

How To Train A Horse Without Force Part 1

Camille Dareau



HappyHorse 
HappyHuman

Contents

Objectives	3
Prerequisites For Training - Building A Solid Foundation:	
Psychological stability.....	6
Physical Stability.....	12

Section 1: OUTSIDE THE ARENA

Starting at the beginning

Approach Philosophy.....	16
Forming Your Approach.....	18

Preparatory Handling Skills:

- 1. First Rung of the Ladder:**
 - Working with a horse unaccustomed to any human handling....24
- 2. Leading the Young or Inexperienced Horse.....**27
- 3. Tying and Grooming.....**33
- 4. Challenging Operations: Clipping, Hoof Care and Dentistry.....**42

Exercise 1 <i>Energy Connection: Boundary Awareness</i>.....	52
---	-----------

Section 2: INSIDE THE ARENA – ON THE GROUND

Working On Yourself

Building the Trust Bond.....	59
The Good Will Philosophy.....	62

Working With Your Horse

The Value of Gymnastic Preparation.....	67
Lungeing Equipment.....	70
Handling the Equipment.....	87
Understanding the Groundwork Goal.....	94
Lungeing Procedure.....	105
How To React To Extreme or Difficult Behaviour.....	152
Ideas for Exercises on the Lunge.....	165

Exercise 2 <i>Energy Connection: Resolving Fears</i>.....	179
--	------------

OBJECTIVES

This book is about the relationship between your horse and you. As humans, we have the unique and exciting opportunity to form a physical, emotional and spiritual connection with another animal when we ride a horse. This is not the case, to my knowledge, in any other sport or art. For this reason it deserves to be taken very seriously. You are the member of the relationship who will be taking responsibility as trainer and manager, and if you can be as honest as you can with yourself about why you are taking on this challenge, then you have already made immeasurable progress. Remember that horses, like children, know very well how we feel about them and where our priorities lie.

This course covers the whole journey that is taken with a horse who has had little or no handling, through to a horse you are riding in correct, gymnastic engagement. At this stage the sky is your limit in terms of the further development of not only your riding technique and intuitive sensitivity, but also the continued gymnastic development of your horse and the resulting depth of your relationship together.

Of course these are only printed words, backed up with photographs and anecdotes, it is not the same as a trainer right there in front of you, giving you a personal analysis of your progress. There are, however, many riders who will be students forever, and despite a multitude of lessons they will not make the leap from student to trainer in their own right. *Anyone* who is prepared to train their mind and body and trust their intuition is capable of becoming a successful trainer of their horse. This course provides the ingredients necessary to do that.

In my opinion it has never been more important to take a step backward and



examine anew our motives and our current practices in this age of ‘super-horses’ and excessive ambition. Horses give us the gift of their integrity for nothing. We can repay this by helping them to realize the inherent power and majesty, which exists in all of them.

Xas survived Neonatal Maladjustment Syndrome, and many difficult passages in her life, yet we have many magical moments training together.

PREREQUISITES FOR TRAINING BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION

Think of it like a house: you don't want to build a house on weak or unsuitable foundations because no matter how wonderful a builder you may be, everything you have built might be threatened at any time.

Through becoming aware that the sources of problems which surface during training in the arena could often be found in the lifestyle of a horse (and equally that problems surfacing in their management can be caused in the arena), the importance of the **whole picture** has gradually become clear to us. So over the years we have been piecing together the essential aspects of all areas of training and management which allow us to take a horse to the point in their training where they will make the choice to give up their body to our guidance. This is very much a choice, and can only be made from trust. We want a partner, not a servant.

Of course it is a great advantage to own your own land and enough horses to allow the formation of a herd, but there are always ways to follow your values. If you put your horse's happiness and your happiness first, then this is the course for you. We all have the opportunity to heal our own fears and limitations when they are mirrored for us by a horse. Whether it is our obsession with keeping our horse's coat perfect at the expense of his social life, or our fear of letting go of the reins and balancing properly when we ride at the expense of his physical comfort,



it is all the same process: discovering ourselves through them. Our success is only limited by our willingness to listen to our own wisdom within.

This course is about **training without tension**. As anyone who has ever been tense or terrified in an exam will know, tension is not beneficial, and even if the adrenalin rush helps you through the exam, you wouldn't want to work in those conditions every day. Tension is not a healthy state of mind, and it produces many harmful physical effects as well.

The most harmful effect for us in the short term, when we are there in the arena with our horse, is that a tense horse will not listen to us properly. If they won't listen they will not be open to the work we want to do, and to creating changes in their nervous system, and developing the muscle memory required.

It is understood that a cell in the body can only be in one of three active states:

- **Growth** - The response we want the cells of our horses musculoskeletal system to be undertaking.
- **Fight or flight** - Adrenalin fueled stress response activated by the sympathetic nervous system
- **Repair** - Initiated by some kind of damage i.e. illness, injury

This is a simplified explanation of the highly complex metabolic processes, but we can understand from this quite clearly that if we want our horse to develop his postural muscles and make new connections in his neural pathways so that he can become more sensitive to our aids, as well as changing his fundamental birth pattern crookedness so he becomes straighter and can balance and power-up beneath us, ***he has to be healthy, and he has to be calm.***

These two imperatives tend to feed each other, unhealthy horses are not so likely to be calm and stressed horses are less likely to be healthy. We need to set up a positive circle, not a vicious one.

The following is a list of the most vital elements of the positive circle: (there is also a lot of information available on the Happy Horse Training website about holistic management)

Psychological Stability

When we work with horses, above all we need their attention. The success of the aiding system we will use to channel their bodies and develop them physically entirely depends on whether they are willing to listen to us or not. The easiest way to make a stressed horse listen is to force him to listen, and this method is very common. The problem is that it doesn't feel very good, either to be a forceful rider, or to ride a coerced horse, and the more forceful you are with your horse, the more forceful you *have* to be, because it is all one-way. The horse will give you nothing back and eventually he will either stiffen up physically, or break down mentally.

If you don't want to use force, you can be patient and wait until the horse is prepared to listen, and this will be a necessary approach in the course of this training program. No horse is relaxed all the time, unforeseen events will occur e.g. a hot air balloon landing in the field beside you, or a plastic bag in a tree, and underlying physical and mental issues which cause anxiety in your horse are bound to come up. At those times, decisions as to how much you can achieve must be made. Such times are often golden opportunities to win your horse's trust.



Psychologically, what matters to a horse more than anything else are his FRIENDS and FAMILY, just like us... in the vast majority of cases. Over time, if we are consistent and persistent in forming our trust connection with a horse, we will gradually convince him of our leadership status, and he will be willing to put himself in our hands during the time we are commanding his attention. The rest of the time

however, he needs his friends and/or family, because he is a social animal just like us, and he is fulfilled and inspired by his own kind.

Every time it comes to the point in training when a horse is making the choice to give himself up to the rider (we call this 'melting' or 'letting go'), we have found that **he will evaluate his situation in terms of his relationships with his 'herd'** when deciding whether he is willing to trust or not. This is not a kind of rational discussion he has with himself, but more of a kind of verification of his self-confidence. The reason we have concluded that this mental process is linked to the rest of the herd is that very often a horse will communicate with the herd at this crucial moment. Insecure horses with a history of solitary confinement, weaning issues or unstable circumstances will neigh ('scream' as it seems to me!) in a way which seems to be almost an attempt to re-integrate themselves with the natural safety of the herd. Sometimes the herd will attempt to communicate with them at this moment, often when they have reached the state of readiness and are about to let go. Those horses which happily and consistently let go and trust the rider are always self confident, with a secure position in the herd.

Of course, like us, horses are born with a unique personality and they can be pre-disposed to insecurity or confident behavior.

The point is that establishing a solid foundation for our training is critical.

Not only will we command our horse's attention better, and they will trust us more easily, but they will also heal injuries more quickly, put muscle on quicker, and ultimately feel better



to ride. Not to mention the very important issue of safety. Happy horses are calmer horses - they are not happy when they buck and squeal and jump around. In fact they do that to express anxiety, often as a result of being imprisoned in stables for long periods of time.

Ideas In Action

In the last year we took on an eleven year-old Lipizzaner mare on the brink of being



put down because she was so aggressive with other horses and people. We weren't sure whether to take her on because we were already a bit full up with our two herds, and keeping horses on their own is not something we would do willingly. We wondered if she really was dysfunctional and would never be able to integrate. Maybe there would be terrible fights and injuries...

It was the beginning of the winter and we were struggling with the workload anyway, the rational decision would have been to say 'well, we can't

save them all'. On the other hand we believe that in life whatever comes into your path is right for you, and there is no such thing as a random event unless you choose for the events in your life to be random. I did some energy work on the question, and I got a very clear message that we should take her. She wanted this chance of a new life.

When she arrived we kept her in a little paddock where she had the pigs in the woods beside her for company. In fact it was a good start because the female pig has a certain talent with horses that Monty Roberts would be proud of! She has tamed many a tricky horse with her expert approach, using the natural respect (which can border on terror!) horses have towards pigs, and their innate curiosity, she draws them gently into a solid friendship. Octavia was no exception.



Esmée the pig with another horse, Rafael

The first weeks we spent gaining Octavia's trust with human beings. We found her to be a particularly intelligent and surprisingly self-confident mare. Most intelligent horses are deeply sensitive however, and they particularly don't appreciate being made into the object of people's fear. How can you trust people who are frightened

of you? So her response was to try, with aggressive behavior, to impose herself as leader in a situation which she couldn't control and actually be the leader: she couldn't control her lifestyle for a start, or the people around her very effectively, and this added to her insecurity. Aggressiveness is always based on some kind of insecurity.

As soon as she realized that we weren't frightened of her she stopped biting and kicking at us and the threats diminished over time as we built up an affectionate relationship with her. She had not been educated to lead politely, or accept her feed politely and learning these things improved her trust also.

She was strangely self-conscious, which is more of a human trait, and it seemed particularly unnatural in a horse.



After a few weeks we decided to introduce her to the 'babies', our two and three year old full brother and sister who are well-adjusted youngsters and would be the least threatening company.

The first meeting was very revealing. Octavia screamed very loudly when she saw the other horses while running backwards and aiming the occasional kick. Despite the scary noise she wasn't kicking

viciously and when the babies looked surprised at her craziness, but didn't move out of the way, she ended up just pushing into them with her back-end, and then moving away again. She was obviously scared of them and thought they were going to attack her, so she wanted to get in first and defend herself. It was funny how astonished the babies were by her screaming in particular. They recovered quickly though and decided they had to show her the correct comportment of a horse in the herd.

Every day they were disapproving and pushed her away when she was too defensive, and when she tried to distance herself they sought her out to make her interact. It was quite tiring for her emotionally, and at night we put her back in her original field on her own. Some days she came into the stables with the main herd

and did a schooling session. At first she would kick the walls wildly when another horse sniffed at her going past, but under the babies influence she kicked out less and less.

Two times stick out in my memory as evidence of the big strides she was making within herself. The first was when she lay down on the sand area close to the babies who were lying down too, and the second was her first grooming session with the 2yo gelding. She looked so vulnerable approaching him, and yet so expectant, and when they came together it really was a magical moment which made all the hassle of the previous weeks well worth it.

Our Paddock Paradise set-up means that the main herd can be 'on the lanes' which go round the periphery of certain fields. So when she was ready we put Octavia in one of these fields so that she would get to know the herd. She was already familiar with the lane system because she went in them when she was with the babies and the herd were in the stables.

There were quite a few times initially when she broke bits of the fence kicking out, but never to the extent of escaping. This was to be expected, as the main herd is a bit less accommodating than the babies. Her socialization rehab was full on now, we rarely saw the self-consciousness coming out in her, and the screaming was long forgotten.

One day, around 3 months after she arrived, we knew we had to take the plunge and let them all in together. She was as prepared as possible for being in the proper herd. We chose a calm day, and after they were all fed and chilled out as much as possible, we opened the gate of her field. This way the horses would be interested in the new field too, and hopefully wouldn't mob her too much.

Some of them went up to her, and when she made an acceptable submissive gesture, backing down and staying quiet, they left her and went off to graze. She then went out onto the lane and stood with one of the more dominant mares for a while. We were surprised at the benign reaction of this mare, maybe they were showing us that it was ok and not to worry anymore.

Since that day she has been going through a slow but sure process of integration. At first she didn't want any trouble and she accepted the position as the most submissive member of the herd without complaint. Her natural temperament is quite bold however, and if she had always been a part of a herd we think she would have taken a more dominant role. It will be interesting to see how things develop. We have observed that (as often happens with people!) if a lower down member of the

herd makes friends with someone higher up, they will then be accepted by the others at that higher level - a kind of unintentional social climbing.



Octavia (right) with her new friends

All this takes time, and Octavia has made amazing progress in a short period considering that she was well on the way to suffering from pathological asocial behavior.

By chance we know that when Octavia was a youngster she was absolutely normal in her interactions with other horses, her problems came about as a direct result of human

interference and ignorance. The horse herd has done for us in months what we as humans could never have achieved in years: restored Octavia into a calm, normal, happy horse, more than ready to learn and develop gymnastically in her work.

Through experiences such as this, we have come to the conclusion that *nothing* should take precedence over horses' need to socialize. This includes our fearfulness of injury, and our human preconceptions about who is going to fight with whom. If you let your horse have his friends, you will be rewarded tenfold in the arena, and you will enjoy watching the interactions too.



To read the full story of Octavia on the Happy Horse Training website go to:

<http://www.happy-horse-training.com/aggressive-horse.html>

Physical Stability

Training a horse to become straight, to engage, and to accept your aiding all go hand in hand. This is described in more detail later on, but it is important to realize that you are going to be changing your horse both physically and mentally. She will become posturally stronger and stronger, and able to carry a human without sustaining physical damage.

When her work is done well, a horse always becomes more and more beautiful. Her attention span lengthens and her mind becomes more open. This does not happen without effort. Both you and your horse must train yourselves to put everything you have into every moment in the arena, while learning to keep calmness and patience as the prevailing atmosphere.

Your Horse must have a suitable diet, which will support her muscular development without compromising her calmness or causing sensitivity in her feet. One of the most harmful quick fixes in equine management is the use of shoes to dissimulate the problem of laminar sensitivity. The laminar tissue in horses' feet is highly reactive. The foot of a horse has evolved to function in a



very specific and sophisticated way, and unfortunately for domesticated horses, the environmental conditions required to maintain the health of this system are very difficult to reproduce, the principal one being sufficient movement. Horses have evolved to be 'on their feet' and moving the majority of the time. This constant stimulus means the tissues within the feet will develop in the right way and the resulting strength and flexibility limits their sensitivity to the terrain.

Domestic horses feet rarely develop in this way whether they are shod or not, but shoeing will certainly inhibit any progression that does take place. The reason why we don't really take this on board is that shoes have a kind of switching-off effect on the whole foot. It's a bit like taking a pain killer and not thinking too much about why the pain was there in the first place. There is no sensitivity problem in shod horses' feet because the feet are both numb and separated from the ground.

Research is happening now which indicates that horses are able to pick up stimuli from the ground, vibrations and so on, which would obviously be disrupted by

wearing steel shoes.



The Paddock Paradise system encourages domestic horses to move more within a network of lanes. See <http://www.happy-horse-training.com/paddock-paradise.html> for more.

In the short term, it is easy to forget that later on many horses will suffer from navicular syndrome, sidebone, pedal osteitis, and all the other ways the joints of the lower limb and foot can break down. It may seem like a necessary evil, but horses don't really move well with shoes on, and it is difficult for them to relax fully in a physical way because they can't let themselves down properly into their feet. Psychologically they will struggle to relax as well, because they can't feel through to the ground adequately.

Coming back to diet, ideally you are aiming at having your horse's feet comfortable because she isn't shod and her diet is right, so that sensitivity in the

feet stays normal.

