

June 2010 Colt to Horsemanship – Part IV *He is Saddled...What's Next?*

In this month's article regarding bringing your horse along in the development of a willing partner, I am drawn to a statement that Mr. Ray Hunt used consistently: "Prepare to a position for a transition". The time and exercises you accomplish with your colt between those first saddling and the time you hop on board are critical "preparation" for the "transition" to developing a willing partnership with your horse. Take the time to establish this positive foundation, and it will ultimately take less time. If you leave a hole in your progression at this point, I guarantee it will show up down the road.

Once the saddling process is coming together in a positive manner, it is time to further prepare your colt for the riding environment.

- Things coming in and out of his vision
- Taking direction from someone on his back
- Natural and man-made obstacles, movements, and noise
- Handling situations where the pressure is ramped-up

The exercises suggested below start this preparation on the ground. As with all ground school training, it requires the human to be clear in their request, have a focused picture, and apply body language that will consistent with posture you will use in the saddle. Everything we do on the ground should apply to the saddle.

Ground Riding Exercises:

What is Ground Riding? In many of the ground school exercises, we are located in a 'driving' position. As example, in sending our horse on a circle the human is found in the center. The energy projects outward as if it were the spoke of the wheel. That focus drives the horse forward. In ground riding you'll change your focus to run parallel to the direction of travel of the horse. Your shoulders and hips will be in the same attitude as the shoulders and hips of your horse. The feeling is that you are going 'with' your horse, rather than 'driving' him.



Flap the Stirrup – In the ground riding position, develop a nice walk with your horse. Reach over to lightly hold the stirrup and begin swinging it back and forth, rubbing it against the colt's ribcage. Next, toss the stirrup up on the seat of your saddle, all the while maintaining forward motion. Last, make a kink in the stirrup leather, and snap it downward to make a nice 'pop' sound. Work this up until your horse can travel along at a rhythmic walk, and not be bothered by the noise or movement. In the end, you should be able to make a change in your intentions and accomplish the same movements at a stand still.

Pull the Tail – Once your colt is comfortable with the stirrup exercise, politely work your way back to his rump, croup, and tail. Invite yourself in with a little massage underneath the tail head, and then down to the tip of the tail. Continue your walk forward, hanging on to the tail as if you were walking along holding hands with your good friend. Try a circle in this position by slightly opening



your inside forearm and looking where you want the horse to go. If he loses forward momentum, bring your tail hand up to give him a little tap on the rump. You are feeling for flow, rhythm, and timing...No PULLING!

Use of the Flag:

The flag is a wonderful tool to 'sensitize' your colt to things coming in and out of his vision, while asking him to follow your clear intentions. Review the following articles, pictures and videos for ideas on how to use the flag as a positive tool for preparing your colt. (www.tnhorsemanship.com/articles 08 August NWHS - Use of the Flag)

Use of the Lariat:

While you may never rope a live critter from atop your horse, I highly recommend becoming handy with the use of a lariat. Your saddle horn is a moveable post to which you can attach a horseman's rope providing many opportunities to 'sensitize' your colt. Jump rope swings, resting on the hindquarters, around legs, under tails or around flanks are all positions and movements to seek for the lariat. Remember that you want to always establish the acceptance of the lariat in various positions with the horse moving first. It will be easy for the horse to accept at a standstill, if you start with movement first. (08 September NWHS – Use of the Lariat)



Working From Above:

Preparing your colt to take directions from the position that you will be in when on his back can be accomplished from either atop a fence or atop another horse. (08 October NWHS – Working from A Top Your Horse)

Preparing for the Bit:

Your first few rides may be in a horseman's halter, or hackamore. If you are choosing to bring your horse along with a snaffle bit, you may want to introduce the snaffle before the first ride. I like to have the colt carry the bit, searching with his tongue, and moving his jowls, so I'll leave the headstall a little long. You can accomplish all of the ground school exercises listed above with the snaffle bit over the top of the horseman's halter, and using the 12 ft. lead and body language for direction. (09 June NWHS – Developing Contact – Snaffle Bit)

Ground riding can be one of the most rewarding group of exercises in further establishing the communication and partnership with your horse. It develops self-confidence in both horse and human, and will pay huge dividends when you are in the saddle!

