

October 2008 Beyond the Basics

Training Your Horse – Part IV of series

Working Another Horse from A Top Your Own

Many of us are fortunate to have more than one horse in our lives. Some may be at different stages of development. Each one seems to excel at certain jobs, and all have very distinct ‘horse-analities’! However one characteristic seems to be rather universal among us humans who are blessed with multiple horses, and that is related to the ability to find time to work with each horse in order to discover his personal brilliance and give him adequate jobs to accomplish. We have seven riding horses on our place, and it is a rare day that we get to work with all seven individually. I am constantly searching for ways to exercise multiple minds and bodies at one time, and keep both horse and human in a continuing education course. This month’s ‘Training Your Horse’ article talks about one of my favorite activities to achieve that multiple learning agenda...Working one horse from the back of another.

Before we get into some of the great exercises and maneuvers that can be accomplished by working another horse from the saddle of the one you are riding, let’s talk a little about the benefits and some of the cautions or prerequisites you need to consider before your begin. Just for keeping a clear picture in our minds, I am going to call the horse being worked without a rider the “colt”, and the critter you are riding, the “horse”.

Benefits to Working a Colt from your Horse:

- Exercise for two animals, plus the human at one time – both mentally and physically
- Gives your horse a job and can help the timid horse gain confidence and understand herd mentality and rating with respect for body space
- Requires horse and rider to multi-task, clearly projecting intentions to the colt, while maintaining consistent cues and aids for the horse
- Prepares the colt to learn how to yield in a respectful manner, accomplish a flow, either through ponying (no colt dragging!) or via liberty work
- Works things in and out of the colt’s vision from a position above him, preparing him to be ridden
- Exposes the colt to environments in which they will one day be ridden, helping them to learn where their feet are located in a balanced manner



Prerequisites:

- Make sure you have spent significant time ‘sensitizing’ your horse and the colt for use of the flag and rope on all parts of their body **WITH** movement first. Ask yourself these questions:
 - 1) Can I move both my horse and the colt sideways, forward, backing-up, and crossing the hind quarters with a flag or while I am tossing end of the lead rope or 22 ft. line?
 - 2) Can I ride my horse while I hold a flag in various positions at the walk, trot, and canter?
 - 3) Have I prepared the horse and the colt to have ropes under their tail, around their girth and flank?
 - 4) Does my colt yield to pressure, follow the ‘feel’ of the lead rope when I ask him to move forward, and allow me to change eyes both in front of him and behind?

- Equipment: Double check that your girth and leathers are in good shape – not old and cracking; Do you have a rein set-up that allows you to drop the reins, without loosing one, and easily readjust your hand position; I recommend a ‘Horseman’s’ halter and 12ft. lead for ponying the colt. (Available with Alice’s specifications at Nancy’s Halters through www.tnhorsemanship.com)

- If possible, spend some time with a knowledgeable aspiring horseman to learn and watch proper liberty work and effortless ponying exercises. When done with mindfulness and a flow, it is a beautiful dance!

CAUTIONS!!!

- When ever the halter comes close to your saddle horn, if you are riding a western saddle, red flags and whistles should go off! Particularly when using a ‘Horseman’s’ halter...They will NOT break and should you get that halter catch on your saddle horn it would not be a pretty picture.
- When working the colt with a saddle on, be careful not to catch your toe in the colt’s stirrup. Often times when I am working my horse very close to a colt, I will remove my foot from my horse stirrup and bring my heel up towards my buttocks.
- Check out the environment and facility first! Make sure the fence is secure and without spots where a rope or lariat could get caught in the “V” between a post and the panel. Look for any protruding nails, etc.. If ponying in a bigger environment, know the terrain so that the exposure for the colt will be all positive!



Basics of Coiling the Lead Rope



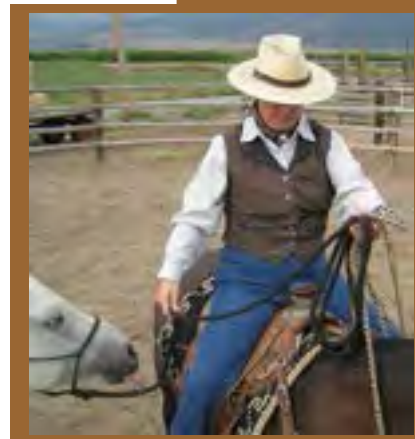
Preparing to Coil:

If the colt is to your right, then the tail of the lead (the black rope) comes towards your belly. The reins and coils are held in the left hand.

This system allows for the coils to flow off your finger tips, and will keep you from getting any wraps around fingers, hands or wrists.

Preparing to Coil:

If the colt is to your left, then the tail of lead rope is positioned towards your horse’s ears. You hold reins and coils in the same hand.





Proper 'Ponying' rather than 'Dragging'

Developing a soft, willing partner that yields to the pressure of the lead is critical for every horse and every discipline! If your horse does not lead well, then he is not ready to tie and he has a brace somewhere in his body and mind. Working from atop another horse, and using your saddle horn as a movable post, can be an excellent method of improving the feel for the colt to 'lead-up'. It also develops your timing and helps to make your horse handy. You want to try NOT to get the point of a straight line in the lead rope, as seen in picture #1 above. Rather, put a suggestion in the lead and be prepared to put a little bump or snap in the line. Go to your horn or dally to help with this little bump. If you are not sure of your timing and dally abilities, have a friend on the ground help you with a snap of the lunge whip to encourage the colt forward and to follow the feel of the lead rope.

How to Dally



1

No. 1 (Dally Right Hand)
Push coils & reins towards ears; Start a "Z" pattern with right hand holding lead rope (i.e. Left hip to Right Hip
No. 2 Left ear)



2



3

No. 3 Continue pattern, from left ear to left hip to right hip, and lock down on your thigh
No. 4



4

Chase the Tail to Push the Eye



No. 1
Start by leading the colt towards the tail of your horse. Watch for a nice, balanced turn-on-center. (i.e. The colt's outside front foot reaching for your horse's tail, and the inside hind stepping under. Your horse accomplishes the same movement.



No. 2 Begin to change from being on the inside of your colt's bend, to leading his outside eye through and magically find yourself on the outside of the bend for your colt. Keep forward movement, and watch the outside front foot, as you now lead it towards your horse's ears.



No. 4 Here the colt is preparing a nice turn-on-the-haunch to the right, with the front feet moving in a rhythmic 'reach-cross...reach-cross' pattern. Notice the lead rope nearly acts as a neck-rein.



No. 3 In this sequence I started with the white horse (the colt) in a bend to the right, chasing the brown horse's tail. Now I have lead the colt's left front foot through, and have caught the new eye – left eye. We are still both bent to the right and the white horse is preparing to shift his balance slightly to the hindquarters to accomplish a turn-on-the-haunch.

Changing Directions Away from the Colt



No. 1 Feed-out slack in your lead rope, as you ride away from the colt. Begin to lift the lead.



No. 2 Prepare to turn away from your hand with the lead. **No. 3** Continue to ride your horse forward and now around your new inside leg – back towards the colt's tail.



No. 4 Take time to re-adjust your reins into the new hand, and next coil the lead rope in positions correct to allow the rope to flow off your fingers toward the colt.