The natural diet of a horse is a continuous supply of roughage with fairly low nutritional value. By giving your horse a

largely hay, as opposed to grass, diet with low sugar hard feed to support musculoskeletal development, you can imitate this reasonably well. We don't think it is fair to work most horses on a hay and grass only diet, as some natural horsemanship proponents claim is possible. Of course some native ponies need very little, but they still need protein and minerals of some kind.

Horses in the wild are not submitting to the demands of riders, and they are not always carrying the best condition anyway. It takes a lot of energy for a horse to develop gymnastically and enough protein to build their postural strength. If we choose to exploit their time and energy, then we are obliged to compensate them with physical comfort which will make their work with us easier. Look at the Happy Horse Training information on nutrition (e.g. <http://www.happy-horse->

[training.com/horse-nutrition.html](http://www.happy-horse-training.com/horse-nutrition.html)) for a suitable low sugar hard feed diet. On this page you can read our personal story of discovering the right nutritional balance for our horses.

Horses without excellent feet should really be ridden in hoof boots (you can also find information about this on Happy Horse Training: <http://www.happy-horse-training.com/hoof-boots.html>). Since we are expecting to be in charge of the path taken, it isn't fair to insist on barefoot if there is a question of putting the horse over



These photos show the same horse working with (left) and without (right) hoof boots. The comfort provided by the extra protection of hoof boots is clearly shown by the heel-first landing in the left-hand photo, as opposed to the toe-first landing without that protection.

terrain that could be sore for him. We pick our way to some extent, and we also protect our feet. We train our own horses in boots even in the arena to be sure of maximum comfort. Horses are particularly prone to anticipating discomfort so the more you can do to avoid it the better.



SECTION 1

OUTSIDE THE ARENA

"It is only when we respect the boundaries of others that they will dissolve and let us in"

STARTING AT THE BEGINNING: APPROACH PHILOSOPHY

Up until now we have been talking about getting the foundations right for training a horse. Important as they are though, the foundations are not the creation itself, and our creation can be a remarkable phenomenon. Horses living with other horses, and people with other people, may be natural and normal, but is it the same kind of opportunity to release our potential - that of both humans and horses - as forming a relationship between two species? There are many ways in our world for human beings to extend themselves beyond the natural necessities of reproduction and survival... and this is surely one of the most remarkable.

We have the opportunity to create an entirely new being. The human role of this new being is to open themselves up to the horse completely - trusting to balance and sophisticated communication. Not hanging on with the reins and dominating with the spurs. The horse's role is for him to go way beyond the natural scope of his movement, and discover the freedom of life beyond the herd, where his acceptance of a human has released his own power and released his mind from his hierarchical place in the herd.

This training program offers you the information you need to bring your horse to his psychological and physical limits and take him beyond them. Horses which are still stuck in their natural crookedness, that has often been fixed deeper in by incorrect riding, are also stuck in a kind of mental institutionalization. Imagine that they are moving all the time in the same rut which manifests physically as stiffness, lack of balance and crookedness, and manifests mentally as an obsession with where the other horses are, which boils down to where the gate of the arena is!



You can take them beyond this narrow mindedness, and literally light up their imagination. It may sound a little melodramatic, but it is possible with all different types of horses, difficult as well as talented ones. For that half-hour to an hour in the day, you will literally change their perception of reality. At first there are tough times for you and the horse, and there will only be moments of magic, but gradually these moments extend themselves and your horse will start to enjoy what he's doing more and more, and he'll miss it when he doesn't come in to work. Like anything some horses are more willing than others, but it is a therapy for all of them.

The language between you and your horse will not change throughout the progress of your training. It is like any language, the words may get more complicated, but the



letters stay the same. This means that **the success of every part of the process will depend on the success of the previous part.** If you can't read a word, you will never read a sentence. How obvious is that! Not obvious enough sadly for many riders who ask their horses to do a half-pass when the horse cannot yet bend properly on a circle.

Training a horse is not a mysterious process, but it is a developmental *progression*, which cannot be hurried. There are faster ways to teach horses dressage movements than taking the time to allow the right changes to be realized in their bodies and minds; and the more talented the horse, the easier it is to cover up the absence of true training. This is not the same achievement for the rider nor the horse, however, because the focus is not on the reality of the relationship as it presents itself each day and how to work with that, but rather on fabricating an image which is acceptable, despite the reality of that particular partnership. This is not a subtle difference in training techniques; it is a profoundly different mentality, which applies to health and everyday living as well as dressage training.

Recognition is everything. This can also be described as 'being in the present' or 'living in the moment'. When we can develop the concentration and understanding to feel *ourselves* and therefore our horse, as they really are each moment we are relating to them, in the saddle and on the ground, then we will become aware of their boundaries and learn how to stay at those boundaries until they are ready to

change. This is how we can gradually transform a stuffy or awkward horse into an elegant and forward moving athlete.



Many trainers will describe complicated or just plain crude ways of sensitizing horses to the aids, but if they involve forcing through boundaries then they will only raise defenses in the horse. Whether those defenses are physical compensations or mental protections, it comes to the same thing, they are only

pushing you further away from that magical connection which is what real dressage is all about.

Forming Your Approach

The context will change and the way in which you say it will change, but if you can convey in every encounter you have with your horse, 'I am here and I am someone you can trust', then you are already halfway to forming the trust bond which opens the doors to all the genuine achievements you will ever make with that horse.

As time goes by you must prove that statement in many different ways, but just like when a baby looks you right in the eyes, a horse can look into you and *know* you. The best you can do is to be honest. Everybody has a temper, more or less under control! Everybody is ignorant of some things, and everybody has fears which limit their abilities. One of the most beautiful things about horses is their generosity when you are honest with them.

Of course we aren't always honest with ourselves about things, but learning to 'expose ourselves' to our horse is crucial. He will never take advantage of that. That doesn't mean some horses don't buck you off and run back to the stables, it means

that they don't think less of you for being a less than perfect being. Horses don't feel embarrassed or threatened by love. It is an *energy* to them, and if it is there from you, they can connect to you. Maybe not straightaway if they are damaged horses, but they will eventually.

Think of it as when you let your guard down, and allow yourself to feel love for your horse and project it, it is exactly like lifting the phone off the hook. Now you can talk to each other. It is so important to understand that *HORSES DON'T TAKE THINGS PERSONALLY*. They may associate a particular person with good or bad events, but if you love them, you will motivate them to trust you, whoever you are and whatever you have done before.



Another beautiful thing about horses is their capacity to forgive. As long as you are willing to recognize where you went wrong, their forgiveness goes without saying. It is important that we too learn not to take things personally with our horses - we have to return the favour. This means being as generous and forgiving with your horse as he is with you, don't hold grudges or get resentful, or above all blame him for things. There is always a reason for his behaviour. This does not mean you have to be a doormat. You are the leader and the guide and you decide the program, otherwise your horse can't relax and feel secure, but your motivating factor is your horse's wellbeing and instead of criticizing his behaviour, you need to do everything you can to understand it.

For example, if you have a young horse who nips you, and it was quite sore because she got a sensitive bit of skin, a suitable reaction might be to take her head-collar firmly and hold her close to you, look right in her eye and say 'No, don't bite' and hold her attention until she acquiesces. Then think about why she did it, and make the fair assumption that she is teething and just wanted to let you know how sore it is, or just take it out on you! After that forget it ever happened. An unsuitable reaction would be, because you feel anger and self-pity because she hurt you, to react because of that. What you can change quickest is your *reaction* to whatever emotion you feel, then at some point the emotion itself will not arise so readily.

The point is not really whether you hit out physically or not, the physical action is not as important as the intention behind it. In this case, when her biting *isn't* an attempt to dominate, but more an expression of her teething pain, smacking her for nipping is not going to encourage her trust in you.

Remember horses will try to communicate with you if you let them, and sometimes we put them off doing this by misinterpreting their actions.

On the other hand young horses must realize that people must be respected in the same way as a higher up member of the herd, and such a herd member doesn't think twice about going in with teeth, heels or both. That said, the relationship we want to create with a young horse is *not* the same as the one she would have with the herd bully.

It is more important to be **clear and decisive** with horses than worry too much about getting it wrong. **As long as we care about them and put them first**, then we will open ourselves-up to the truth of the situation, and be able to see whether we are over-reacting because we are frightened of being hurt, or whether our reaction was necessary to clarify our own boundary at that time.

The further along we get in this process of what is basically self-understanding, the more we will discover ways to communicate with our horses which are less violent and more effective. Leading by example will become more and more achievable.



There are therefore two things to think about when responding to your horse:

1) Be The Dependable One - Think of the stallion of a herd, he is selfless in terms of his care of the herd. He will starve and injure himself and exhaust himself to keep them safe. If you adopt this kind of attitude, you will avoid taking things personally and putting yourself into the role of irresponsibility. Never be offended by your horse.

2) Listen to his Message - This second point will come about as a result of the first one, if your intentions are right, your intuition will be right and you will know how to react in different circumstances. At the end of the day the answer you give to your horse depends on the question he is asking you. Over time you must sophisticate your ability to understand the question. That is all, but it is everything. If your horse is communicating 'I'm not feeling well I don't think I'm up to working today' your answer is different to when he is communicating 'I can't be bothered working today and I don't think you're strong enough to make me'.

You are quite likely to perceive a situation with your horse incorrectly and therefore make an unhelpful response a few times if not many times, but instead of wasting the opportunity by feeling guilty, it is a better idea to apologize to your horse, (this is the same thing in energy terms as recognizing a limitation in yourself, so the consequences of having misunderstood your horse will be healed), then spending some time thinking about why you went wrong. You might become aware of a pattern or a key to what you missed. Even if you don't see a pattern, every time you do this you will make a better interpretation the next time.

Remember also that you must apply the same attitude of understanding and lack of judgment to yourself if you are to successfully apply it to your horse. If you have a headache or a time when your ego gets the better of you, you won't be open to the subtleties of your horse's state of being that day, and you just have to recognize it and let it go. If there is a secret, it is in the recognition.

My little phrase '*If you can feel it, you can heal it*' applies to anything physical or mental which is obscuring who you are. Recognize it, feel it, and it will resolve itself. In fact, in many ways it is a more helpful attitude to consider that instead of making a value judgment about your actions i.e. good or bad, right or wrong, that in fact every time your horse reacts to your action, he is giving you an idea of how helpful you were in creating a harmonious relationship. If there wasn't much harmony then you know you have to react differently next time, and find out more about what is happening.

Ideas In Action

A good example of an experience I had once of responding in a way which didn't improve the harmony of our relationship happened riding out on a hack with a young thoroughbred mare. At the time this mare had been working well on the lunge and was at the stage of riding out short distances, no more than half-an-hour to strengthen her up and introduce her to the aids before riding her in the confines of an arena.

This day she had already become nicely aware of my leg aids, in other words her sides were undergoing the awakening

which happens when young horses are becoming tuned to the rider's leg, and the nerves are sensitizing. Concurrently her back muscles were starting to stretch as her abdominal muscles contracted, this would lift her back as well as

encouraging her to stretch her neck and soften her jaw. The problem came when

she stiffened her jaw and the softening reaction to what was happening in her back did not result.

I responded by asking her more strongly with my leg and seat, and she became more upset throwing her head up and down and staying stiff in her jaw. It didn't degenerate into an out-and-out fight, and thankfully my days of attempting to resolve anything with the reins were long gone, but no progress was made and we returned on a bad note. I was feeling certain I had messed up our relationship and done terrible damage to our training progress.



When I thought about the situation later, I realized that I was so worried about not progressing with her training that I had become determined to achieve this softening, instead of backing off and accepting that, for whatever reason, she was unable to soften her jaw at that day. My motivation was therefore based on fear - worrying about progressing - and any action taken as a result of fear is unhelpful. It is the same thing as reacting in a certain way because you think your horse won't be ready for the dressage test on Saturday, or because he will think he is getting away with something, or because you are frightened of falling off.

The outcome of this story is that when I looked at the information Xas had given me in a different light, I pieced the story together. She was born with neonatal maladjustment syndrome, which involves an oxygen imbalance in the brain. Whether or not it was the cause, or one of the contributing factors to the syndrome, she has a deformed vertebra in her neck which was identified by an equine osteopath after the episode in question. It is not an easily visible fault, and the gravity of it had not become apparent throughout her training up to that point, because she was not yet working in full engagement with a rider.

The other clues in hindsight were her refusal to accept even the long side-reins we use (she deftly broke one with her foot the very first time they were introduced!) and the fact that in her early work she held her neck very straight instead of rounding it.



The main point of the story is that when Xas communicated that she didn't want to soften her jaw and carry her neck in the correct way, it was because she *couldn't do it*. She reacted more violently when I insisted because she *knew* she couldn't do it, and that she had to protect her neck. In fact she is very conscious of protecting her neck even to the point these days of looking very dubious if her rider is given the reins during a lunge lesson!

*These three photos show the gradual and natural progression of Xas's head carriage in her schooling work in engagement, which took place over several years. She has always been allowed to **offer** the head-carriage that she was comfortable with, instead of the rider interfering in an attempt to 'improve it' or make it more 'advanced'. It can be seen from the comparison of these photo's how much her head-carriage has lifted and strengthened, purely from the gymnasticising effect of engagement, with, of course, therapeutic assistance whenever required.*

This is another example of the necessity of accepting a horse's own boundaries and not trying to force them, because most of the time if not all, horses behave how they do because of how they feel (for more on this subject see: <http://www.happy-horse-training.com/horse-behavioral-problems.html>).

Incidentally, this mare was then taken very slowly and carefully towards the engagement process, and her neck became stronger and more supple to the point where now she softens her jaw beautifully, and although her head carriage will take a long time to come right up, the way she holds her neck is a correct telescoping posture. To read her full story go to: <http://www.happy-horse-training.com/dummy-foal.html>.

Preparatory Handling Skills

1) First rung of the ladder: Working with horses unaccustomed to any human handling

In order to proceed in a constructive way with any horse, it is worth accepting that it is always the horse's choice whether she's going to trust you or not. We have already discussed the question of what our objectives are, but it is a subject I don't believe can be thought about too much. We have to be aware of the fact that most horses in the history of domestication of horses have not been allowed to make this choice. They have been coerced and dominated in every field of equitation, and still are.

Why does it matter then?

It matters if you want a partner and not a slave. A partner has a personality, she has ideas and most important of all she communicates with you through her love, so most of your time with her makes you feel good. A slave is a living machine, very useful maybe, but not a companion, and not a relationship which will feed your soul, quite the opposite in fact.

So taking the position that you want to make a *friend* out of this horse, you must accept that the first step she makes towards you is her choice. You can herd her up,

get her trapped in somewhere, and force the head-collar on her if you like, but you won't ever get back that first opportunity to **give her the choice**.

Ideas In Action

Over ten years ago now I bought a couple of youngsters, Mojo and Amy. They were about 7 or 8 months old, and I didn't have any control over their weaning process, nor did I realize the significance of this at the time, so they were probably taken from their mothers, shoved into the lorry and brought to our place all in one day. All they had was each other to rely on.

It was in the winter and there was snow on the ground so we kept them in a big barn with a straw bed, and we gave them a few days to settle down. They were not used to people and they ran away when you approached them. The little colt was much bolder than the filly, so we worked with him first. Two of us gently cornered him and gradually got him to the point of accepting a lead rope over his neck, and after half an hour or an hour or so we got a head-collar on him. The process of introducing him to the rope and the head-collar was carried out within the boundaries of his acceptance, otherwise we wouldn't have been able to get near him, but once the buckle of the head-collar was done up and we could hold him, then the choice was no longer his. We didn't force him in an overt way, but we didn't think about giving him the initiative.

