the movement. Gradually ask for more crispness, a livelier rhythm, greater precision, more steps, or more softness. The key is to progress gradually in your expectations so you can always be releasing when the quality of the reinback is high.

Experiment outside the box. Take advantage of the full cross-training benefits of the reinback by exploring beyond the straight and narrow. For example, Dennis Reis demonstrates leg yield in reverse in his horsemanship video. The dressage classicist Nuño Oliveira and Frederic Pignon, star of the Cavalia equine show, demonstrate canter in reverse. While a canter reinback is best left to an elite few, any of us can effectively combine backing with a variety of lateral movements, or as a set up for forward exercises that exploit the qualities of a correct reinback.

Building on the basics—combining the reinback with lateral movements

Posted to an Internet dressage discussion group:

<< don't back a horse around a curve because it is so bloody hard to get them to back up straight properly >>

Does backing horses anything other than straight undermine their ability to back straight? At first blush, this would seem to make sense, but consider also that the reverse might be true. It might be hard to get the horse to back straight because he doesn't know how to back a curve.

In "*The Athletic Development of the Dressage Horse*," Charles de Kunffy writes: "No horse can be kept straight merely by being kept straight on a path. Riders cannot through precision of influence alone make a horse strong and supple enough to move straight. Only by suppling, strengthening, and elasticizing with lateral exercises can we then [cause] horses to move straight through our influence."

If de Kunffy has a point, then it could be argued that whether schooling exercises are

performed in forward or reverse, they have more value for enhancing straightness if they add lateral "suppling, strengthening, and elasticizing"—ergo, backing in circles and serpentines, leg yield in reverse, and such.

If that philosophy resonates with you, here are some tips and ideas you might want to add to your program:

Back an arc or circle. "One of the first things I get working is to get the horse to step a few steps back straight, then step one front foot back underneath my stirrup," Bill says. If you've gotten each rein "hooked" to a front foot in your foundation work, you can use that rein to precisely direct the placement of that foot as it travels through the air.

"I'll build on that to where I can back a quarter-circle, then a half-circle—ultimately a full circle" about two horse lengths in diameter. Separate this exercise into small building blocks. Remember to release with each step. And let the horse tell you when he's ready to move up each stage in difficulty.

Back through an "L" chute or "S" cones. These patterns are a staple of trail classes everywhere, and a good way to assess how precisely you can direct the horse's feet. Bill offers some tips to make these patterns work well: "First, I won't attempt something like this until it's really going well without the confinement of poles or cones. But at some point I do like to add obstacles so the horse can see some purpose in it, and the rider can learn to deal with the added pressure, now that there's a visible penalty for being inaccurate."

As with the previous exercises, don't try to make the entire "S" or "L" one continuous line. It's best to visualize it in discrete segments—two steps straight back, two steps turning, two steps straight, etc.

Back to set up to bring the forequarters across. The reinback is a great way to shift the horse's weight over his hindquarters in preparation for a turn on the haunches. Back straight a couple of steps, visualize planting the horse's hindquarters in place, and then step one front foot nice and deep to the side to bring the front end across in that direction. Feel the whole horse under



you so you can avoid the most common pitfall: having the horse wallow in a backup when you wanted him to pivot around his hindquarters.

Back to set up for naturally collected upward transitions. Backing rocks the horse's weight over his hindquarters, providing the foundation needed for powerful forward impulsion. Take advantage of this effect to strike off into a powerful trot or canter from the last step of a reinback.

Note that when striking off into a canter departure, it becomes critical which diagonal pair of legs is planted. To make the departure on the correct lead, the horse will need to strike off from the opposite hind leg. That is, to strike off on the left lead, the horse must initiate the departure when the left front and right hind step back to the ground. To strike off on the right lead, the horse will depart when the right front and left hind reach the ground.

Time your request to adjust for your horse's responsiveness—the greener horse will likely take a second or two longer to respond to a “canter now” signal than a more educated one.

Choreographing the reinback into your schooling sessions

Tips for success When should you introduce these movements in the progressive education of the riding horse? How far along and how fit should the horse be? How much is appropriate in a session? How do you know when to stay the course and when to quit?

Thoughtful horsemen ask these questions about every maneuver in every encounter—seeking to maximize the educational value of a ride without undermining the relationship value. When you incorporate the reinback into your program, familiar principles apply:

Presentation is everything. The purported dark elements of backing—the concerns that it ruins forwardness or teaches the horse to evade by ducking out backward—become issues only when the human factor is faulty. If the rider drags the horse backward, uses poor timing, or fails to release, it wouldn't take long to instill bad responses in the horse. However, you can say the same of any schooling maneuver, forward or backward. But if the rider applies tact and good timing, the reinback builds many desirable

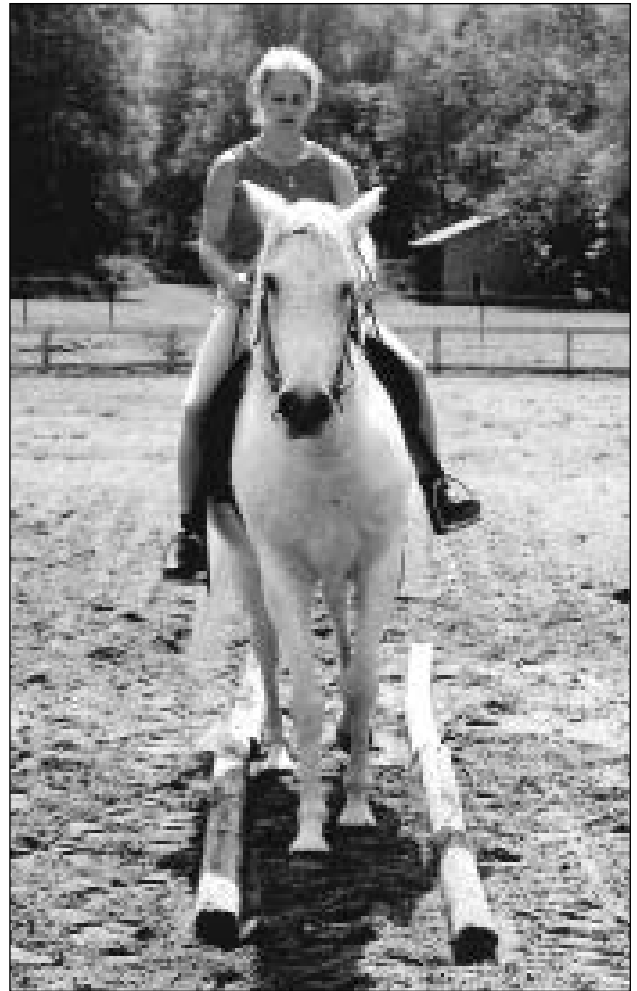
physical and mental qualities.

