

December 2009 Beyond the Basics

Use of Ground Poles and the Cavalletti – Part II

With the holiday season upon us, it seems we have even less time to spend with our horses. It is a rush everywhere, with every activity we partake. So here is a little reminder from the point of view of the horse...SLOW DOWN! During this very busy time in our human calendar, remember to take that deep breath, recall the wonderful contributions the horse makes to your life, and give them the gift of your patience, forgiveness, and marvel at their grace.

The cavalletti and ground pole exercises you started last month should be producing great results, while keeping your horse's mind and body exercised and happy! Here are a couple more of my favorite ground pole activities to help keep that great attitude in both horse and rider.

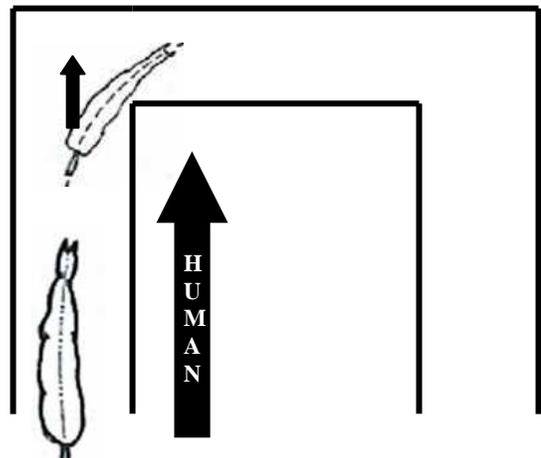
Hallway Corners:

Purpose – Sending or riding your horse, both forward and backwards through the hallway will help to promote:

- Isolation of movements, such as slowing the fore-quarters to step the hind-quarters away one-quarter turn (I.e. Turn on the forehand)
- Isolation of movements, such as slowing the hind-quarters and walking the fore-quarters away one-quarter turn (I.e. Turn on the haunch)
- Effective use of your aids, without intimidation
- Stretching over the top line, as the horse looks where he is going
- Eventual gathered softness, both forward and in the reinback

Equipment Need – 8 to 10 ground poles, about 6' to 8' in length; Horseman's halter and lead; When riding use a snaffle or bosal to begin; Patience, focus, and clear picture of the correct movement!

Preparation – Lay out the poles in the "U" shape, as diagramed, in an area with good footing



Set-up for Turn on the Forehand:

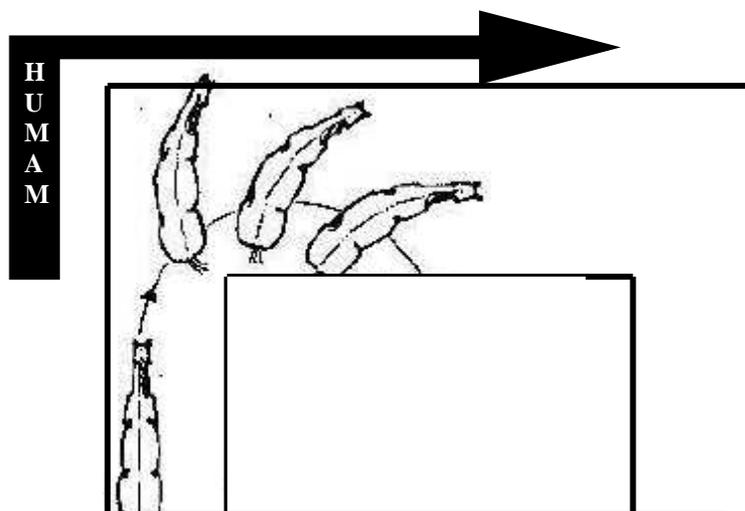
Ground work: The human directs the horse from the inside of the hallway; As you approach the corner slow the fore-quarters, tipping the eye slightly towards the inside of the square, lifting a little on the lead, and focus on the hindquarters stepping under and away from you, until the horse is positioned to start down the new hallway

Riding Aids: As you focus down the first hallway, prepare the horse for the first corner by asking for a 'soft feel' and 'half-halt' with a 'feel' on the outside rein; Accompany this by stretching upwards and focusing your eyes & torso on the next hallway; Add a slight caress in your inside leg at the calf, and relax your outside leg; Balance slightly to the outside and wait for the hind legs of the horse to cross under his body, moving his energy from the inside hind foot to the outside shoulder & rein

Set-up for Backing Down the Hallway:

Ground work: (Note: Your horse should easily backup on the ground with the positioning of your body, accompanied by the sending of energy with your intentions down the lead) Position yourself in front of the horse, with his rump ready to back down the first hallway; Begin backing, and as his hind feet approach the middle of the new hallway, tip his nose slightly to the outside, sending your energy a little more towards the inside eye and forequarters; Remember to stay in the two-beat rhythm of a flowing backup, and continue until the horse is lined-up in the new hallway

Riding Aids: Start by getting internally light, tilting your pelvis a little more vertical towards the pubis; Pick-up a 'soft-feel' or 'contact' and picture the movement backwards on a straight line; **NO PULLING;** Feel the horse's feet back & use your imaginary eye in the middle of your back, while looking straight out over the ears with your real eyes; **NO** looking side to side...this will only confuse the horse through your seat bones! As hindquarters approach the first corner, begin to look slightly to the outside of the hallway with your eyes and torso, tipping the nose slightly in the same direction; Caress with the leg on the outside of the hallway and feel for the inside hind foot beginning to reach in the direction of the new hallway; Wait...Feel...and reward the correct Try!



Set-up for Turn on the Haunch:

Ground work: Send the horse forward positioned with the human located to the outside of the hallway; As the hindquarters pass the inside corner, slightly lift the lead, ask for a little 'half-halt' and slight shift of the balance to the hind feet; As the weight changes to the hind foot, re-position your focus to the eye & forequarters, and ask the front end to step away from you until the horse is parallel in the new hallway

Riding Aids: Focus down the first hallway & ride until your horse's tail is past the inside corner; Pick-up a 'soft-feel' & 'half-halt' on the outside rein; Stretch upward & focus on your horse's outside ear; Wait for a slight shift of balance to the hind quarters, then politely lift & direct the inside front foot into the new hallway; Ideally, we achieve a 'reach' with the inside front foot, and a 'cross' of the outside front foot, with a forward 'feel' but little forward movement in the hindquarters; The front end walks around the hind end!