The little filly was much more frightened of people, and it took us longer to go through the same process. For many years she was very attached to the colt, and would often follow his lead in doing something challenging. Looking back now I realize that he was the leader she accepted, not us, which is often the case even with adult horses. She did turn out to be a particularly challenging horse to work with for reasons which probably extend beyond those first experiences.



Three years ago we bought an eight-month old foal again, another coloured filly, who we named Totale (left). This time we persuaded her breeder to lend us the mare so we could make sure the weaning process was natural. This filly was even wilder than the two in the first story because she had hardly had any contact at all with people. Of

course we had to trailer them home, and it wasn't an ideal scenario, but she followed her mother into the trailer reasonably easily, although not before she made a last wild attempt to rejoin the herd!

This time when we got them home and settled outside, we took a different approach. It happened naturally, perhaps because the circumstances encouraged it, but every day we would feed them and handle the mare a little. She herself was skeptical about people, having had a tough life breeding foal after foal, and not being given much care and attention. She didn't encourage the filly to accept us, and we didn't try to approach her. At the time it was fine just to let her do her own thing. Over time she would come a little closer but she wasn't happy to be touched. We would bring them both into a stable, allowing the filly to follow - sometimes she would even go adventuring a bit, but she always came back. In the stable we groomed the mare and they would get fed, have their hay, rest, and then go back out.

*At some point we decided 'officially' **not** to go against the filly's boundaries by insisting on handling her before she accepted it willingly. It felt right just to wait and see and to give her the time she needed.*

One day, about three months after we bought her, I was out in the field with her and her mother, feeding them and putting out the hay, when instead of pulling away when I went towards her, the filly decided to stay where she was. I touched her and she still stood, so I stroked her all over. She showed no sign of timidity or suspicion from that day onward. In fact she was overconfident and prone to disregard peoples boundaries because she was so joyful to be right beside people!



Totale as a yearling, now well handled

Interestingly, she had the same level of confidence with people as foals who have been bred and brought up by people who understand and care about horses. The fact that this depth of confidence could be recuperated with such a youngster showed us both how important the right weaning process is and that giving her the choice about how long she needed to take getting to know people was far more valuable in the long run than forcing her, however gently the process was undertaken.

These experiences have led us to believe that the less force employed in our dealings with horses, the more whole they will stay in themselves. This means that layers of fear based on distrust do not built up between them and us. This then allows us the pleasure of engaging with their true personality every day as well as their unspoiled attention when we are training them, and as any teacher knows, this is priceless. Youngsters who have been weaned abruptly and younger than in the wild may need more 'support' from their handlers in the bonding process because they may lack the confidence to make the first move. This support must be calm, patient and above all founded on love, not merely focused on trying to get the job done.

Looking at the bigger picture of all these experiences, my understanding is that horses, just like people, choose their own circumstances in life, in that our energetic vibration fits in with our surroundings. Maybe because Mojo and Amy were less 'whole' in themselves than Totale, they attracted the scenario where they had less choice. This doesn't mean that there is no point in trying to become more aware and change things for the better, only that there is no point in attaching blame. The more conscious we become, the higher our vibration and the more positive our encounters will become.



2) Leading the Young or Inexperienced Horse

Leading a horse is the foundation exercise of your training program. Any problems you have leading will also manifest themselves in some way under saddle, so it is worth taking the time to form good habits. Your leading success is also one of your best indicators of how you are rating as your horse's trusted leader.

When you are training your horse to lead you want to achieve the following goals:



- **That your horse gives you his attention most of the time**, and if he is distracted by something, as soon as he is ready, he returns his focus to you, to find out your opinion. The best way to tell where his attention is is to watch his ears. Usually if he sees something interesting he will fix his ears towards whatever it is (*top photo, left*), and when he wants your opinion he will flicker an ear back to you (*middle photo, left*). This is your cue to let him know what you want, which in most cases will be to carry on and refocus his full attention on you again (*bottom photo, left*). If you ask for his attention *before* you 'have an ear' you are likely to be ignored and if he does respond it is more likely to be in a tense way. This is because he is still judging the degree of threat, which you would be doing also if you were a horse. As a human we assimilate the threat differently, but he cannot be expected to understand that. There are times when we do have to insist that a horse accepts our judgment before he may be ready to, but in my experience meeting them halfway is always more beneficial to the relationship.

In fact the most powerful way you can attract your horse's concentration, is to give her *your own* concentration as consistently as you can. When you are working with her, starting with leading, you put her under the spell of your concentration. You observe her behavior and you listen to her. 'Listening' meaning that you are like a big receptor, absorbing everything about her and what she is doing each moment - and the very act of doing this, *connects* her

to you.

Then when you have established this connection, you can use it to influence her.

What I am describing now is the fundamental energetic connection between a horse and anyone who is said to 'have a way with horses' or maybe someone who 'whispers to horses'. This sensitivity is a gift for some people in that they were born with it, so they didn't need to become conscious of how it works in order to develop it



in themselves, but it is not exclusive to them. If you are alive, you are a sophisticated and intelligent being made of energy, and this energy can work with a horse's energy like two cogs in a machine. When you ride it is a physically closer connection, so the experience is more physically intense, but whatever you do around horses, the connection is there.

For horses this connection is how they live and they are aware of it even at a distance.

Many times when I have been schooling or working with a horse, and we come to a moment where the horse is choosing to really open himself up and trust me completely, at that very moment his closest friend or partner will whinny, often from two fields distance away, because they sense a change in the energetic connection of their relationship. It is that the timing of it that is so exact, time after time, that I am I no doubt of the strength of this network of intelligence.

Throughout this course, the importance and as far as is possible the functioning of this connection will be discussed and described, and many of you reading will discover or enhance your own innate ability. At the end of each main section there is an exercise which relates this energetic connection to the training subject of that section to give a better idea of how you can put it into practice in all areas of your horsemanship.

- **That your horse is willing to walk beside you wherever you wish to go**, and stay with you, under reasonable control, if something frightens him. Success comes from the horse's willingness to yield to you, in this case (leading), yielding is to the pressure from the lead rope on his head, or gentle taps from a stick you might use to encourage him to go forward. Unless a horse has developed a specific fear which is associated with a specific method of yielding, in a horse's mind yielding is yielding, whichever aid you apply or method you ask with.

Every horse has a unique character, and some are born yielders, right through the scale to those who will only yield as a last resort. When a horse yields to someone, they are giving away their freedom of choice. Horses are less averse to this idea than people in general because they are a prey species, and herd survival is a very deep instinct for them. It is very important to them, however, *who* leads them, because this leader will have the power to make life and death decisions. It is important to appreciate the responsibility we are taking on, and give our horse good reason to trust us.



When a horse allows us to lead him into a trailer this is also a form of yielding.

Imagine a graph, with tendency to yield as one axis, and training progress as the other. Every horse has a place somewhere on that graph. Horses with low yielding aptitude but a lot of quality training can easily overtake those with high aptitude but careless training. Modern breeding is producing horses with superior ride or trainability, but if this results in less and less assiduous training, it will not further the art of horsemanship.

Yielding is the key to all training, so it is crucial to understand your horse and observe how both you and your horse react during the process of teaching your horse to yield.

The reasons why horses don't yield are numerous and important to identify, because your reaction must be suitable, otherwise you might damage your trust bond. The simplest way to know whether you are making the right decision or not is to become aware of whether you are putting your horse into a state of tension, or a state of calm.

The training process is often complicated by the unfortunate situation that many horses are in a greater or lesser state of traumatization. Horses that have been traumatized are difficult to work with because their central nervous system has been altered by their previous experiences. Making true progress with such horses requires a particular understanding and patience. The level of traumatization can also be difficult to identify, sometimes in the worst cases it may manifest as a

dullness or lack of personality, and only appear as stress behavior when the horse is exposed to certain environments, such as going to a show or being on his own etc. Horses like this may dissociate from their surroundings. Like a plane running on autopilot, they function in their lives, but there is no one at the controls. This can make communication with them impossible in a conventional way and often people will resort to methods that re-traumatize them because nothing else seems to get through to them. Of course this doesn't really get through to them but it gets whatever job had to be done, done, e.g. going in the trailer, or in the ring, or standing to be clipped etc.

If you suspect your horse is traumatized look at the Horse Trauma supplement to this e-book where the subject is covered in depth.

Teaching a horse to lead boils down to states of comfort and discomfort. If he comes willingly when you apply pressure, then you stop the pressure and he returns to the comfort zone. If he doesn't yield, you maintain the pressure and he stays in the discomfort zone until he makes the choice to come forward into the comfort zone again. The clearer the choice is made to the horse, the better he can understand. This is why it is definitely better **not** to increase the pressure until he gives (or panics and hurts himself). This may seem counter-intuitive, because the more you pull the more obvious it should be to the horse what you want, but in fact pulling harder often has the unhelpful effect of provoking the horse's defense system. This is because the horse ***didn't have enough time*** to think about your request before the discomfort became too strong for him not to react. Some horses will yield in that moment because they are natural yielders, and some horses will fight, because they are natural fighters, but most horses will be put into a state of tension as a result, which is exactly what you don't want.

It may take longer at the beginning, but the foundation of your training will be much stronger and deeper if you go down the 'patient' route. **The long way is definitely the short way with horses.** It is not, as is commonly thought, a case of 'letting the horse get away with it' because you take longer, in fact the horse will have a clearer and more profound understanding of what you want and what you represent for him.

Ideas In Action

*At the time when Totale (from the 'Ideas in Action' story above) was happily leading in and out of her box (she had been successfully weaned and was enjoying having her own stable) every day she was brought in for the morning, she would come out and be groomed, go for a little walk and go back into her box. Usually quite happily, until the day she decided she didn't want to go back in. Up until then she hadn't really **learnt** to yield in her leading experience, she did it because she was enjoying what she was doing, but being smart she had now realized that going back in her stable wasn't as much fun, so now was the moment for her first real choice. She probably also picked up that I was more pressed for time that particular day.*

When I asked her to go forward and maintained the pressure she took a long time to respond, and went through different stages of evasion, primarily pretending to go to sleep! But every time she eventually yielded and came forward a step. It took at least half an hour to cross the yard, but despite her stubbornness, (she has a particularly bold and bossy personality!) she could see



*that there was no other option, and she went in the stable. Interestingly there was someone on the yard that day who thought she was being allowed to get away with it, and that I should have used a whip or a rope, in order to make her react more quickly – because, in her view, all the time she was refusing to go this behaviour was being confirmed in her mind. The way I saw it was that in fact in Totale's mind, she had explored every possible option without being distracted or upset, and then she realized that it was much easier and less boring to let me be her leader. **It was a choice that she came to without any negative experience or traumatization, which would have provoked her fight-or-flight instinct (in her case probably fight!) response and would have confused her understanding of our relationship.***

Since this incident, there have never been any further difficulties leading Totale forward – though there are days when holding her back is not always straightforward! But the extra half hour spent that day was priceless for her education.

Of course every different scenario is unique - there are days when we just won't be in the mood to be patient, and perhaps occasionally it isn't such a bad thing to raise your vibration a bit, after all a stallion doesn't always hang around putting his herd in order. On the other hand, strong handling of any sort is better seen as the exception, when we can't help reacting like that. Training by force will always require force to carry itself forward, and it isn't a happy way to be in your day-to-day relationship with your horse. As I see it, when I can react to any circumstance with a horse in a calm, listening way - then I can make the relationship evolve. If I react from my ego and lose my connection with my real self, then I am not creating anything with that opportunity. The more aware we can be of our reactions, the clearer the choice will become between evolving and stagnating.

3) Tying and Grooming

Tying



Teaching a horse to be tied up is more about getting her to **associate being tied up with feeling calm**, than instilling in her that she can't escape. Most horses will learn at some point in their lives that they can escape – indeed it is safest to tie horses up to a loop of string attached to a solid ring so that if they do panic they can break free without injuring their neck. We have to appreciate the size and strength of a horse, and that

they are animals who have evolved to take flight when under threat, so it is crucial to avoid tying them up by their bridle or any attachment to their mouth, to anything that they could drag away with them in flight or to something which will not break straight away. Above all avoid these practices with a young or inexperienced horse.

In order to make tying up acceptable for a horse it is best to make it fun or at least interesting for her until she accepts the constraint. Most young horses love being groomed, so that can be the focus of the session. Start by having everything you will

need at hand so you don't have to leave her, and first of all get her used to the place where you will be tying her up. Observe her behavior and if she is too anxious then she isn't ready to be asked to stand yet. You need to know *why* she is anxious, whether it is because she is separated from the other horses and she's not used to that, or whether she is just a bit nervous of a new place. You can tell the difference because in the former case she will not be interested in her surroundings, she will be distracted and only thinking of escape, and to connect with her in this situation is often too difficult. In the latter case she will just be looking around, and with your reassurance she will gradually relax.

Remember that everything you do at this stage with a young horse is her patterning for her whole life, and unresolved issues will resurface in any moment of stress, so always prioritize on finding ways to avoid stressful situations. For this reason, if a young horse is unhappy on her own, bring her a friend. She can't learn if she is unhappy, and once her confidence grows you can try her on her own again. It is highly unnatural for horses to be on their own, and a young horse will not necessarily recognize you as her leader yet. Often when a horse does appear to accept being on their own it is because they have internalized their feelings. This is bad news because they will undoubtedly resurface in some negative way which is less easy to connect with and resolve, such as stable vices or physical stiffness.

Once you have succeeded in getting your youngster's attention, it is better at the beginning not to actually tie her up, but just to put the lead-rope through the loop of string, so that she can't learn about breaking it until she is capable of standing. Keep the session as short and sweet as you can, less is always more because a young horse's attention span is often limited to 5 or ten minutes, and you definitely want to stop **before** she gets fed up, otherwise she will associate the experience with getting fed up. If she tries to move and pull out the lead-rope during your session just put her back into place and stay calm so she sees that she never gains anything from pushing about.

Particularly confident youngsters do have to realize that you exist and that you are their leader. You must be able to displace them and not be displaced by them! If you feel you are being ignored raise your internal energy and be noticed, preferably without losing your cool overmuch because that signals to the horse you have lost control. Identify your own feelings if you aren't succeeding - if you are scared then your energy will communicate that to the horse instantly and it will destabilize the horse causing her either to be scared and want to distance herself from you, or she will see it as weakness and attempt to push over your boundaries to take control.

The best way to deal with fear is to let yourself feel it, don't try to hide it or hide from it. The more you can accept it the more it will resolve itself. Try to keep your mind on each moment when you are with your horse and tell yourself that in this moment you are safe, and the next and the next etc. in this way you cut down on the fearful thoughts that can escalate and take control.

There will come a time during these sessions when you sense that your horse accepts the idea of being attached, and at this point you will be able to start tying the lead-rope up. Over time during your sessions you can start to get her used to being left alone. It is still important to stretch out gradually the length of time you are away from her until she is not bothered by your absence, It is only necessary to be out of sight, and not too far at first, so that you can get back quickly if she panics. Some horses might reach the indifferent stage after a week and others it might take a month or more. It is never a good idea to leave any horse unsupervised for longer than 5 minutes, but you do need to be able to go and fetch something or go to the toilet without expecting the worst!

It is not the end of the world if she does do something to frighten herself a few times, but the more careful you are to keep her safe when she's with you, the higher she will rate you as her leader and the more she will trust you and do for you willingly. **It is important not to underestimate how much a horse's apparent willingness, or lack of it, depends on how much she trusts you.** Horses will do amazing things if they trust you - often people don't experience this because their horses don't essentially trust them - either because people mean pain or unhappiness, or because they don't provide enough security. This lack of trust is usually only apparent in subtle ways, for example if your horse doesn't let you catch him again if he escapes from the yard, or when you're rushing out to put his rug on in he field before it rains.