Consider the horse's physical readiness. Backing is somewhat physically challenging, so be reasonable in your expectations, especially in the early rides on a young or green horse. “Even though I'm such a supporter of backing a horse early on in his education, I don't back him much at first,” Bill says. “I'll seek to build certain foundation qualities, and I can do that with just a few steps at a time at first.”

Know when to quit for the moment. “It's easy to go through the good and get into the bad, and this is more true of the backup than other movements,” Bill cautions. “Get a couple of good tries and leave it before the horse loses interest in performing. Even if it's just a step, quit and move on to something else before they're thinking it's time to quit.”

This may seem like a slow way to make progress, but “bit by bit, I will be building on what we've already established. At first, if I just got a step or two back, I'd go on to something else. Later on, when that's going well, I might leave off when I'm getting a little backup with soft feel. Then later maybe I'll leave off when I get backing with softness and crispness. After 20 rides or so, he ought to be backing pretty darned nicely, but we've reached that point in a gradual progression and small increments.”

Know when to quit for the day. Stop before his enthusiasm wanes. Sometimes the best strategy is just to leave the horse alone and let him “soak” on what just happened. “If I get a really good ‘try,’ particularly if it's a breakthrough on something that has been a sticking point, I'll leave off for the day. I may be only 20 minutes into the ride, but that doesn't matter. I'll stop, unsaddle, rub on the horse, and turn him out.” With the reinback, this apparent slow route can be the best fast track to success.



When the tolerances are tight, your corrections must be especially subtle. Here, the rider is making small corrections to keep the right hind from stepping out: a little bit of right rein, right leg slightly back, and left leg somewhat away from the horse to invite him into that space.

Closing thoughts

When the horse is backing with the correct body attitude (engaging the haunches, not pushing backwards with the forelegs), “it certainly helps develop the strength of the hip and loin,” Bill said. “That strength really comes in handy when you go for collection, lead departures, flying changes, and other advanced maneuvers.”

Far from being the dangerous proposition that some traditionalists suppose—or a fleeting display of show-ring obedience with little practical value—backing does seem to enhance many of the attributes that improve the quality of all movements we require of the educated riding horse, as well as the horse's general suppleness of mind and body.

Taking a few steps back can indeed be a great way to get ahead.



Equibalance: Feet Are the Base You Stand On

with Julie Leiken

We are starting with the feet, because they are the base of everything, the support that you stand on.

I am going to demonstrate a series of exercises to encourage movement in your feet and ankles, strengthen your arch and help you find balance over your feet. It's no different than what your farrier does when he shoes your horse; he wants the hoof balanced so that it rolls directly over the center of the hoof, not off to one side or the other. I want the same thing for your foot.

Pilates® Master Teacher Ron Fletcher has divided the foot into three foot centers. (See photo at right.) The first foot center is behind the big toe in the fleshy part of the foot. The second foot center is between the fourth and fifth toe, depending on the size and shape of your foot. The third foot center is in the center of the heel. These three points are the weight-bearing places in the foot.

To find your foot centers, stand with your feet together and lift all of your toes up off the ground. (See photo below, right.) You will quickly be able to feel if you bear more weight on your first two foot centers or back on your

third, or if you are unequal from left to right. Not only will this unevenness affect how you walk, but will also say a lot about how you ride. The following exercises will help you become more balanced over your feet.

To get the most out of the exercises presented today and in following articles, you must think about resisting the motion as you make it, think about moving through a thick liquid, such as molasses that you have to push through to complete each motion.

Remember that your boot is just there to protect your foot, so when you try to put your heel down, most people only think about putting the boot down. I want you to think about putting your foot centers down because that will start to get you really using your feet and legs, reaching from the back of your hip using the gluteals, through your hamstrings and extending down into your foot. They all reach down into the heel and you want to feel the back of the leg stretch as well as the front.

Practice all of these exercises daily if possible, and then you will be ready for the next article, The Magnets.

For More Information Visit:

www.ronfletcher.com or www.julieleiken.com



The three foot centers.



Lifting the toes to find the foot centers.