Of course the depth of trust you achieve with your horse does not reflect *directly* the success of your approach, because all horses are different and have had different experiences in their lives. Gaining a little bit of trust with a very insecure horse might be more of an accomplishment than having a lot of trust from a confident horse. This is one of the reasons why horsemanship is so complicated; we are not *just* dealing with our own issues. On the other hand, if we don't deal with our own issues we won't progress, because even with a near-perfect horse, the good feelings we get both handling and riding still only come as a result of our own personal development.

Many horses are attached these days using cross-ties. I have never been a fan of them because they are more reminiscent of caging a wild animal than wanting to spend time with a friend. I have also seen several horses with severe spinal and pelvic injuries due to falling over backwards in cross-ties when they were not attached to strings to allow them to break.

Grooming

Grooming is the principle way horses bond with each other in the herd, so it is an essential skill for us to develop. Learning the best ways to make a horse feel nice, and therefore calm and wanting to be with you, sheds a different light on conventional grooming practice, and getting the horse clean can be part of the same process when it is done in a horse-friendly way!

Observing your horse's reactions is the key to heightening your awareness in all the groundwork you do, and in this case you are simply looking for which sensations he enjoys. In general, horses appreciate a gentle but firm touch - scratching, rubbing or massaging. They are not so keen on a clapping, patting, prodding or tickling type touch. They do have a very flexible nervous sensitivity, for example they are irritated by flies walking over their coat, but they also appreciate the flies being swished away from their faces by each other's tails with a force that would often be very painful for a human.



At times I think we can become slightly over-concerned with whether we have tapped or patted a horse instead of stroked etc., especially now that we are becoming more aware of these things. It is maybe more important to the horse how we ourselves *feel* about what we are doing, and a loving pat is appreciated far more than indifferent stroking.

Mares who are less balanced hormonally than others can be very sensitive in their skin to the point that they can only tolerate the gentlest brushing, but rubbing and scratching them in the right places can relax them and even cause a systemic desensitization so the nerves in their whole body will be soothed. These kind of mares also relax and desensitize significantly after the right schooling work. In fact schooling work should be like a therapy for horses, like a form of physiotherapy that gives them a physical high.



Above: A particularly sensitive mare, who can only tolerate very gentle grooming, relaxing with Cranio-Sacral Therapy

It sounds like an obvious point, but it is quite common for people to repeat an action which their horse dislikes or fears in order to 'get him used to it'. In fact this will only make him *more* sensitive and fearful, and consequently trust you *less*. For example if you have a young horse who is particularly jumpy and worried if you touch him when you are riding (I once worked with a youngster who had been backed and brought on too quickly for his temperament, and even the sight of me moving my leg slightly in his peripheral vision could send him into a panic) then it is *not* a good idea

to move about and touch him at inopportune moments in order to get him used to it. The goal is to keep the horse in a habitual state of calm, so **only do things which calm him** and you will find that each day he is a bit more accepting and a bit less likely to react. Of course it is important to touch him in the right way as often as possible, but only when he is prepared for what you are doing and when it genuinely makes him more relaxed.

As all horses are unique: like us, they have their own preferences when it comes to grooming - both how and where. Youngsters often like to be scratched around the root of their tail and most horses appreciate rubbing into their wither area. They will let you know if you are in a 'bad' place or being too strong. Other pleasure zones can be:

- Massaging behind the ears
- Stroking the forehead/nose
- Scratching the roots of the mane.
- Scratching the sternum area to the belly back as far as just in front of the udder/sheath
- Gently rubbing under the dock

Some horses, mares in particular, are not happy to be touched around the flank unless you are extremely gentle, and some mares are sensitive about their udder, although others may enjoy it. Listening carefully to your horse's body language is a crucial way to build trust between you. Unfortunately we tend to ignore much of the communications from our horses because it's easier to ignore it than to take the time to understand the problem. If you are as certain as you can be that a negative reaction to the saddle, for example, is a conditioned response due to past trauma (because the horse is tuning-out of the present moment and reacting because of the past experiences) instead of ignoring him, you can gently try to bring him back into the present moment and encourage him to feel how the saddle actually feels now. Look at the trauma appendix for more information.

On the other hand if your horse is unhappy with your present saddle then it is causing pain and must be changed! Telling the difference is not always simple. Sometimes a horse will have spinal pain which is not caused by the saddle, but he feels it when he is being ridden, so he associates it with the saddle being on him. Each horse is like a puzzle we have to solve. **Viewing this process as an adventure is much more enjoyable than viewing it as a chore.**

Ideas In Action

Some years ago we rescued a 5 year-old Thoroughbred mare from a local horse sale because she was so upset and angry with the situation she was in that we couldn't imagine things would turn out well for her otherwise. She was already an expert at dissociation, or 'tuning out'. At first she spent half her time either in a highly stressed, defensive state or in vacant detachment - when she couldn't cope anymore and had dissociated from her surroundings. This is a state similar to when a mouse has been caught by a cat and seems to be dead. It is a coping mechanism initiated by the parasympathetic nervous system which anaesthetizes the nerves and dulls awareness so that the pain and terror of being in a near death situation is less intense. It is understood now that, in humans, dissociation is connected to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (see Horse Trauma supplement).



This mare had been traumatized by several procedures associated with her general care and management, but the one where her inability to stay in the present moment was most obvious was pulling her mane. She is extremely sensitive to her hair being tugged in any way, even during grooming, so pulling her mane must have been agonizing for her.

Most horse-owners now realize how barbaric the traditional practice of 'mane pulling' actually is (hopefully!) - it's another of those things that were always done because there wasn't a satisfactory alternative, and until the invention of devices such as the 'Solo-comb'[®] (a comb that trims the mane by cutting the hairs rather than pulling them out), people probably didn't really realize how cruel it is to pull the hairs out of their horses neck in that way. Some horses were always more sensitive than others, but if you are looking for a good way to make your horse afraid of you it is certainly effective.

At first when Odette got the slightest hint of any fiddling with her mane beyond ordinary (careful) combing, she would start to stamp and shake her neck about and you could see her leaving the present and going back into 'hell'. When she went

*back to her past trauma **she could not feel the fact that there was no pain associated with the Solo Comb, she was stuck in her defense mechanism to her previous situation. It is not possible to tell if, when she dissociates from the present in this way, she is feeling the numbness of the 'freezing' response to a traumatic situation, or whether she is re-living the pain she suffered at the time. Either way she is not aware of what is happening to her physically in the present moment.***

When she did begin to stay in the present moment, she realized there was no pain and stood perfectly happily - sometimes to the point of dozing off. The trigger stimulus in her case, and other horses with this same association, is usually the action of pushing the hairs up towards the mane, while holding a little section that would be pulled out. This is clearly a particularly provocative action, but sometimes the triggers are secondary associations and may not be obvious to the observer.

*The damage was done in her case because she simply **was not listened to**, no one cared that she was being hurt and so eventually she protected herself by going somewhere different in her mind and body when she was suffering. This retreat became so habitual in her case that she would 'leave' at the slightest stimulus which reminded her of her past trauma, and her personality at that time was particularly bland and vacuous. When she did relate to people it was with irritation and aggression because all of her associations with people were negative.*

The procedure used to work with a case such as Odette's is described in the Horse Trauma supplement. The process will only go as quickly as the horse can heal, and in her case the traumatization was so profound, at such a young age, that we are still not out of the dark. It is interesting however, that the gradual progress she does make in this one area has a much more obvious effect on her temperament overall.

Working with this level of damage in a horse is obviously difficult because you can't convince them that 'it's alright now' if they are dissociating from 'now', and re-living the past event all the time. The first important step is recognizing that the horse is traumatized, and personality traits are one of the best clues, particularly lack of personality.

Unfortunately such traumatization of horses is not at all uncommon. Out of our nineteen permanent residents, we have at least seven horses which are significantly affected. Interestingly the behavior is not always in direct relation to the level of suffering they have been exposed to in their lives, and the way each horse expresses the trauma is not always the same. Sometimes it affects their behaviour

systematically i.e. it creates problems in every area of their lives, and other times it is restricted only to certain very specific stimuli, for example being away from other horses will set them off, or seeing a jump. I believe that when a horse reacts like this in any circumstance, it will colour their whole outlook and their personality in some way. A bit like a photo which has had an 'effect' put onto it. For this reason, even if you never have to expose your horse to the trigger stimulus, unless you address the issue and work towards healing it, your horse will never be truly themselves.

When grooming it is fun, and much more enjoyable for your horse, if you consciously focus on feeling your horse with the tools you use. That sounds obvious in a way, of course we do that, but in general we only sense the surface texture and when we are using a brush we will rely on visual information more than touch. What I am talking about is being able to **feel the state of the muscles and the joints, the bones, the ligaments and even the organs**. Like any skill this perception can be developed to a greater or lesser degree, but even the most basic awareness will let you know if you are welcome to touch a horse in a particular place, or if you are in danger when you go round behind a particular horse - or if a horse is feeling unwell that day.

Most people who work with horses regularly, have, knowingly or not, developed this ability to some extent. Developing a skill is just a matter of practicing - and grooming sessions provide a great opportunity. The following points are ideas you can try out to get you started and wake up your own intuition:

- When you are using a body brush, focus on the horse's skin. See if you can feel his level of sensitivity in each place where you are working - this is possible by 'using his nerves' in the same way as we use our own to feel our own skin. Don't worry if nothing comes at first and don't try too hard because 'trying' will block your perception. Do listen to the slightest little apparently imaginary sensation however - it only seems imaginary because your sensory ability is still undeveloped, and if you block it now it won't strengthen.
- Once you have focused on the skin, try the muscles and see if they feel different in some way. Are there certain muscles which feel more stiff than others? Do you pick up on a sense of weakness anywhere, or strength?
- When you are picking out your horses feet get a sense of how he feels in his feet, is he numb or weak, comfortable or sore?

- While grooming your horse's legs you can get a picture of his joints - knees, fetlocks and hock joints. It doesn't matter if you don't feel anything, but it is interesting to become aware of your own ability to focus - do you start thinking about something else quite quickly? Or just switch-off? These are just symptoms of weak concentration in this skill, and if you can notice yourself losing it you will gradually improve. I say 'picture' the joints because ultimately it is possible to perceive what could be called a 'sensory image', which you can feel and also see in your mind's eye.

Horses always know when you start attempting to tune in to their system, so you can often gauge your success by their reaction. In the 'exploratory' stages, when you are just trying out what you can feel, rather than specifically using it to connect with and calm your horse, you may even have an agitating influence. On the whole this signifies some level of restriction, physical or emotional in your horse and in becoming aware of it you are making your horse more aware of it too. In this case try to slow down and give your horse more space energetically i.e. focus less intensely and for a shorter time period. The key is always to become aware of **how you are influencing your horse, and react to that.** Some horses will relax and even go to sleep, so you are making them feel good.



A horse fully absorbed in her therapy session

4) Challenging Operations: Clipping, Hoof-care, Dentistry

One of the most significant mistakes we can make when training horses, and which seems to result in many physically and mentally unhappy horses, is just **simply overdoing it.**

Horses, like some people, will often seem to take to a new project with great enthusiasm, and without any apparent misgivings or suspicion, only to begin to back-off and resist further on down the line. This phenomenon seems to be much more common than people realize, and this lack of recognition is probably to do with the time lag between the 'overdoing it' and the surfacing of resistance in the horse.

In that time, horses are often sold-on or the circumstances have changed in some way. In general it is with youngsters of three, four and five years of age that the boundaries are forced, and then the resistances start to crop up with the six, seven or eight year olds. It is also very difficult to tell *how much is too much* at the time. Often there are no signs at all, in fact almost the opposite – the horse may give us false consolidation that he is happy with what is happening to him.

Ideas In Action

Recently we made a new path on our land, so that our small herd could get from the fields up above to the stables below without having to go down the farm road. We cut the path through some woods, and the slope is quite steep in parts - we didn't know how the horses would take to it. The first day, the boldest youngster had no problem at all coming down, and she seemed to love it - they all followed and had fun discovering the new area at the bottom. Over the next few days however, this particular mare liked the path less and less, as her initial adrenalin charged enthusiasm wore off and her doubts were given a chance to come out. Other horses who had hung back originally then took over the leadership role as their confidence grew. Gradually she realized there was nothing to worry about and took up her preferred place at the front of everything again!

Watching this changing confidence dynamic made me realize again how important it is not to take a horse's goodwill for granted. Instead we have to safeguard it and appreciate it, watching carefully for the signs of any disharmony, and not expecting the hesitations a horse may feel in his mind to always be obvious. If we stay open to the possibility of the existence of these doubts, then we will not tend to go too far.



The horses emerging at the bottom of the new track.

The other side of the coin, of course, is how much is enough? This depends on what it is you are doing. A gymnastic

session has an ideal length, which, in most cases, is a bit easier to perceive than when working on handling skills because there are certain obvious physical signs. This is discussed later on.

In cases of handling as there is not the same physical process to go through, there is never really the same worry about 'under-doing' it, simply keeping the session as low-tension as possible. Habituation to new things will happen more easily and quickly the calmer your horse is when exposed to them, and it is not helpful to do more, only more often. Even that frequency is not as necessary as we tend to think. If a horse has a 'quality' handling session that he enjoyed and accepted, he could be left for a month and remember precisely from where you left it. Dentistry is a perfect example: most horses are done every year or six months at the most, and if they have good experiences then they are perfectly happy to accept it the next time. The same is true to the contrary - as most horse-people know, they also have a very good memory of when things went wrong. It is for this reason that **quality should always outweigh quantity in your training**, especially if 'quantity' involves a lot of mediocre training.

If you have the choice, it is obviously better to have achieved a basic trusting relationship between you and your horse before you expose him to potentially frightening procedures which you may not be in complete control of. It isn't always easy to tell whether a horse will accept a particular scary thing or not.



It is very difficult to tell how challenging a situation is for young horses, the youngster in this photo is dissociating to some degree from the relatively new experience of being mounted. Look at the way his eye reveals that he is not quite present.

Clipping

Most horses actually like the sensation of being clipped once they have become accustomed to the noise, which they don't usually like. This being the case, the simplest way to habituate your horse is to show him that the clippers are not going to hurt him. Often if you can start without too much fuss, he will soon realize this and settle down.

Start by switching the clippers on **at a distance** from your horse and watch his response. If he stays calm you can approach in an offhand way, hold them as if they were a brush, not a weapon! And make sure that he will stand still for the first touch. Think of it as a kind of meditation in which you are giving off waves of reassurance and keeping your vibration very low and unthreatening like a normal grooming session.

If he reacts strongly to the sound of the clippers, simply take the threat of them away from him. **If you retreat every time he exhibits fear he will realize that there is no threat because his fear is being acknowledged and his boundaries respected.** If he is curious, approach gently but unhesitatingly and let him see and smell. Again if he becomes fearful, retreat again, removing the threat. The most acceptable place to start for many horses is around the shoulder. In general once he feels that the blades are not hurting him, a horse will relax completely and you can move to the more sensitive areas quite easily - such as the belly around the sheath or udder and the upper neck and head.

Horses that are too tense to get the clippers onto in the first place just require more time and patience on your part. A little bit of exposure to the noise and the proximity of the clippers every time you groom is a good idea until you can get started.



Most of us find that approach a bit tiresome and look for other options such as twitching or sedation or attempts to force the horse by making him more scared of being hit than by the clippers.

The problem is that these methods do 'work' at least in the short term. Certainly sedation will, unless your horse is so badly traumatized that the sedation is ineffective. I say 'the problem' because it is a problem when it comes to our trust connection again - if the 'quick fix' methods did not work for such procedures, at least in the short term, then we wouldn't be tempted to resort to them, but when we choose to clip a horse, that is our primary objective, to get the job done - especially if we have to borrow clippers or even hire someone to do the clipping for us. If however we can begin to value our relationship with our horse *more* than the cosmetic aspects of keeping him, then I truly believe we will begin to attract favorable scenarios for that relationship e.g. we will find a patient and sympathetic person to help, or we will have the time to spend to do it right, or our particular horse simply won't have a problem with being clipped. I say this from having had plenty of 'quick fix' experiences of all kinds, and coming to the realization that in the long run it isn't worth it to force your horse in any way.

A few important points to be aware of about clipping, which can create problems with your horse's acceptance:

- **Clippers can get very hot during use**, to the point that they are uncomfortable for the horse. This is a common reason why horses can begin to fiddle about and get upset. A bag of frozen peas, or stopping for a while will help to cool them back down, but keep checking them as you go.
- **When the clipper blades start to get blunt** they can tug on the hair and feel uncomfortable for the horse. They won't make a nice smooth clip like this either, so it's a good idea to keep them sharpened regularly.
- It is best to keep clipping to the minimum number of times per year possible, and limit the surface area clipped as much as possible. If your horse sweats a lot when you work him it is definitely better for him to be clipped sufficiently, but we have to replace what we take away with quality rugging (blankets). The less we interfere with the horse's natural defenses, within reason, the healthier he will be.

Hoof Care

Horses have a natural aversion to letting us pick up their feet because they are flight animals, and they prefer to keep their options open. In the same way as they like to keep their back feet on solid ground as long as possible when going into a trailer, they like to keep control of their flight mechanism at all times.

This idea, in fact, is the key to successful hoof trimming, in our experience. In the same way as when tying a horse up, it is important to teach the horse to control himself, so that he never thinks of himself as being trapped. When he is learning to tie up, if he learns how to be patient and wait for you *before* he is actually physically restricted, then he doesn't have to experience the fear of being trapped. Then when he is comfortable with doing that, the string which attaches him will act only as a little reminder that you want him to stay there.

This is exactly the same way the rein contact works when a horse is being ridden. He develops the postural strength to move himself in self-carriage and the bit is never used to restrict him or hold him back, it is only an energetic connection which allows the rider to remind him to soften and accept the engagement. Just like the string, in itself it has no strength, the strength is in the security of the place the horse is in at any time, because he trusts you as his leader.

As for picking up feet, the key is to get the horse used to giving you his feet without making him feel he is trapped or restricted, until he is used to the feeling and he doesn't test his freedom anymore. He 'test's his freedom' by trying to take his feet



Above: The sequence of picking up the feet. First ask gently but firmly, secondly *wait* until the horse relaxes his hoof into your grip, then thirdly, start working on it.

back, so at first, give the foot back straight away. You are looking for his relaxation, and when he tenses and pulls away he isn't relaxed, so give him his foot back and he will relax again (if he doesn't he needs to do a bit more basic grooming and tying up training). Try to feel his relaxation like an energetic state that you are connecting to, and that you can then expand into everything you ask of him. Pick his foot up again, and he will probably be a bit calmer for longer and so on. After you have picked the foot up off the ground, there is often a moment (especially with the hind feet) when the horse tenses and pulls the foot back to him. If you allow him to do this, whilst still keeping hold of the foot, he will usually then relax and be much happier to subsequently let you work on the hoof. Again, it's about showing the horse that you respect his boundaries instead of pushing through them by resisting.

If the horse continues to resist your hold on the foot, then only if you feel certain that he is not tense and just being a bit lazy or pushy would you insist on keeping hold of his foot. This can be a stage you come back round to once you have his confidence and he starts to try and push the other way and take control of you. It can also be if he is a bit stiff or sore and he might not want to make the effort. Giving him the benefit of the doubt is advisable in this case.

Horses that have been traumatized by the shoeing procedure are unfortunately not rare, and more advice on how to resolve this and other forms of traumatization can be found in the Horse Trauma supplement.

More details about handling a horse during hoof trimming can be found in the HHT eBook *The Simple Seven-Step Natural Trim* (<http://www.happy-horse-training.com/natural-trim-ebook.html>)

Loading

Loading horses into horseboxes and particularly trailers is an interesting evaluation of both our horse's trust in us and his leading skills. When you think about it, if a horse will lead obediently then he ought go anywhere with you, including into a trailer. Of course a trailer represents an enclosed space followed by an uncomfortable and often tiring journey, followed by the stress of strange surroundings etc. and although that does put a magnifying glass on the strength of your bond with your horse, if a horse is not happy to load (unless he has had a specific trailer trauma) then it is because he doesn't trust you enough.

People often don't understand a horse's perspective on this because people have a much more independent outlook than horses, but nothing takes greater priority than **being with the herd** for the vast majority of horses. This means that where the herd goes, they go, and they don't question it. It is this mentality we are attempting to exploit. When you are doing this because you care about your horse, however, it is an honorable mission.

As is clear enough from what has been discussed here so far, that being accepted as leader is not a simple mission to attempt, for several reasons:

- We are not horses, for a start, and we don't live in the herd with our horse - we will spend a variable amount of time with our horse, but nothing like his companions, and just like with children, it is those who are around the most who have the greatest influence. If a horse doesn't have any companions it can actually boost his owner's position in his eyes, but this is really a form of desperation because he is profoundly unhappy and wishes to latch on to anyone available.
- We can't perceive the world in the same way he can. Much of the information about his world is lost to our senses, so we can't always understand his reactions and just as importantly we can't always communicate our own viewpoint very effectively. For example he might not want to go somewhere we want to go because he can sense it is dangerous and we can't, like a rickety bridge. Another time we might know that something is *not* dangerous to him i.e. a hot air balloon, but getting that across to him is not always straightforward.
- Most of the things we want our horse to do or have done to him are quite challenging, if not actually uncomfortable for him, especially at the beginning, and going in a trailer is no exception.

So we are already starting the race with a heavy handicap when it comes to winning our horse's confidence, and our own



temperament issues haven't even been mentioned yet. Most of us are impatient and

easily distracted and either get scared or angry if things start going wrong, so it isn't surprising when a challenge like putting a horse in a trailer has so much notoriety. As an experience however, it can do great things for your bond with your horse if you get through the problems together.

For more detailed information on the process of loading go to the HHT page 'Loading A Horse The Right Way' (<http://www.happy-horse-training.com/loading-a-horse.html>).

Equine Dentistry and Veterinary Care

Someone once said that the greatest gift you can give to your horse is to train him well, because then he will have the best chance in the world. This is relevant whether you sell your horse or not, because other people will have to handle him at some point. **Your horse is always your responsibility** though, he trusts you to look after him in every scenario, so *never* give him over to someone you don't trust yourself. No one else is going to care about your horse like you do, and *you* have to deal with any consequences afterwards. Horses know whether you are prepared to look after them or not, these things make up the integrity of your relationship.

When you are working with a horse who has had only positive experiences on the whole, and if your practitioner is reasonably confident and sensitive, even something unpleasant such as an injection should be accepted by the horse in good spirit. Anything you do to prepare your horse as part of



can

your everyday grooming process is a good idea, for example, borrowing a gag such as the one used by horse dentists and putting it on, **for a very short period of time**, along with reward, such as 'pleasure' grooming and praise. When this kind of habituation is done well it is a great help, and does your horse and your dentist a favour.

With very young horses however, it is quite easy to give them a negative memory. When we personally take young horses in to back and bring on, we usually find it is easier if they haven't been exposed to the saddle or bridle beforehand because then there are no fears or apprehensions to overcome.

In a situation where there really are only two choices, sedation is preferable to a fight. Sedation is definitely a quick fix option only though, and if you have a patient dentist or vet who is prepared to spend some time, it will be worth it to try to work through the problem with the fully conscious horse,

On the other hand, if the practitioner is not of the right temperament and/or the horse is very difficult, such a situation can be traumatizing or re-traumatizing for your horse, and his behavior will worsen and you will have to resort to sedation in the short term anyway. It is the thin line, again, where only your intuition can guide you.



Preserving the good will of young horses is paramount

Reasons why we try to avoid sedation where possible are:

- Sedation doesn't solve any problems, it only masks them, because the fear is still there for the horse and in essence we are still forcing the horse to accept something he is frightened of.
- The less synthetic chemicals injected into any horse's system, the better. Injecting something foreign, even if it is a vitamin, straight into the bloodstream is a serious shock to the horse's immune system and the intelligence which organizes the highly complex biochemical processes in the body, so it is not something which should undertaken lightly.

In the long term, working with the 'retreat-when-threatened' procedure described in the clipping session, along with a professional who is willing to try it, is by far the best thing you can do.

EXERCISE 1

ENERGY CONNECTION: BOUNDARY AWARENESS

Relevance for Training

For all animals, including us, our nerves are the biological system by which we can feel our body. This 'feeling' is far more sophisticated than whether we feel a pain somewhere or not - in fact it includes a vast spectrum of possible sensations of all kinds, which we can classify into 'good' and 'bad' if we want to. We can think of the nerves like thousands of little torches through which we perceive what is going on. Of course the fact that they are also integral to the system complicates things, because when they themselves are dysfunctional or influenced in some way, our picture of what they are there to show us becomes distorted.



Horses can understand each other in ways people are often insensitive to

The fundamental intelligence that can tell us everything if we learn how to listen is always present, but humans have let their sensitivity to this stagnate to some degree as we have evolved our intellectual capacities further. Horses, on the other hand, have stayed very much in touch with it. This means we have to do a bit of recovery work in order to understand better how horses appreciate the world. In a way people have discovered a whole different way of perceiving the world, and in doing so we have forgotten how we used to feel. Now we imagine that horses have also done this, and that they figure things out in the same way we do.

A classic example of this is to think that if we get off a horse when he hasn't yet achieved what we had planned for the session, we imagine that he will realize this, and next time he will be even less likely to perform whatever it was because we allowed him to stop the first time.

If horses are able to think in such a logical way, then why is it that they rarely work

out that going along a fence-line will take them to a gate so they can go back along to reach the water on the other side? Instead they will stand at the fence opposite the water! On the other hand, horses can sense whether their close friend is safe when they are physically separated, or where they are in relation to home, or if a trailer or a bridge is unsafe without even having to step onto it.

Imposing elaborate thought patterns onto our horses' actions is unreasonable, and it is also unhelpful because it prevents us from deciphering the real reasons why horses behave in the way they do. This is why, if we follow this kind of logic, it is only possible to *condition* them to behave in a way that pleases us, but they can neither be *trained* nor *healed* effectively.

Practically, all of this means that one of our most valuable ways of communicating with our horses is to make the effort to redevelop our innate ability to **sense things the way they do**. This allows us to understand them more in the way they understand themselves, and we can begin to see why they may be lazy in their work, or ticklish to groom, or angry in their box or uptight on a hack. Every symptom has a source and finding the sources is our job.

Procedure

One of the best times to start heightening your awareness is when you are grooming, because you can directly relate to the horse's nervous system through your own nervous system. Unlike when you are riding, there is not the same pressure to get things right bio-mechanically i.e. your posture has a less direct physical influence on the horse's posture. It does still have an influence of course, and you will communicate a lot of information to the horse before you even get as far as touching.

The main energy states you are looking to communicate to the horse through your own posture are **calmness, patience and confidence**.

The connection you have when actually *touching* a horse physically is different from when you are at any distance. It is as if you are merging your energy system with theirs. This is not necessarily more powerful, because you no longer have the same 'energetic leverage'. It is like earthing your energy into their system, and unless a horse is insecure about people, it is usually calming for them because horses use friendly touch to bond with each other.

So far in the text there have been many references to 'boundaries'. Often these are thought of as conceptual, but in fact they are an **energetic reality**, existing like a kind of force field. There are many different ways to describe this phenomenon, from auras to energy-bodies. I will use the word *boundary* - it is helpful for the ideas in this course because it is the **edge of the energy-body** that is our primary concern. This is because our goal is to connect with an animal from another species, and both respecting and understanding these boundaries is very important.

The first step towards understanding boundaries is re-awakening our inherent sense of them. The following are some exercises you can try to either wake up or sharpen up your boundary awareness. The more you practice feeling for them, the sharper your intuitive sense will become in all communications you have with your horse.

1) Awareness of Your Own Boundary: We are all quite familiar with our own *physical* boundary; we feel the external world through millions of sensory receptors in our skin. Can you feel your *energetic* boundary though? Sometimes we call it 'our space'. We expect our horse to respect it, and usually prefer other people to as well!

Practice shutting your eyes and sensing how far your perception of yourself extends beyond your physical limits. Keep your awareness focused on your whole being rather than a specific area and let your mind drift a little. If you start thinking thoughts, then remind yourself of the aim of the exercise, but try to keep a flow to your consciousness, so you encourage continuity in your perception.

Occasionally it is possible to experience the full 'becoming' of your energy body when you do this exercise, and when this happens you can feel your nerves change quite dramatically. If this happens, keep your postural balance, and as soon as you open your eyes the normal sensations will re-establish themselves - it can be an unnerving experience because we are so used to feeling our normal spatial and bodily awareness.

The main objective is to achieve any kind of loosening of the narrow sensory perception we tend to live with in our lives as human beings. Anything different you weren't aware of having felt before is great, and only the beginning.

2) Awareness of A Horse's Boundary: Feeling the boundary of another being is not as significant a leap as it may seem. We are all made of energy and therefore all connected with each other. With enough practice and self-belief you can awaken your own inherent ability to feel these energetic connections in whichever

circumstance you choose. Your mind makes the leap between your nervous system and your horse's, and then the sensations available to your horse are also available to you.

Who knows the extent to which your impression mirrors that of your horse? Experience will show you there is certainly a close relationship. You will come to understand why your horse reacts in certain ways - because you also felt in your own way whatever it was. We all filter information through our judgment of the world, but we are all sharing very similar physiology. The essential is that you are **widening your field of perception** all the time, and therefore your ability to understand and train your horse.



When you approach the horse, your aim is to make yourself seem unthreatening, but you don't want to appear too hesitant. You can do that by being aware of your own energy, what can be described as your 'vibration'. If your vibration is consciously low (i.e. calm, relaxed) then you are inviting the horse to communicate with you without needing to defend himself. You are

opening the door into your own energy field, lowering your boundary and widening your personal space.

Approach from at least five meters - some horses have a larger energy field than others. Often horses who are not happy in themselves will be losing energy and their field is bigger and their boundary further out. Horses who have been traumatized may have damaged boundaries. Be open to whatever comes into your mind. Feel for the place where the horse is happy for you to be, and if you feel as if you are coming too close, encroaching on their personal space, that is when you have crossed over. Come back out and stay at the edge until you feel a change. While you are waiting, **stay aware of the feeling the boundary gives you**. This could be physical or emotional, a shape, colour or texture. It could be a nothingness. You may not feel a change, but if you do feel a shift, this may be your invitation to enter. To me it feels like a softening in the connection, as if a pressure was released, like piercing a vacuum-packed package. Usually then it feels okay to go in closer and make physical contact in a nice neutral place, like at the horse's shoulder.

Remember your intention in this exercise is to feel the horse's boundary, so it is a different situation to normal handling. Most horses accept us within their space, and as their leaders we assume the right to enter at will, which is normal behaviour for the leader. In this situation however, **you are assuming the *therapist* role, and therefore you are giving your *horse* the leader role, along with the responsibility to communicate his or her needs.** It is your horse's choice whether he wishes to address his issues, if he has any, and the extent to which he wishes to take that opportunity. Therefore the responsibility is his. A therapist is a facilitator but not a decision maker.

If you practice, you will become adept at switching roles, and there are times when the boundaries are less clear. Sometimes this is a sign that your relationship with your horse is transcending the basic hierarchical rules.

There are no right and wrong things to feel, even feeling nothing is fine.

Sometimes feeling 'nothing' is actually feeling an energy blockage. This is why it is a good idea to think about the *nature* of the nothingness you feel. Whether you feel how it feels in your body and/or mind or if you can see it as an image, sensation or feeling.