Walking Exercise



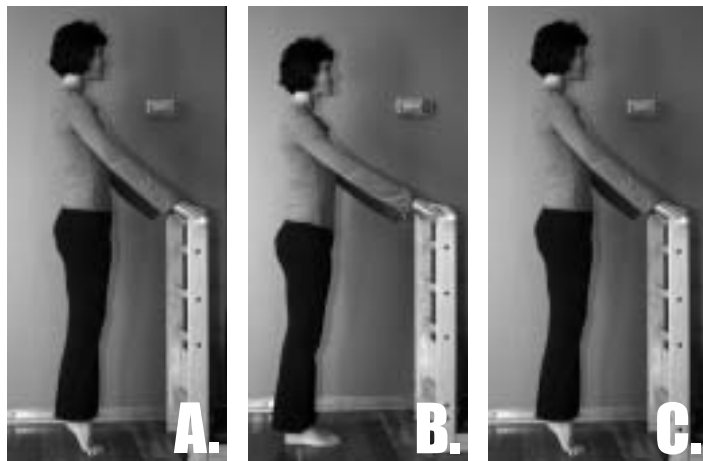
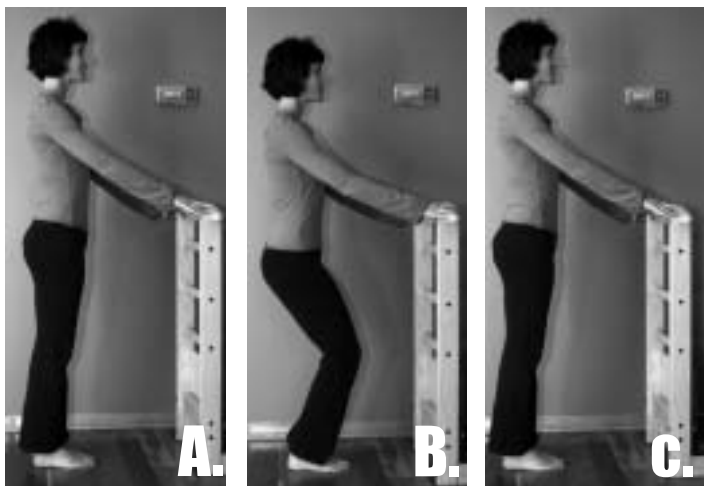
Place your hands on a chair, or fence, anything that will give you a feeling of where you are in space so you do not lean forward. **(A.)** Start by lifting your third foot center and rolling up onto your first two foot centers; really press them into the ground. Pay attention that your knee tracks over your foot in a straight line. **(B.)** Then pull the third foot center down and really press it back down into the ground as you center onto your balance points. **(C.-D.)** Repeat this eight times, alternating feet. **(E.)** An add-on is to lean forward while up on your first two foot centers, getting that extra bit of stretch, then come back to center, and then press the third foot center into the ground.



The Plié

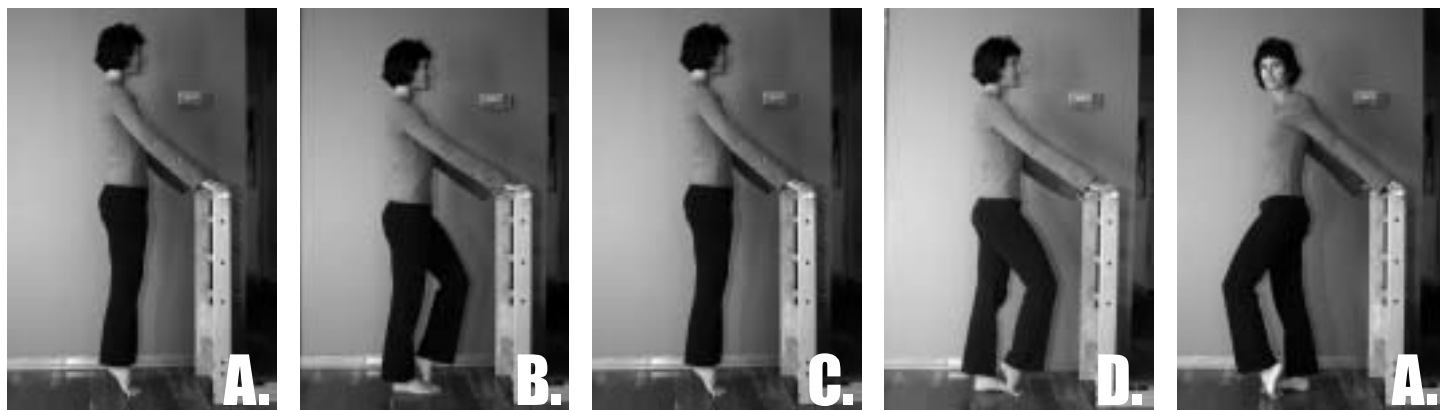
Next we are going to work on stretching the Achilles tendon, this allows us to have full range of motion in our ankles. **(A.)** Start with your weight balanced over your foot centers. **(B.)** Using the idea of oppositional force, bend from the hip, the knee and the ankle, feeling as if someone were holding your upper body up while you plié. Focus on increasing the bend in your ankle joint while maintaining the weight on your third foot center. **(C.)** As you rise up from the plié really use the floor, feeling all three foot centers pressing into the floor.

Think about a pole on a very short merry-go-round horse. The horse is going up and down, and since he is short, you can keep your feet on the ground as the horse goes up and down underneath you. Think about keeping a perfectly aligned position as you ride the horse up and down. Your three foot centers are pressing into the floor as you go down, and pressing even more as you come back up. This will keep your arch nice and lifted, and you should really feel this stretch your Achilles tendon and all through the back of your leg.



The Relevé

Before you do the Stair Climbing Exercise, I want you to practice just lifting (both heels up both third foot centers up) at the same time, pressing into the first two foot centers on both feet. **(A.)** Lift them as high as you can. **(B.)** Then press the third foot centers back to the ground. **(C.)** Lift and lower eight times. Each time imagine staying straight on the pole.



Stair Climbing

(A.) Start in relevé. **(B.)** Press one heel down at a time, keeping the opposite heel lifted high, making sure it doesn't drop down. **(C.)** Lift back up and together. **(D.)** Press down and together. Repeat eight times.

Flex and Point Your Feet

Sit up as tall as you can. Put your hands behind you to help. **(A.)** Reach your legs out in front of you, and flex your feet, by pulling your toes back. Reach through your heel and really get a stretch through the back of your leg. You will feel this in your hamstrings.

(B.) Now press the ball of your foot forward. **(C.)** Then reach all 10 toes forward into a point. **(D.)** Pull all ten toes back, then the ball of the foot. **(E.)** Flex at the ankle. Repeat.



Foot Stretch

Turn around, take the front of your first two foot centers and press those into the ground. Lengthen the front of your leg forward. This will stretch the front of the foot, the shin, and all the way up through the leg.