Whatever you feel, stay with it as long as your concentration allows. It is tiring at first, so give yourself time to strengthen up. Little and often is good, without rushing. Some days you might feel nothing and others may be intense. If you have never worked with this kind of energy perception before, then this exercise may seem very vague – don't let this frustrate you. The goal is to heighten your perception to a degree that is very much more subtle than our normal train of thought and sensory perception allows. It is a bit like the difference between what we see with the naked eye, and what we see through a microscope. Try to stay in the present moment, and just trust that feelings will come to you more and more as your awareness expands.



Always be aware of the effect your awareness is having on your horse.

There will be very few horses who remain unaware of your communication in this way.

It is as clear for them as if you were to shout and dance about. Horses are like people - they are all different, so although you are starting to speak their

language, each individual will react differently. Some may be delighted, others nervous, and some won't be particularly interested. That is the fun bit! What does your own particular horse, or horses think? What is their story? Every individual has a marvelous potential in each moment to teach us something, and your personal connection with that horse is unique.



SECTION 2

INSIDE THE ARENA: ON THE GROUND

'Acceptance of the unacceptable is the greatest source of grace in this world'

Eckhart Tolle

THE MIDDLE GROUND: WORKING ON YOURSELF

By the time you are entering the arena with your horse, ideally you have already established a solid foundation of trust between both of you. It is just as important that **you trust your horse**, as that he trusts you. In fact trusting your horse is the only active role you will take, because although you can prepare the ground for your horse to trust you, whether he takes up the offer or not will always remain his choice.

Building The Trust Bond - Help Yourself To Trust your Horse

In the process of preparatory training on the ground, you will at times be in a vulnerable position in relation to your horse. For example, when asking a horse to go out on the lunge, despite taking precautions, there will be moments when you are within kicking distance. Even leading your youngster round the arena for the first time could result in you being shoulder-charged or stepped on. We cannot prevent these things through holding the horse more tightly, securing him with more equipment or simply hoping for the best. We can attempt to safeguard our body by wearing a hard hat or a body-protector, but at the end of the day, **the only reason we will ever be truly safe with our horse, is the strength of our trust bond.**

As the guardian and leader our role is to trust first. In some circumstances, such as when children are learning to ride or in Equine Assisted Therapy, it is the horse who will take the leading role initially, and he does this by offering his trust. It is a priceless gift to be trusted, and if we choose to be our horse's trainer we must endeavour to give him our trust.

This is easier said than done of course, and it is perfectly normal to have reservations about a horse, particularly in the beginning. Trust building often takes time, and the trust bond will continue to be strengthened between you as long as you work together. What is important, however, is that you are always open to your fear when it arises. Recognition is the first step to resolution, because it brings the issue out into the light.

Think of fear like a little cloud of darkness that can only flourish in our consciousness when it remains unseen and denied. At first it may seem like a better idea to ignore the fear because in that way it seems to have less control over our mind. It is true that as soon as we allow the thought to come into our minds that we might be worried or fearful, or even terrified in some situations with our horse, this thought can set off a whole process of reactions in our body and can be overwhelming. If, however, we can successfully *accept* the feeling to as full an extent as possible each time, gradually we will release a bit more of it's power over us every time. In this way we are hunting down the little clouds one by one and exposing them to the light of rationality which vaporizes them. Or you could think of the fear as a big lake of water which threatens to drown your relaxed state of mind and your enjoyment if it gets too deep. Every time you expose yourself to it, you are successfully drawing some more out and one day it might even dry up completely.

Exercise 2 at the end of this section explains each step of this process more clearly. You can do this exercise whenever fear becomes an issue, or even if you want to improve your self-control and self-awareness when fear does not seem to be a problem.

Knowing how to deal with fear, and any negative emotion (as described in exercise 2) is a very important aspect of handling horses because you can only access your intuition and greater understanding with an unclouded mind. Frustration is a common negative emotion that gives rise to anger and violent actions around horses and students of horsemanship all the time. How many of us have *not* been reduced to tears or desperation in some lesson or other when we were learning to ride? Or perhaps still are?

This tradition in the horse world probably has a lot to do with the difficulty of the task involved. The understanding and experience required for training horses, training riders, and then training the two together is considerable, and often the level of this understanding possessed by teachers and students alike is hopelessly inadequate. **Frustration is a sign of ignorance**, whether it be ignorance of the subject itself or how to communicate it to someone else. We all experience frustration, because we all experience situations which seem to be beyond our control. When it happens between our horse and ourselves during the training process, it is *imperative* to learn to take a step back, calm down, and allow the real solution to the problem to reach our minds.

Some practical examples of ideas that have surfaced in this way are:

- Years ago, when our farrier in Scotland couldn't continue because of chronic back pain, and we were not able to find another farrier willing to take on so many new horses, the idea came to just 'go barefoot'. That doesn't seem like anything special now, but in our community in those days it was practically unheard of to work horses without shoes. It was only the beginning, but the idea itself was crucial to set us free from our conditioning at the time.
- Before we had heard of the Micklem Multibridle, which itself is an excellent example of a great idea, the stage between riding the newly backed young horse off the lunge and them understanding the basic guiding language which is initiated with the reins was always a worry, considering the sensitivity of a young horse's mouth. I had the idea to attach an extra set of reins on to the cavesson noseband, which allowed me to use them for 'steering' until the youngster understood the opening rein and leg aids, and there was no further danger of the horse coming up against the bit.
- When a horse of mine, Dechie, was having problems with her teeth and jaw, I stopped riding her with a bit by attaching the reins to the noseband instead. This worked very well until the issues were resolved and she was fine with the bit again.
- I started using a crupper with Dechie because her barrel is so wide and she has a flat wither, so the saddle regularly disappeared up her neck. This was a fairly obvious solution, but when I had the idea to use it on another horse whose saddle also went forwards although he was completely different shape, the transformation in him was remarkable. After that we realised that saddles that fit well i.e. don't grip onto the spine or lodge in behind the scapulae, *always* go forward, at some point and to some degree. Using cruppers on all the horses made them much easier to ride, because we stayed in the right place on their back, and they no longer suffered the discomfort of a saddle shoving into their shoulders.

When Dechie became too wide for her very wide saddle(!) I started riding her with a saddle pad only (photo, right). It was comfortable for her and good for my posture.



I could also feel better what she was doing with her spine.

I don't think it is of any importance *who* has an idea; these ideas are all there in the universal consciousness. What matters is to make ourselves as open as we can to them, like a radio wave receiver. There is always a solution for anything that can be perceived as a problem.

Negative emotions may arise when there is a need for further knowledge and/or understanding, and realizing this is empowering because it is an opportunity to expand your knowledge. In my experience, as long as my basic intention was for the good of my horse or me, then whenever I really needed to know how to do something or what to do next, in a way which did not sacrifice my values, I would find the answer. It doesn't matter if you live in the middle of nowhere with little support, or don't have a lot of money.

The Good Will Philosophy

One of the main differences between the way we work with horses at HHT and a lot of the training we see elsewhere, is what I call our *good will philosophy*. It is important because it underpins everything we do, and is at the root of all our decisions concerning our horses. There is no merit in just being different for the sake of it, and we don't expect to convince people of what we do unless it appeals to their way of thinking already, but it is valuable to know *why* you do things in a certain way, because it can prevent you from going down a false route, especially if you are struggling to follow your own values in a skeptical world!

We believe that horses are fundamentally generous beings. If they won't do something for us, it is because they can't without hurting themselves or us. Although it would perhaps be more admirable, we don't believe this because we are such wonderful enlightened people! We believe it because we have come to this conclusion after much experience of working with 'problem' horses. Just as geneticists learn about normal genes from the mutations, we have learned what we believe is the true nature of horses from the troubled ones.

This belief changes the whole perspective of what it is to train a horse. Why? Because if, in the course of training, horses do not appear to be generous, we have to find out why. This is when we start to enter into the complex world of psychological and physical 'issues'. As it happens, the idea that we are living our

lives here on earth to heal ourselves and remember our inherent perfection does accord with our life philosophy, and if this is the case for us humans, why should it be any different for horses?

This then means that **no horse is the wrong horse**, and no problem we come up against is beyond a resolution that satisfies our values. In fact in believing this, the horizons are suddenly expanded considerably. Unfortunately, however, whether or not the 70% threshold will be reached in the next dressage competition is in a parallel universe! If this were such a worthy ambition though, there would not be such a high level of horse abuse as a result of it, which goes virtually unquestioned within the competition world itself.

Sadly it is evident from general opinion in the horse world (and you only have to look at any forum discussing horse training on the internet to see this) that many people have a deep unwillingness to even consider the question of physical problems being at the root of the vast majority of horse behavioural issues. This is probably due to a mixture of not being able to sense the problem, not being able to find a solution, or even a fear of pain itself which brings on a refusal to accept its presence. Whatever this prejudice is based on, the first step to resolving it is to face it. Allowing the idea is the first rung in the ladder to finding the answer. Healing is natural and powerful, but it only happens with the right support.

This route is definitely the long route. It winds like a spiral as each issue limiting the horse's ability to respond to us is addressed. We will find ourselves returning to the same place in terms of technique, but each time round the quality of the movement and the strength of our connection to the horse are improved.

Of course it is possible to train a horse by way of overriding the 'issues', and the technical results may appear to come quicker. The drawback is that instead of responding to us because it becomes more and more pleasurable for him, the horse responds because he builds up compensations to shut himself off from his problems. This makes his paces less pure and his mind less clear. The most significant drawback in my opinion however, is that we ourselves have missed all those opportunities to learn and develop our ability, to listen to and come closer to our horse, and develop our innate ability to feel the beauty of unhindered energy. This is why those who say that *'the long route is the short route'* know what they are talking about.

These are true stories which illustrate what can happen as a result of whether the

horse's good will is believed in or not. Beyond a kind of minor procrastination on the part of the horse which doesn't amount to very much, there is never any such thing as 'letting horses get away with it' or 'get one over on you'.

They simply do not operate like that. Just as we find it hard to understand how much they value their space and freedom, and feel most comfortable outside in all but the worst weather (unless we have institutionalized them), we also seem to find it hard to accept that horses react only to how they feel in themselves at that moment. If we can help them feel good they will be safe and as hardworking as we could reasonably demand. Both stories which follow are single events that happened in the lives of young horses, where a single choice had the power to change the path of their future for the better or worse.

Ideas In Action

A handsome colt foal whose sire had been bred in Germany was born in England one spring. He was purchased later on that year by an inexperienced person who liked beautiful horses. He was in livery full time at a yard where his owner visited him occasionally. He had been well treated by his breeder and was used to trusting the people in his life. He was by nature a very sensitive horse, and although conformationally he had great scope in his movement, and would have developed into a very powerful horse, his mind was particularly delicate. Definitely a poet rather than a rugby player!

When he was a yearling, the staff at the livery yard decided it would be a good idea to 'try him out' for jumping. They knew his good breeding and at the time, 'loose-jumping' of youngsters was coming into fashion. Charlie was taken from the field into an indoor school for the first time in his life and before he had a chance to look around he was being chased forward with lunge whips and plastic bags. Instantly triggered into a flight reaction he began to run. When he encountered the first jump he didn't have a lot of time to think about it, it was an obstacle blocking his way so he threw himself over blindly. His natural sensitivity made him react by freezing up physically, to the point where he couldn't control his own legs. He became clumsy and confused. His handlers decided he was being lazy and stubborn and they became more and more aggressive as he became more paralyzed.

He was forced to go beyond this into a state of survival reaction where his conscious

mind had ceased to function. He ran and jumped until he was exhausted. Terrified of the whole situation he desperately tried to escape at the door, but was forced to go round again and again. The jump was so high now that his fear and exhaustion made him jump across the wing and he came down in a crash of poles. Stunned for a few moments he lay still. When he managed to drag himself to his feet it was clear that one of his hind-legs had been seriously injured.

Unfortunately now that he was 'damaged goods' he didn't hold the same appeal for his owner who took no further interest in his well-being. To save money he was put out for the winter and his injury was not properly treated. By the spring he was rescued in a state of near starvation and his leg injury was worse than ever. From this time on he was never mistreated again in his life, but he never really recovered either mentally or physically. His constitution had been too badly damaged during the period of his starvation and he was never able to really let his guard down psychologically again.

If Charlie (right) had been observed and listened to more carefully, it would have been possible to see how nervous he was, and with patience his jumping talent might have been allowed to flourish. If we were able to imagine the implications for a horse's mind of even being inside an indoor school for the first time, or chased by those creatures you had always trusted, we would no doubt take these sessions with baby horses more seriously. It is a very



serious undertaking to train young horses because every event is significant for their future, *especially the very first experiences*. Giving the benefit of the doubt, and taking a bit more time is by far the most profitable route in all ways.

Nearly twenty years ago now, a four-year-old gelding of mine took fright at something while in his stable and somehow managed to hit his head hard on the top of the door. He bit his tongue at the same time, so I gave him some time off to let his mouth heal. The weather was not good anyway at the time, and as we didn't have an indoor school, he ended up having a break of about ten days.

The first day he was ridden out again he seemed a little tense, but he had been on

holiday and was full of energy so I thought it was normal behaviour. At least until I suddenly found myself thrown off in the middle of the road so quickly and violently it was quite a shock. Pushkin had never bucked before - certainly not rodeo-style like that - and I just couldn't believe he would behave in such an uncharacteristically dangerous way without a good reason. I led him back home, and arranged for a therapist to come out and see him.

The therapist, a Cranial Osteopath, looked at him and said he was very likely to be suffering from quite a bad headache, because his occiput, (the skull bone at the back of the head) was in such strong compression. She gave him what is called an 'occipital release' which allowed the muscles in spasm to relax and restored the correct blood flow and nerve activity to the bodily structures.

It was only at his point that I remembered how he had struck his head on the stable door two weeks before. According to the therapist, he was already starting to compensate for the restriction in his neck and head, by stiffening up in his right sacroiliac. Pushkin had a few days off to allow his treatment to fully complete its process, and then he was gently started back into work.

His normal cheery temperament had returned, and much to my relief, his trustworthy disposition when being ridden. He never bucked in that way again, and he seemed to be even more trusting than before because he had both been given the benefit of the doubt and the support to heal himself.

Not believing in Pushkin's essential good will in this case could have resulted in a serious loss of trust between us. Continuing his training without looking for the reason behind his behaviour might have required forceful riding, resorting to more severe bits and gadgets or even selling him, all because of a basic misunderstanding. At best, his overall athletic ability would have been reduced. Sadly these scenarios are not at all rare, and the vast majority of horses are misunderstood in some way. We are in control of the choices we make for our horses welfare, and often it just requires a little bit of putting ourselves in their shoes to understand. We gain so much more this way. Even if we don't get on very well with a particular horse it is always possible to change the relationship for the better and become a better rider and trainer through the process.

Basically, what is good for our horse is good for us. If we believe in them we are also believing in our own capacity to forgive and understand, and therefore in the fundamental goodness in the world.



WORKING ON YOUR HORSE

The Value of Gymnastic Preparation

Horses did not evolve originally to be ridden by people. Although through selective breeding we are no doubt improving their physical structure and their psychology in certain ways to help them cope better with the demands we make on them, **each individual horse must be sufficiently physically prepared to carry a rider.**

Why is this so important?

- The hollowing reflex is naturally very strong in horses, and once it starts to be triggered by the weight of a rider, the central nervous system patterning is very difficult to undo, and it may not be possible to do so completely. A youngster that is prepared in a way that makes him strong enough to carry a rider, and then is carefully backed, will not form this association. As hollowing is the opposite physiological reaction to that of engagement, and the entire process of training is founded on working towards a stronger and stronger engagement, avoiding hollowing at any stage is a priority.