Laminitis Prevention and Care

by Sue Stuska Ed. D.

Laminitis is inflammation ("-itis") of the laminae (the connective tissue between the inner hoof wall and the coffin bone). Founder is generally considered to be a synonym. This condition can occur once or happen repeatedly. Full recovery is possible, but this is a potentially serious condition. Laminitis can end your horse's athletic career or even lead to euthanasia.

Related Anatomy

The horse's skeleton is really pretty amazing when you consider that his whole weight is supported on four relatively small coffin bones. The coffin bones are semi-circular wedge-shaped somewhat porous bones. They correspond to the distal (end) bones in our middle fingers and middle toes (although they are shaped differently from our digits because they are weight bearing).

Each coffin bone is surrounded and supported by the hoof wall and a number of structures. It sits on the corium (live part) of the sole, which gives rise to the hard ground surface of the sole. It is supported in the rear of the hoof by the digital or plantar cushion, which absorbs shock and facilitates blood flow. The coffin bone is connected to the underside of the hoof wall by sensitive laminae. The laminae are made up of finger-like structures with finger-like margins which project from both the inner hoof wall and the coffin bone and interlock where they meet. The laminae allow the hoof wall to continuously grow downward yet still stay connected to the stationary front and sides of the coffin bone. They help support the horse's weight and act as shock absorbers. The front and side surfaces of the coffin bone are parallel to the front and side surfaces of the hoof wall.

The deep (away from the surface) digital ("of the digits," or toes) flexor tendon runs down the rear of the leg and attaches to the bottom of the coffin bone (in addition to the rear of the short pastern bone, the bone above the coffin

bone). This flexor tendon helps flex the limb, pulling the toe back and heel up; it helps propel the horse forward.

Digital arteries supply blood to the laminae. Some arteries run upward from underneath the front and sides of the coffin bone and others run downward from the coronet band area. This circulation design is not the most efficient, and contributes to the susceptibility of the laminae to founder.

Causes

Carbohydrate overload is the most common cause of founder. The best-known scenarios include the horse getting loose and into the grain bin and the horse that gets too much lush new spring grass. Other similar situations are re-growth of pasture grass when it rains after a dry spell and too rich a ration (of grain and/or hay) for the work being done. The inflammation of founder can build over time—for example, a horse being fed too much grain or getting too much green grass over a period of days or weeks can at some point start showing signs where the condition was actually progressing all along.

Founder can also accompany other serious medical conditions like colic, severe diarrhea, bacterial infections like strangles or a uterine infection from a piece of retained placenta. Toxic reactions to drugs or plants can cause it; black walnut shavings used as bedding is a known culprit.

Road founder is similar in the symptoms and results but occurs as a result of concussion instead of being a systemic problem. Repeated stress, in the form of impacts on a hard surface like pavement, is the cause of this mechanically based laminitis. Prolonged and serious lameness in one front foot (particularly if the horse is confined and stands still for long periods) can bring on founder in the other front foot; the continuous heavy pressure coupled with decreased blood flow return can compro-

mise the circulation to the laminae.

Physiology of an Episode

Founder is actually the result of one or more complex system-wide problems (except for mechanical founder). Somehow (researchers don't know exactly), in each case, the circulatory system is involved. In grain or grass founder, the carbohydrates build up and must be metabolized faster than the body can safely handle this process. The blood flow to the laminae is altered; the traditional theory is that the flow is restricted. Researchers are investigating links between the overloaded digestive system, or toxins in the body, and the laminae which cause, or allow, the laminar separation.

Inflammation produces the heat we feel, is responsible for the pounding pulse, and causes lameness. Researchers believe that the connection has been compromised even before the horse shows up lame. The time between exposure to whatever triggered the laminitis and the clinical symptoms can vary—from half a day to nearly two days—and the connection of the laminae can be damaged during this time. If you feel the hooves during this post-exposure but pre-lameness period, they may feel abnormally cold.

In the least severe cases, the coffin bone is not displaced. In the more severe cases, the laminae lose their grip. The combination of the weight of the horse and the pull of the deep flexor tendon can tilt the front of the coffin bone downward (usually referred to as "rotation"). Alternately, but less frequently, the inner or outer edge of the coffin may tilt down toward the sole. The whole coffin bone can be displaced downwards. Scar tissue eventually fills the area between the coffin bone and hoof wall.

Pressure of the coffin bone on the sole is painful, plus the pressure further compromises circulation by restricting flow in the vessels coming up from

underneath the coffin bone. If the tilting or sinking is extreme, it may be impossible to make the horse comfortable even if he does not work again.

In the most severe cases either the toe of the coffin bone penetrates the sole or the whole coffin bone drops and penetrates the sole (the weight of the horse is too much to be supported by the damaged laminae). Euthanasia is usually recommended because of the irreversible damage, the pain and potential for ongoing infection.

Owner/Caretaker Diagnosis

Because damage can be done even before clinical signs, if you believe your horse has had too much grain or grass (for example, he got loose), it is important to contact your veterinarian. Look for other contributing factors: fat horses and, particularly, overweight ponies are more at risk, as are those who have foundered before.

Look for soreness or lameness; the front hooves are more commonly affected but all four feet can be involved. Laminitic horses often exhibit a characteristic stance: they bring their hind limbs forward under their bodies to support more of their weight while extending both front feet out in front of them and standing back on the front heels in an attempt to relieve pressure on the painful laminae. The soreness varies from almost imperceptible (particularly if the horse is standing in soft bedding), to pointing the forefeet alternately, to refusal to walk, to lying down (the result of being too uncomfortable to stand).

There will usually be heat in the affected hooves and a much stronger than usual digital pulse. The digital pulse can be felt on the sides of the pasterns above the heels. Next time you're grooming, try to find the pulse. In normal conditions, the digital pulse is faint and slow at the normal heart rate of 30- 40 beats per minute

External Signs of Previous Founder

After the episode, your farrier may find redness in, increased width of, and a softer-than-normal white line. These can all be signs of earlier laminitis. The

white line is the downward extension of the laminae, seen on the sole surface of the hoof during a routine hoof trim. It is relatively lighter in color and is softer than the rest of the sole surface, and runs just inside the hard hoof wall.

Also after the episode (when checking a horse to determine its health history, for example) you may see changes in the growth of the hoof wall. Founder rings are slight constrictions of the hoof walls as they grow out that show earlier founder episodes. They are easy to distinguish from normal growth rings, if visible; the toes normally grow faster than the heels, so there is more space between the rings toward the toes. In the multiple-founder-episode horse there will be more space between the rings at the heels because the compromised circulation-impaired hoof wall growth toward the toes.

Before the Vet Arrives

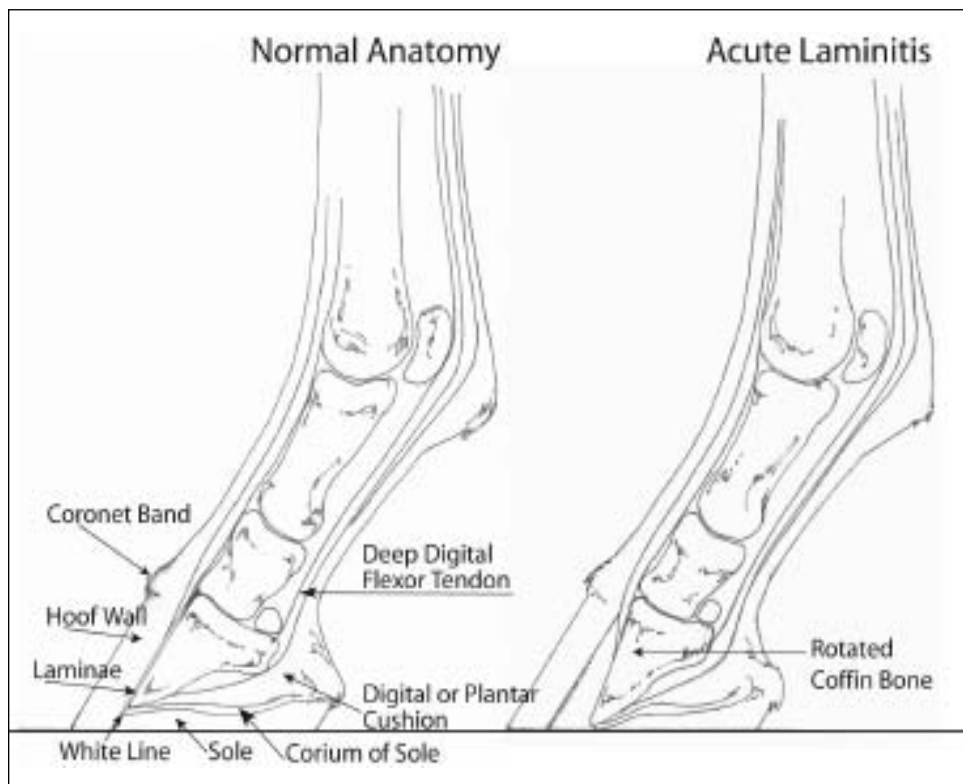
Since the damage may be done before the horse shows pain or lameness, it's best to prevent founder. If you're faced with it, you must call your veterinarian immediately because immediate action is needed to prevent further damage and to support the inflamed tissues.

Remove any remaining feed. If the horse has gotten more than his share, try to estimate his intake.

Allow him to stand or lie down; do not force him to walk.

Administer medications according to your vet's instructions. Your medicine chest should already include those drugs which your vet has indicated s/he may want you to administer before his/her arrival. These include pain reliever/anti-inflammatory/circulatory enhancers like phenylbutazone (bute), Banamine, and/or aspirin. Acepromazine is commonly given to combat vascular spasm and return blood flow to normal. DMSO is used by some vets topically, by IV, or orally.

Cool the hooves. You can use ice or cold water; you can stand the horse in buckets or use running water. Cold therapy is vital because it may prevent further deterioration of the connection between the laminae. It also decreases the pain. During, or at least between, cooling sessions, stand the horse in soft, supportive footing. Avoid hard surfaces which will concentrate the pressure on the hoof walls; soft footing like sand supports the sole and may aid in keeping the correct alignment of the coffin bone.



Vet and Farrier Therapy

Your vet will assess the situation and follow up on any medications you have given, with additional appropriate ones.

X-rays are the only way to determine the extent (if any) of coffin bone displacement.

The therapy will be directed at preventing the tilting or sinking of the coffin bone, since this can be the worst possible result. Since the deep digital flexor tendon is acting to pull the coffin bone downward, it's important to decrease this pull. Raising the heels with a wedge-shaped pad can decrease the pressure. Although not exactly the same situation because our calf corresponds to the horse's gaskin, we can think of raising our heels to allow our calf muscles to slacken. Usually the shoes are pulled immediately to prevent the pressure of the horse bearing most of his weight on the hoof wall. The wedge pad can be taped to the sole with duct tape running around the sole and wall. In addition to standing the horse in soft but supportive footing (like sand), padding with a gel/silicone material that contacts the full sole and frog will help. This distributes pressure on the sole, heels, bars (supportive structures on the sides of the frog) and frog of the hoof. Once the horse is stable enough to be shod, a supportive shoe like a heart bar shoe might be custom forged.

Trimming and later shoeing will also be designed to keep the horse from putting any more pressure than necessary on the toe (where the laminae may be most affected) during walking. The toe, where it contacts the ground, may be rasped back. The shoe may be designed to fit back further on the foot than normal. A normal shoe may be tacked on backwards. All of these are designed to make it easier for the hoof to "break over" (to tilt forward before it is raised off the ground in the stride). (This would be similar to the way we walk when protecting sore toes, though that's not

entirely accurate because our heel corresponds to the horse's hock.)