Investing the time and effort required to prepare a young horse fully actually puts both you and your horse first:

- It puts *him* first because he will cope with being mounted so much better, both physically and mentally. Physically, because preparing a young horse gymnastically for long enough *before* he is mounted gives him the strength and balance to carry a rider so much more easily, and his soundness is being looked after. It helps him mentally because he is far more likely to feel comfortable in himself, and therefore he will feel calm and able to listen to you.

- It puts *you* first because he will be so much safer to work with as a result. He will be much less likely to buck or react violently out of fear, and he will be able to continue his training more easily because he is working *with* you, not desperate to get away from you. A horse with a strong, lifted back is also a lot more comfortable to sit on than a hollow horse.

- Lunging work over an extended period of time allows you to build up a strong relationship with your youngster, based on trust and mutual experience. You will get to know his temperament well enough to be able to predict his behaviour better under saddle. Any problems that are already there, physical or mental, will come to light during the process, and you will have the opportunity to address them before any negative associations or bad habits can be associated with the actual process of being ridden. **Prevention is always better than cure.**

These two photos show the progression of a young horse from initial lunging work to subsequent ridden work. The strengthening of the longitudinal stretch on the lunge has resulted in a round rather than hollow posture under saddle.



Ideas In Action

Amy seemed like a straightforward kind of youngster before she started her career, a little timid maybe, but not unusually so. During the course of her training it was to become apparent quite how different she is, both in her mind and her body, from a 'normal' horse. It was true that there had been the occasional blip up until the point when Amy started her proper training. Mainly associated with leading, she would suddenly have other ideas than her handler and she would seem to panic and sometimes rear. It was not often enough to raise much suspicion. Looking back, she tended to hide herself behind the other horses, and it was only when she was introduced to the lunging cavesson and the arena that her true issues began to be revealed.

The problem was that Amy had no idea what any of it meant. Working with her was a real revelation as to how much we take for granted with most horses. Have they been domesticated horses for many of their past lives? Amy certainly hadn't been, or maybe it was a kind of horse dyslexia, but we had problems and setbacks at every stage of her preparatory work.

Having the cavesson on was strange for her, the bit was outrageous to her for many weeks, and teaching her to go round on the lunge took months. She was never treated in any way other than with gentleness and patience - it was obvious any other way would have been totally counter-productive. Even so, she ran backwards, lay down, and in particular reared and spun round countless times before she was able to even manage a circle on the left rein.

Along the way many physical issues came to light, not least her spinal curvature. We kept going, good days and bad, and progress was made. Amy would certainly have been unrideable without the lunging process we went through. She was far from easy to ride, and even now we encounter difficult times, but I was able to understand her enough to know her limits and read the warning signs, which she did always give me.

The lunging was also invaluable for unwinding enough of her crookedness problems and spinal restrictions to allow her to manage a rider with less stress.



Amy, now able to work in engagement

The time-scale is always dictated by the horse, but most horses need at least three months of quality work on the lunge to form their musculature and nervous system enough to reduce the turbulence created when the rider gets on to a minimum. Remember that because the young horse is so easily influenced at this stage, the time donated to this first formation is more valuable than at any subsequent point. A horse with whose education has been rushed at this stage in order to save a few months of work may need years of recovery and retraining later on.

Lunging Equipment

Type Of Tack

Having good equipment makes a big difference both for you and your horse, the main reason being the necessity for **comfort**. Discomfort is both a distraction and a tension generator, both of which are the principle enemies of quality work. The other reason that you need well-designed equipment is because your equipment is the interface between you and your horse, and if it doesn't work well, then your aids will be less clear and therefore less sensitive and less effective.

1) The first important piece of equipment is a good quality lunging cavesson. It must be made of solid leather with the well-padded noseband supported with a metal



bridge with three rings. The lunge line is attached to the middle ring. The noseband should be able to be adjusted to fit snugly on the bony part of the nasal bone, with two fingers clearance between it and the cheekbone. There must also be a middle jaw strap (extra to the throat latch) which helps to secure the whole cavesson in place. It should sit at the junction where the cheekbone meets the lower jaw. Unlike the throatlatch, which should be left with a hand's width of clearance, this strap must be firm so that the whole cavesson is less likely to pull into the horse's outside eye during work.

Nylon or synthetic cavessons are not stable enough on the horse's head to use for lunging.

Recently we have started using the Micklem Multibridle™ (*photo below*). For the following reasons I find it to be the perfect solution to all the issues which have come up with horse 'headgear' over the years. The Micklem bridle is:

- Designed to prioritize comfort - the bridle makes several improvements to the traditional bridle. Particularly helpful is that the noseband no longer has to be fixed around the place on the horse's jaw where there might be sensitivity in the horse's inner cheek from the molars pressing. Recently our equine dentist told us



that it is often the noseband pressing in this place which causes the damage to the lining of the mouth if the teeth are at all sharp. Horses that are not ridden can have sharp teeth and yet no damage is created there.

- In terms of convenience, it is a considerable simplification that the bridle can be used for lungeing and riding interchangeably. It has the stability in its structure to be ideal for lungeing, and the flexibility to suit the horse when riding.

- My favourite asset is definitely the bit clip system. When the bit is secured in this way, pressure that comes back on the bit is diverted to the nose, which is naturally less sensitive and vulnerable than the horse's mouth. This permanent protection is perfect both for the horses who don't choose to take care of their own mouths, and the riders who are careless with their horses' mouths. Even with the best intentions it is difficult to avoid *any* impingement on a horses mouth. A sudden spook or jumping a fence awkwardly can easily cause a horse a nasty jerk in the mouth. The bit clip acts like a permanent protection.

2) The second piece of equipment is the lunge line. It doesn't matter too much whether it is made of cotton or nylon. Personally I don't like them to be too bulky to hold, so prefer nylon. They are usually about 25 feet long and it is important they have a loop at the end to hold so that you can hold it securely at its full length.

3) The lunge whip is a vital piece of equipment, trying to lunge without one is like trying to ride without your legs. Find the optimum weight and balance so that you can control the lash with sophistication. Too heavy and it will strain your wrist, but

too light will not give you enough momentum to allow you to be sensitive enough. It does take some time to get used to the heaviness and balance of a lunge whip, and above all to learn to use it skillfully.

4) Using a strong but flexible pairs of gloves is necessary to protect your hands, especially when working with a youngster who may try to pull away. Wearing gloves for both riding and lunging is a good habit to get into because it creates a little bit of physical distance between the reins and your hands and helps to generalize the effects physically. It also helps to remind you to 'switch off your hands' - something which has to be repeated until they stop trying to take control.

I am not much of a believer in boots or bandages/wraps because I prefer the horses to stay sensitive to what they are doing with their legs. This is assuming the horse is unshod and has the full natural sensitivity in feet and limbs (for more information on natural hoof care look at: <http://www.happy-horse-training.com/horse-hoof-care.html>). We are attempting to waken up the horse's senses all the time rather than dull them by protecting him from himself. On the other hand, if a horse has a crookedness in his limbs which causes him to knock one leg regularly against the other then some kind of comfortable protection is obviously necessary.

Timing For Tack

I use only the lunging cavesson on its own with a youngster until we have reached the stage of managing a relaxed walk and trot, holding the shape of the circle consistently, and therefore keeping a steady but sensitive contact. If the canter comes easily because the horse's natural balance is good enough then that is fine at this stage, but I like it to come as a result of good balance and straightness, so the horse's channeled energy overflows him into canter. This is very different from when he loses balance and rushes faster and faster until he falls into canter. The main difference is in the transition. A prepared canter is performed from the strike off of the hind-legs which push the back up round and lift the shoulders, whereas an unprepared canter is more of a downhill plunge, where the front legs take most of the weight and pull the horse forward into canter.

Most of the horses we work with at HHT are not performance horses, so their canter is not innately balanced, and it takes them years to develop enough strength to change their natural canter into something approaching the uphill ease of most modern sports-horses' canters. Canterng *in engagement* is particularly athletically

demanding even for horses whose natural canter is well balanced. It requires suppleness and strength through the whole postural system. Our philosophy is to work as much in *quality* as possible, we have found that pushing horses to move when they can't do what they are being asked to do in balance and relative straightness is *not* productive in the long run. Even if they take much longer to become ready for certain movements, when they *can* do them, they do them correctly.

The way to look at your progression is that each stage prepares the next stage, so working with the lunging cavesson will prepare the horse for the bridle and saddle, and working with cavesson, bridle and saddle prepares the horse for the rider, and working with cavesson, bridle, saddle and rider on the lunge prepares the horse for working independently with the rider.

Working like this means that your training is truly established, without any issue left to chance.

Every horse that we take on we take back through this process, even if they have been mounted for years, and there are several who have been 'dangerous' to ride before. By the end of the re-training, whatever their initial problem was, it has long gone, or has become manageable in a straightforward way.

We don't really believe in putting ourselves at risk in the saddle. I admire people who are willing to try to ride through rearing and bucking in a sympathetic way, but I can't help feeling that such horses are only expressing their physical or psychological pain with such behaviour, and riding them is subjecting them to a traumatic experience - not to mention their rider!

Horses *are* aware of what they are doing as long as they are not blinded by pain and fear, and we have to draw our own personal line as to the extent we are willing to go to listen to them. I have found that the more I listen, the more is revealed to me and the more I feel when I do ride, but I see riding as a *gift* from the horse and not a *right* of the rider.

I am also aware that there is always a balance, and it is important to stay grounded and not follow a particular concept beyond its advantages. I knew someone years ago who I felt had lost her way to some extent, in that she asked her horses how they felt about absolutely everything and tried to carry out their wishes. There are

two points here; one is that we only have our own senses to rely on when we are figuring out what our horses are telling us. The more we listen, the more sensitive we become, for certain, but we will always filter the information through our own prejudices. The second point is that horses actually like to rely on us to make most of the decisions! They feel safe when we know what we are doing, as long as it is truly for their benefit.

Usually if they don't accept such decisions they have a good reason, and that is the time we have to use our discretion. I don't think there is any real benefit in trying to oversimplify such things though, or trying to find a 'system' that simplifies it too much for us. It is the potential that is the exciting part of life, and it is only our fears that make us want to control things overly.

Knowing when to introduce the saddle is about judging the time when it will make the least impact for the youngster.

The more smoothly and calmly he already does his work on the lunge, the less he will feel the presence of the saddle. You want to be introducing everything in such a way that it becomes part of the scenery as easily as possible. Often this is immediate if you choose the right moment. I would say much less damage is done by over-preparing than under-preparing.



Ideas In Action

We bought two warmblood foals recently who had to be picked up from the stud at the age of six months. This is the common practice at studs, and although we would have preferred a more natural weaning process, the advantage was that we could form a closer relationship with them from the beginning, as we were essentially replacing their mothers as their carers. We bought them rugs because we don't like keeping horses in when the weather is bad, and we don't have shelters outside. The first few weeks we spent gaining their confidence until after about a month they loved to be groomed and could be touched all over. Around that time we

approached them very carefully with the rugs, and because they were very suspicious, we let them sniff the material, but kept them low to the ground and not too close. After that we sometimes approached them at grooming time, or took the foals to see them hanging on a door.

Luckily the weather was never too extreme until the day we decided to see what the foals felt about having the rugs on. They were a little anxious when the rugs were brought up over their backs, but they allowed it to happen, and didn't try to break



away. Out in the field in the heavy rain they must have appreciated the mobile shelter, which might have helped them to accept, but really it was just a question of enough patience and listening when they became scared at first.

After a day or two they accepted the rugs being put on without even needing to have a head-collar on.

Spending more time at first saves much more time and trouble afterwards by avoiding any phobia in association with equipment that the horse may develop.

Tips For Tacking Up

- Usually I introduce the saddle before the bridle, but that is not particularly important. It is better to do the two separately however, so that you avoid an overload of new experiences.
- You can put the saddle on a few times before you work the horse with it on. What matters most is that new things are included into your routine calmly and carefully.
- Watch for signs of anxiety and back off. It is up to you to render the object unthreatening for your horse. To the horse's way of thinking, threatening things do not stop or back off, they keep coming, so retreating is a good way of showing the horse there is no danger associated with the new equipment.

- Use the saddle which fits best rather than some old thing that doesn't fit in case it gets damaged. If the training is done patiently, damage to your saddle is highly improbable, and what is precious beyond value is your horse's **good associations with the tack**. Once a horse decides that a saddle is a bad idea, it is exceptionally difficult to change his mind.
- In my experience, the principle threat to a saddle is a horse rolling with it on in the arena. For this reason it is advisable, if possible, to prevent any attempts your horse makes to roll in the arena *at any time*. It is the place for work, not 'herd behaviour'. For the same reason, it is inadvisable to perform any loose schooling work with the saddle on.
- When you put the saddle on, make sure you can feel that the scapula is unhindered by the panel when you stretch the horse's front leg forward. This far back is the only place a saddle can sit on a horse's back without damaging the scapular cartilage over time. The vast majority of saddles are put on way too far forward.



The saddle in the correct position (left) far back enough to clear the scapula, and too far forwards (right) hindering the shoulder rotation.

- The girth must be comfortable and tightened gradually, especially at first. Remember to have it firm enough by the time you are beginning the actual work though, because saddles starting to move about are particularly alarming for a young horse.
- Getting into a routine that can become like a meditation is a very good idea. Everything you do is done with attention (mindfulness), patience and gentleness.

This will set up the right kind of mood for your session too.

- Continue at first with the same work as before you were putting the saddle on, so that it doesn't signify anything more complicated or demanding for your horse.
- It is necessary to familiarize the horse with the bit for a while before putting the cavesson on, or if using a Micklem bridle, before tightening the drop noseband to any degree. This is because the cavesson or drop noseband will restrict the movement of the horse's jaw, and this is too much to ask straight away.
- If you are using an ordinary bridle, when you feel the time is right, you can make up a bridle without a noseband, make sure the bit is the right width and shape. Start by putting it on for a few minutes each time you work your horse. Put it on at your horse's calmest time, this might be before work or after. Only when you observe that the bit can be allowed to sit in the mouth *without* chewing is it time to put the lunging cavesson on as well. This is when the bridle can be included in the tack for working.
- I am always careful to avoid using the bit for control at any stage, and the only connection it will have to anything in the work at this stage is if and when the side-reins are introduced.

Side Reins

Side reins are a part of the lunging equipment that is very easy to misuse. I prefer to keep an independent relationship with them and to be honest I don't use them very often. I do like to introduce them however, and habituate a young horse to them, mainly to gauge the reaction. Negative reactions to them are very informative.

My personal philosophy about side-reins is that they are useful for introducing a young horse to the concept of channeling. This 'channeling' concerns the alignment in particular of the ribcage and the shoulders. I don't believe that side-reins are *necessary* to develop the correct alignment in a young horse, but I do think that they can help to concentrate the development to some extent and also clarify the stage of straightness already reached. By imposing certain limitations to the extent a young horse can misalign herself, side-reins begin the process of familiarization with the ultimate sensation of engagement. This sensation can be a challenge at first because it is so particular. At some stage it becomes a great security for most

horses, providing an opportunity to let go of anxiety and even giving them a physical high, but until the physiology is developed to this extent, it is crucial to respect the horse's boundaries and to *ask* rather than demand.

The other constructive use of side reins is to familiarize the young horse with the feeling of stretching into the contact, in the same way as he will in ridden work in engagement. It is important to understand the difference between the horse reaching forwards into the contact with the side reins/bit as a result of the telescopic stretch of his neck that goes along with correct longitudinal flexion, and a contact that is created by the side reins used in a restrictive way. In order to accomplish the correct contact without the side reins becoming in any way restrictive, it is essential to find the right length adjustment so that the horse only just takes up the slack of the side reins when his neck is at full stretch.