If the coffin bone has tilted, it may be possible to realign it with the other bones and reestablish a relatively normal corresponding sole surface. This is done by checking repeated X-rays, trimming the heel shorter and rasping the front of the hoof wall. This description makes the procedure seem simple; in reality, it is complex because of the added interaction of the damaged laminae and the flexor tendon and is different in every horse.

Be ready to try a number of different types of shoes and provide more frequent than previous trimming; there is no one solution and your professionals may need to try several iterations before coming upon the best for your horse.

Once foundered, a horse may always need to wear protective sole pads.

It's vital that your vet and farrier work together as a team to support the hooves through the current episode, to provide long-term care and protection of the hoof structures, and possibly to rehabilitate the damaged structures.

Prognosis

A foundered horse may or may not be able to return to his former athletic activities. He may regain enough soundness for a less demanding sport. Or, he may not be able to work at all. A foundered but pasture-sound horse will continue to need routine farrier care.

Prevention, and Feeding the Foundered Horse

Make accidental access to grain impossible. Provide a horse-proof latch on the feed room door, and secure feed containers against horse access.

Don't feed more energy than the horse needs. Don't feel that you are being kind or appreciative by feeding that extra scoop of grain—even if he looks hungry. If he needs a snack, offer a small amount of low-energy hay.

Don't allow your horse to get overweight. Put overweight horses and

ponies on a diet and increase their exercise plus turn them out (into an area without grass!) so they can work off some of their calories themselves.

Start with limited access, and gradually increase access to fresh grass.

A conservative approach would be to hand graze the horse for half an hour daily for five days, then turn him out for a short time each day. Temporary fencing can be used to limit the amount of land, and therefore the amount of grass, or to keep him on lower-energy pasture. A grazing muzzle can be used to limit the grass he is able to bite off. Whatever method you choose must be reliable because an accidental access to too much grass can be dangerous.

Watch for signs—a slightly elevated pulse is enough to curtail the grass access because this may already be too late.

Some horses cannot ever be turned out onto spring or fresh grass. Some can only be turned out when growth has slowed in midsummer. In other cases, depending on your horse's condition and your management possibilities, it is safest to avoid grass altogether.

Choose appropriate hay. Relatively stemmy late-growth grass hay (as opposed to early-growth or any legume hay) provides good roughage without the extra energy. Some horses should have little or no grain. A vitamin-mineral supplement may be needed to continue to meet the horse's nutritional needs; consult your vet. If the horse is a hard keeper (difficult to keep weight on), feeding more fats can be safer than feeding more carbohydrates because of the difference in metabolism. So, you might add an oil supplement. There are commercial feeds designed for horses at risk for laminitis. Again, work with your vet.

Avoid repeated concussion from prolonged work on hard surfaces.

All horses are at risk for founder; some are more susceptible than others. Be aware of the causes and take all preventative measures to avoid this debilitating disease in your horse.



Shim Your Stirrups

by Wendy Murdoch

A couple of years ago a fox-hunter and student of mine, Bruce Gerrish, returned from a skiing trip to Vail, Colo. While there, his ski boots were balanced for his leg/foot alignment by leveling the foot bed of his boots. Upon his return Bruce realized that this might also be true for his foot in the stirrup. He got some wedge material and duct-taped it to one side of his stirrups. When he came for his next lesson, he was riding much better because he could align his leg and foot on the stirrups, giving him a solid base of support.

After seeing this, I realized that Bruce was onto something. So I carried around duct tape and cardboard to my clinics. I “shimmed” several students and they rode much better because they could find a solid base of support on the stirrup. Then, of course, like so many things, my attention turned to other ideas and I forgot about this concept. That is until this past summer.

In June I went to Montana to give a clinic. There I met Pete Gorrell. He has been making Western saddles longer than I have been alive. Pete has certainly thought a lot about making saddles over the years. He has also done a lot of skiing. He recognized the similarity between the ski boot and the stirrup.

One of the Western students at this Montana clinic was having difficulty with her leg and foot position. Pete helped out by shimming her stirrup so she had a level solid place for her foot. It was then I remembered what Bruce had shown me several years before. I had not put Bruce’s idea together with the Western saddles until Pete pointed it out. In an English saddle you are basically dealing with the rider’s leg/foot alignment issues. With Western saddles the stirrup leather construction is a major cause of the alignment problems riders experience. Even if your Western saddle has rolled stirrup leathers, you may still need to shim your stirrups to achieve a level base

of support. This may be for two reasons: your conformation and the issue with the Western stirrup leather.

Western saddles—twisting a flat plane

There are two basic issues with the fenders/stirrup leathers in Western saddles. One is that if the leathers aren’t rolled, the stirrups will want to hang parallel to the horse rather than perpendicular. This means that the rider will have to fight with the stirrup. This can cause ankle and foot pain.

One solution to this problem is to wet the fenders, twist them and put a broomstick through them until they dry. That way the leather will want to maintain the twist, causing the stirrup to hang more perpendicular to the horse’s side.

The other solution is to permanently twist, or roll the stirrup leather to eliminate this problem. This is more common in Western ranch-type saddles than other Western saddles. While this does alleviate the problem of the stirrup tending to lie parallel to the horse’s sides, it does not address the issue of twisting a flat plane.

In basic geometry when you twist a flat plane that has straight edges, the edge winds up at an angle due to the effect of the twist. Look at Photo 1; this is a wide flat plane of material used to simulate what happens to the stirrup leather. Notice that the bottom edge is basically parallel to the ground. In Photo 2, I have twisted the flat plane. Observe how the bottom edge is no longer parallel to the ground. There is an incline from right to left with the outside edge farther away from the ground than the edge closest to the horse.

This angling caused by twisting a flat plane is the same thing that happens to the fender/stirrup leather in a Western saddle. The width of the leather in a Western saddle is significantly greater than an English stirrup leather. While this situation is also true when twisting an English leather, there is much less overall angle because the English leather is so





much narrower than in a fender/stirrup leather.

Next, look at Photo 3. Here is a Western stirrup that is hanging from the saddle. I have twisted the leather to nearly a perpendicular position. Look at the angle of the stirrup. Notice that the outside edge of the footrest is higher than the inside edge. Look back at Photo 2 and see that the twisted plane has a similar angle as the footrest of the stirrup in Photo 3.

When the rider's foot is resting on the stirrup, Photo 4, the stirrup is still angled as in Photo 3. Therefore, the rider will come in contact with the outside of the foot on the footrest first. Either the rider will cock her ankle to try to get an even contact along the width of the foot (from the ball of the big toe to the pinky toe), or she will have all her weight resting only on the outside edge of her foot. This can cause general discomfort in the foot and/or ankle and decrease the rider's sense of security in the saddle.

To correct this situation, take material that will be fairly firm; leather is good if you are handy with a knife. Cut a wedge that will fill in the angle so that the footrest is level. In Photo 5 I have simply used cardboard and duct tape as a temporary solution to the problem. I have taped the cardboard to the inside branch of the stirrup. I don't have the footrest quite level from left to right but it is an improvement. You can play around with how much material you need and what feels good to you. It is important to thin the material as you approach the middle of the footrest so that you don't have a thick edge where the shim meets the stirrup under your foot.

With the rider's foot once again in the stirrup, there is a more level place to rest. There is even contact across the entire ball of the foot without having to cock the foot down on the inside. Now the rider will be able to have a better base of support without struggling against the stirrup.

The alignment of the knee and foot

Good alignment of your knee to your foot is essential to minimize stress on the

knee while riding. If your foot tends to roll in or out, due either to your own conformation or your saddle, it may put undue stress on your joints and make you feel unstable in the saddle.

It is generally accepted that the least stressful alignment for the knee is when it lines up over the 2nd toe. The 2nd toe is considered the "main ray." This is the toe the other toes move toward or away from. In general, when the knee lines up over the second toe, the knee is balanced. The ligaments around the knee are under the least amount of tension in all directions. Of course, as individuals you may find that this position is somewhat stressful when you are standing on the ground. This will be based on your individual way of moving and conformation. It will also be influenced by how your foot is in contact with the ground. Experiment with the following idea and see if making small changes can give you a more solid feeling in the saddle.

Plumb line

To determine if your knee lines up over your 2nd toe, take a piece of string and hang a small weight from it. A nut for a bolt works quite well. This will create a plumb line. You might need someone to help you with this, as looking down may influence the alignment of your knee with your foot.

Take off your shoes. Standing up straight, have someone hold the plumb line so the nut hangs down from the center of your kneecap. Notice what toe the nut hangs over. Check both knees and see if they line up the same. This will give you some idea of how you line up in general. If the center of your kneecap already lines up over your middle toe, then you won't need to go through the rest of this article unless you simply want to experiment to find out how not having this alignment affects you.

Shimming your feet

Get some cardboard and cut it into 1" wide strips about 2" long. Begin shimming your feet by placing pieces of cardboard under either the inside or outside edge of



your foot (big toe side or pinky toe side). Notice how the shim affects the plumb line. As you shim, the plumb (nut) will either line up closer to your middle toe or farther away toward your big toe or pinky toe.

If you are not sure of the effect, remove the cardboard and feel the difference. Add as many pieces of cardboard as you want. You might find that one piece is good and two is better. Always add the cardboard to the same side; otherwise, you are just re-creating the same situation as without cardboard. Experiment with three pieces and see if that is better or worse. As you experiment, think of the “Goldilocks Principle”: too little, too much, just right. You are looking for just right.

Do one foot at a time. You might find that your two feet are quite different. One foot might want the cardboard on the inside while the other wants it on the outside or not at all. Because this is a very individual thing, you are best to simply experiment with going by what feels best. Then remove everything and see how this differs from having the cardboard under your feet. Place the cardboard under your feet again and see if it really does feel better. Determine the amount of cardboard that is best for each foot.

Shimming your stirrups

Take your pieces of cardboard (make sure you mark which is your right foot and which is your left foot) over to your saddle. Duct-tape the cardboard pieces to your stirrups. Place them properly to the inside or outside branch of your stirrups depending on where you had them when you were standing on the ground. If you have already leveled your Western stirrups, you might find that you have a lot of material on the stirrup. Once you have determined what is best for you, you can come up with a more permanent solution. Mount and ride your horse as usual. Notice if you are more able to feel a solid contact to your stirrups. Do you have a more solid feeling underneath your feet?

Dismount and remove the duct tape

and leveling cardboard. Remount and ride again. How does it feel now? What is different in your sensations from when you had the cardboard taped to your stirrups? Put the cardboard back on and see what it feels like again. If you want, you can experiment with taping the cardboard to the opposite side of the stirrup to see how this feels and what it does to your sense of the ground. I bet you won't ride long with it there.

Remember with all of this, what we are looking for is a sense of solid connection to your stirrups through your legs and feet. In order to have a solid connection, you need a surface that gives you good even contact, hence leveling the Western stirrups. In addition, we are taking your own conformation into account by shimming your English stirrups or adding a little more to your Western stirrups.

In the process of shimming we are not trying to change the front to back angle of the stirrup. We are only working on the side-to-side balance. There are a lot of English stirrups and stirrup inserts that attempt to adjust the front to back angle of the stirrups. I generally remove all of that stuff and tell people to get rid of any flexible or angled stirrups. These stirrups usually cause greater instability. Many people have gotten the jointed English stirrups because their knees hurt. There are other ways to resolve the knee pain without resorting to expensive stirrups that simply avoid the issue. Granted, my students who like to go out for long rides will generally put them back on, but in lessons I always like to see the plain Fillis English stirrups.

Shimming your stirrup is not something you will have to do over and over again. After you work out what is comfortable, you will find that you won't even notice that the shims are there. You will have a better sense of solid stability, contact to the stirrup and security. If you take the time now to shim your stirrups you will find that all of your rides will be more enjoyable.



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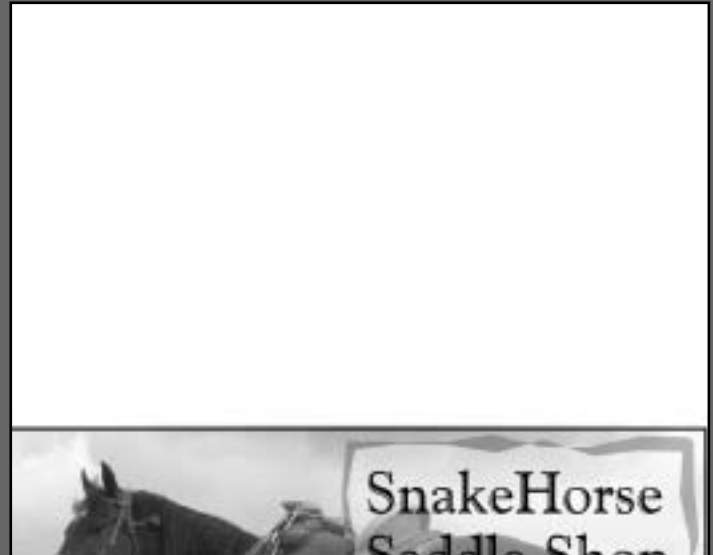
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11/5-7 Brad Cameron clinic, Riverside, 909-653-7446

11/8-9 Brad Cameron introduction to cow working clinic, Riverside, 909-653-7446

11/12-15 Bryan Neubert colt starting, horsemanship and cow working clinic, Paicines 831-801-7910

11/18-21 Bryan Neubert colt starting and horsemanship clinic, Ojai, 805-649-9398

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11/2 Joe and Kim Andrews trail ride clinic, Berthoud, 970-532-3827
11/6-7 Marty Marten horsemanship clinic, Lafayette, 303-665-5281
11/13-14 Steve and Amy

Lesatz horsemanship clinic, Greeley, 970-785-2309

11/16 Joe and Kim Andrews trail ride clinic, Berthoud, 970-532-3827
11/20-21 Steve and Amy LeSatz clinic, Wellington, 970-568-7659

Florida

12/4-5 Tom Curtin horsemanship clinic, Venice, 941-223-1303

Georgia

11/19-21 Tom Curtin horsemanship and colt starting clinic, Albany, 229-849-4505
12/4-5 Lee Smith clinic, Savannah, 912-826-7433

Hawaii

12/10-12 Buck Brannaman Horsemanship clinic, Kauai, 808-828-1010
mmichetti3@aol.com

Kentucky

11/5-7 Craig Hamilton horsemanship clinic, Shelbyville, 502-767-7063

Louisiana

12/4-5 Wendy Murdoch Open Clinic, Benton, 318-965-8179

New Mexico

11/6 Winter Ranch Roping Series, LK Bar Ranch, Animas, 505-548-2505
cowhorse@vtc.net
12/4 Winter Ranch Roping Series, LK Bar Ranch, Animas, 505-548-2505
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North Carolina

11/5-7 Mike Bridges horsemanship clinic, Summerfield, 336-644-7622
11/5-8 Bill Scott clinic, Fletcher, 828-685-8313

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11/11-14 Working Ranch Cowboys Association 9th

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11/3 Wendy Murdoch Effortless Rider® Series, Little Washington, 866-200-9312

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11/11-14 Buck Brannaman horsemanship 1 clinic, Ellensburg, 509-962-5282

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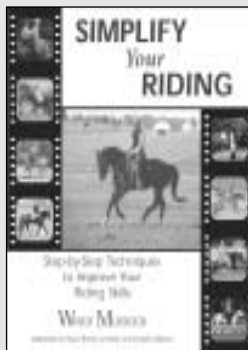
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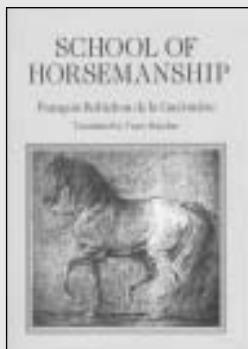


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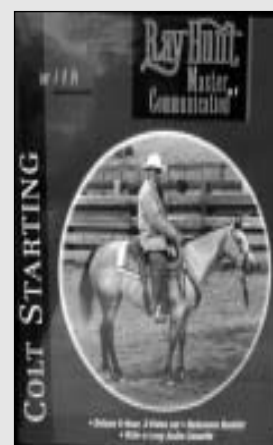
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What Were They Thinking?



"It was amazing to me the calm and serenity I felt as I watched this trap shot shape up. Even though I was still aware of the clock ticking, the hush of the crowd, my partners softly encouraging me and the pressure to 'do it for the team', my focus was so tunneled and the feel of my horse quietly listening and waiting on me so moving, time seemed to stand still. 'Be a good cow,' I softly whispered. Deanie nudged him forward, he stepped, and I took up the slack and dallied. It was so thrilling. Practice and determination really does work! Oh, how I hoped Ray, Buck and Shayne would be proud. And that Tom Dorrance was smiling from above."

Cathi Bauer in the 3-man team doctoring class at this year's (first annual) High Desert Vaquero Contest. Taken just as she threw a trap shot and before dallying on. Her teammates were Deanie Hosker and Lori Smith. The contest was organized by Mike and Deanie Hosker and held Sept 11, 2004, at the Ellensburg, Washington, Rodeo Fairgrounds. It was such a great success that next year's contest will be expanded to two days: Sept 17-18, 2005. Photo by Gale Nelson.

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