If side-reins are forcing an alteration of a horse's top-line, the change is not then initiated by the horse himself and will not develop the horse in a beneficial way. These photos show that the side-reins are not influencing the young horse wearing them other than in the most subtle way. The young horse without them (right) is carrying herself in a pro-engagement carriage of her own volition.

Ideas In Action

Some years ago, we rescued an ex-racehorse from a horse sale who had considerable stress associated with her bit, probably from lack of sensitivity introducing it originally, and subsequent rough riding. After a considerable period of lunging her without side reins to establish a consistent longitudinal stretch and correct bending, my sister felt it was important to introduce the side reins as a way of re-educating her to the contact, and undoing her bad associations with feeling any pressure in her mouth from the bit.

The first time the side reins were attached, even though they were loose enough that she did not contact them in a neutral neck position, she refused to move from a standstill, so great was her anxiety about a possible restriction in her mouth.



Eventually, with patience and gentle persuasion, she began to realize that the side reins and bit were no longer a threat, and she learnt to stretch into them to contact the bit softly and without panicking. This was an important basis from which to start her retraining under saddle, which proceeded with no further problems associated with the bit.

As far as actually *initiating* the longitudinal flexion of a young horse goes, it is a similar effect as discussed above with lateral flexion. Side-reins are not *necessary* when it comes to a horse softening the jaw and top-line muscles - in fact I certainly would not advocate them, or any other artificial constraint to attempt *achieve* this softening, simply because **longitudinal flexion is a natural physiological reaction which immediately follows the relaxation of the back muscles and contraction of the abdominal muscles, which happens when a horse moves in enough balance and straightness.**

If it is *not* happening with nothing other than the lunging cavesson, then either the horse is not sufficiently strong to hold herself balanced and straight enough yet, or she has a complicating physical restriction in some part of her body, or the lunging technique is at fault in some way. The most common physical problems that prevent

longitudinal flexion are spinal lesions, pelvic and shoulder problems, feet or even teeth problems.

Using artificial aids to force a compoment that is not forthcoming despite your best lunging efforts **is not a solution**. It may cause the horse to achieve an *apparent* roundness, but the very fact that it was only achievable by force means it is *not the same* physiological reaction as true engagement. The compoment of engagement of a horse is a voluntary animation of the horse's body, stimulated by the horse himself. The posture produced in a horse as a result of artificial force cannot be anything other than a secondary defensive reaction, the primary defensive reaction being the initial hollowing, which a horse will take up naturally when attempting to balance in a small area on a lunge line. The vast majority of horses working in round pens and similar natural horsemanship arrangements move in the primary defensive posture, a posture which goes hand-in-hand with the bending to the outside that is inevitable in all loose schooling work.

The following scenario may help to illustrate the effect of forcing a horse 'round' with side reins:

Imagine you started a gymnastics class, and the aim was to be able to perform the splits. The only problem is that your hip joints are way too stiff to even contemplate the possibility! If you could go every week to the class and do the exercises daily which gradually loosened the joints and strengthened the muscles, not only in your hips, but also your knees and ankle joints, abdominal muscles and shoulder muscles, gradually you would develop the strength and suppleness in your whole body to accomplish the original goal.

If, however, the instructor decided that you could do it straight away with a bit of help from a special system of straps that connected your ankles to your wrists in a way that used your own body-weight to force you into the splits position, would this mean you could then do the splits? It would probably mean you would have been caused so much muscle and ligament damage that you would never be able to contemplate doing them of your own volition again.

It is difficult to find a perfect analogy, and in the horse's case there is also his momentum to consider, as well as the fear factor resulting from being a flight animal. The above scenario illustrates the point well enough though. The fact is that horses are severely injured every day by the use of any artificial control which uses their own body-weight and momentum to force them into a way of moving they have not been able to accomplish as a result of their existing physical capacity.

Damage caused in this way is most evident in horses' necks; often the ligaments and musculature supporting the third cervical vertebra are irretrievably injured. The weak spots such as the lumbothoracic and lumbosacral junctions are also common sites of rupture to a greater or lesser degree. Of course the more a horse is prone to hollowing the worse the damage inflicted will be, because these horses *already have* physical restrictions which are preventing them from softening in the first place. Certain breeds such as Arabians have a stronger hollowing reflex than others. Although this is normal for them physiologically, without enough of the right work, they will be even more susceptible to the damaging influence of a rider's weight, although their higher bone density probably helps to limit it to some degree.

The time to introduce the side-reins is when the young horse has already been working on the lunge for some time: he has learned to balancing himself well, is strengthening his lateral and longitudinal flexion, and this way of moving is no longer foreign or presenting an issue for him. The role of the side-reins is only to suggest, therefore they are best at a length which does not influence the horse at rest i.e. it is possible to do them up with the horse standing facing the front, without changing the horse's neck posture at all. The horse will know all about them, even at this length that is clearly not threatening.

If your horse does react negatively to the side-reins at this unobtrusive length, and it is the first time he has ever been exposed to them, then it is pretty certain he has a physical issue of some kind, and he is highly aware of the fact that he needs to protect himself. In this case you need to do some investigation. It is not easy to find the sources of physical discomfort. Time and time again I have seen horses pronounced pain free by vets and other therapists when it couldn't be further from the truth.

The concept of trying to mask resistances by the use of force goes back to a lack of belief in the goodwill of the horse. Horses do not resist for no reason, and resistance will only ever worsen or move somewhere else if it is not addressed and resolved.

Ideas In Action

One of our mares, a little TB/Dartmoor cross, has suffered from many physical and emotional issues in her life, from hormonal imbalance to misalignment of her jaw. One aspect I could never get to the bottom of was her teeth. I was certain she had a deep-rooted problem which, along with her neck problems and jaw misalignment, made it virtually impossible for her to accept the bit. She was examined by several equine dentists, and every time they would say she had a 'regular' mouth.

After at least five years of this we finally found a dentist who was able to locate the problem. Dechie had very little room at the back of her mouth, and the upper molars



right at the back had formed hooks that were actually pressing into the gums below. It was difficult for him to remove them because there was virtually no room behind them to move the tools into, but after some struggle, her quality of life was improved considerably!

Dechie, now able to yield in the left side of her mouth.

The point is, *believe your own intuition when it comes to your own horse.* If you can sense there's a problem, stick to your guns. You are your horse's ambassador after all, and no one else will care to the extent you do. I do believe that our horses choose us, so there is no one better placed than you to find out what is going on energetically and emotionally, if you choose to do so.

Every day we appreciate the freedom we have created for our horses and ourselves here at HHT. If our horses are ill we heal them in peace without having to deal with judgments from fear-based prejudices, we don't have to conform to livery yard rules or a barrage of intrusive opinions about our slow training methods.

We believe that anyone can create the circumstances which suit them, but we know it takes time, and we know also that there are many courageous people who fight

against the limitations of fear-based traditionalist thinking every day. One day putting metal shoes on horses and keeping them in solitary confinement will be as unthinkable as it is now to dock a horse's tail, cut a star into his forehead or work him until his heart gives out.

The following story is written by a client of ours who has not always had an easy time with her horse, but he chose her to help him, and their journey together shows that is possible to follow your inner wisdom despite pressure from those who are not in the same position to understand.

Ideas In Action

I went looking for a young warmblood dressage horse. Having been shown some lovely horses, nothing really grabbed my attention and I was taken back to the stables past a brown winter-hairy horse pottering about a paddock with an equally hairy pony. I didn't give him a second glance. A few steps beyond the paddock something stopped me. I could feel eyes watching as I walked away - and a deep sadness. The brown horse was saying something, I had to go back to the paddock gate and meet him. He made it clear to me that I had to take him home but... he wasn't for sale.

However, the owner obligingly chased him around the paddock so that I could see why he wanted to keep him. He moved well, but was holding something back. His neck and withers looked sore & stiff, as were his hindquarters, especially the left hind leg and he lacked the fluidity of movement I really wanted. But, he'd only just turned four, and was cold and wet, what else was I to expect? Anyway, it didn't matter how he moved - the rose-tinted specs had glossed over many of the items on my mental 'do not buy' list - and I knew he was mine. So began our journey together - an eventful one at that.

From the moment I saw Q I could feel a sadness within him. I felt he had created a protective layer around him and it was going to take some work to get through to him. For months he never seemed to be really 'here', he had retreated within himself and spent a good deal of time keeping me at arms length - if we were to ever be a partnership I had to earn the right, but he had to let me in.

He didn't like me getting too close into his personal space and moved to the other side of the stable whenever I approached. Working in-hand, or on the lunge, he'd dive out of my way if I dared get too close to him. I didn't hassle him and slowly he accepted me getting closer and began to work well on the lunge. He had good days when he'd come up to talk and was open to working, other times he'd retreat into himself. I worked at his flexibility helping to

straighten him, never pushing him too much, massaged the knotted muscles and encouraged him to stretch, something he always found difficult even though he tried.

Over the months as work progressed he opened a little more and I caught glimpses of the horse I thought he could be. There was still a nagging feeling that he had a problem with his sacroiliac and left hind leg. His toes always dragged and he found it difficult to get the left hind underneath him, and no matter how relaxed he looked I could see he found it difficult to stretch forward and down and get the fluidity and lift I felt he was capable of (other people who saw him thought he looked fabulous and moved really well, they couldn't see a problem - so what was I worrying about?) It was during a moment of openness and a soft, relaxed way of going that he first reared. It took both of us by surprise. At first I couldn't think why. I hadn't asked anything too demanding of him, nothing beyond what I felt he could do. I ignored it as a passing phase in a young horse's life, but over the coming weeks these episodes became more frequent. They always happened when he relaxed and loosened, and always took him by surprise, but he seemed unable to stop himself and he was always apologetic afterwards.

Friends advised me to get rid of him as they considered his behaviour was becoming dangerous. Not many people wanted to be near him and I have to confess to moments where my confidence disappeared and I thought I might not be the one to help him. One moment he would be docile but absent, the next rearing and desperate but very much present. I knew that he wasn't dangerous, just trying to be heard - and understood. I wasn't sure if I could really understand him, but my gut feeling was to keep going. Gradually as his body became stronger, he became reliable and we could work together in a sort of harmony.

That winter I sent him to a dressage livery yard, with a wonderful indoor school and woodland hacking, so that we could continue our progress away from winter mud. I had my reservations about the lack of turnout and Q not being with his best friend, but greed for progress was too strong. During our time there we continued our work and enjoyed hacking through the woods, but I could feel Q disappearing again, and tried to ignore it. His behaviour was getting better, even though we still had our moments. During one of our ridden 'moments' I was being watched by the resident dressage trainer who advised me to 'chase' the horse forward, 'demand' an instant response, use whip and spurs (neither of which I possessed) to 'get' the horse going, take a good strong contact and drive the horse into it. I was told that this was the only way to get his body to work correctly and overcome any physical problems (the trainer didn't think he had any though, thought I was being stupid, and suggested that Q was just being 'naughty' and 'unwilling' and I should address it with 'strong' training tactics to get the horse to submit). When lunging I was to use a 'Harbridge' martingale to 'help' him work over his back and attach the lunge rein from the roller, through the bit ring to my hand and pull, to 'show' Q how to bend and stretch. I watched the trainers' horses - they were all worked in this way, all were stiff and tight, no suppleness, no softness, no spark, no happiness - body builders but not athletes - the

antithesis of all that I hoped Q would become. All physical problems disguised with gadgets pulling the horse in every way possible.

I knew my horse, knew that he wouldn't respond well, and anyway this was not how a horse should be trained. I didn't succumb to the trainer's ways and left the yard - the pressure to conform to that way of training was too great. There was no place for the horse's point of view, no consideration as to why a horse might be performing badly – just 'make' it do as you want. Q was disappearing into himself with the sheer terror and pressure of the place – so was I. I still had to find a way of getting to the bottom of his behaviour and physical problems. I knew he had extreme emotions, but wasn't sure if they stemmed from something purely physical within his body at that moment – or something more deep-seated.

As soon as he came home, Camille began her Cranio-Sacral work on him. She found he did indeed have a problem with the sacroiliac and left hind leg, which had probably been there for a few years. His pelvis was out of alignment; his lumbar vertebrae were sore, as was his neck. It was no wonder that as soon as he tried to align and lengthen his body, he reared - his sacroiliac and back must have felt very sore if it was so misaligned. His body would have felt very strange, and painful, to him – and he had no other way of telling me how this felt but to rear. Slowly, with Camille giving him regular treatments he transformed. She showed me how to help him with my own hands so that, in between her treatments, I could keep his healing on track. His body relaxed and began to re-align itself, his muscles softened and his outline changed. As he found it easier to soften in his body whilst working, and lengthen through the topline, his behaviour changed. Over the next year the protective layers gradually melted away, his jaw and eye softened. As soon as he felt well in his body he became more present, the distant 'nobody home' look went. No more rearing, no more erratic behaviour. He is making great progress, the softness, suppleness, fluidity and lift are in his body, his kindness has resurfaced, and he is back in the present, enjoying his work - and life.

As owners we have to take responsibility for our horses. We have to watch them with great care, listen to how they move, find out what they have to say; we are the ones who should know them best. I could have sold him, I could have followed the trainer's advice and used strong-arm tactics, but would they have resulted in the happy, supple horse I now have? I doubt it. We have to use our intuition, follow it and stick to it no matter what pressures are put upon us to do otherwise.



Note on the Conventional Theory On The Use of Side-reins

The traditional philosophy regarding side-reins is that they create a framework within which the horse can develop his musculature for engagement before the rider gets on board. This makes theoretical sense, but in practice I feel that the work the horse does to manage his own body himself, softening the edges around the engagement posture, which make him tend to hang back or rush on, is of greater value. Side-reins which are shortened in order to limit the horse into a higher neck carriage seem to have more of a stiffening effect on the horse's musculature and there is always the danger of teaching the horse how to bring himself behind the bit if he is not going forward properly.

In an energetic sense, if we want a response which is giving and enthusiastic from the horse, it is unlikely that this can be produced from a mechanism which limits his movement. When a rider balances a horse, he or she uses postural effort to achieve the impulsion and carriage necessary, and such a muscular effort is energetic, not limiting, and it is not centred around the horse's neck and mouth.

It is safer not to try to replace what can be more sensitively done by the rider with a mechanism that has no ability to feel or give. Young horses need to rest their neck frequently and subjecting their impressionable mind to the lifelessness of a short side-rein's block on their mouth and neck, is not the best introduction to the contact which we want to be subtle and communicative. As described above however, side reins that are long enough to *only* be contacted when the horse stretches his neck forwards into them *are* a useful way of introducing the contact in a gentle, unrestrictive way.

As long as the young horse is strengthening their ability to flex laterally and longitudinally in the preparatory lunging work, they will be improving their ability to lift themselves up posturally. There is no reason therefore to force the process artificially.

As for any of the other kinds of auxiliary reins such as chambons, running or draw reins, market harborough etc. the same logic applies: if a horse is capable of carrying himself in the way which strengthens him for the rider, then he will do it *voluntarily* (given reasonably favorable conditions). He certainly cannot be *forced* to do it, whether he is capable or not.



A young horse developing her longitudinal stretch without restriction from auxiliary aids.

Handling The Equipment

Remember that lunging must be seen as a training opportunity in exactly the same way as riding is, except that you are in a different physical relation to your horse. Each aiding system in riding has its lunging parallel:

In riding, legs/whip aiding = lunge whip/voice in lunging.

In riding, seat aiding = postural indication/lunge line contact/voice in lunging

As will become clear, the true control of your horse (which is the ultimate objective of this course) must be understood as an energetic bond. It is far more sophisticated at every stage than a crude manipulation of the reins, and a certain distance or wariness must always be observed with regards to the use of any kind of rein to slow down or stop the horse. If not we can never truly isolate what is required of us in each stage from each particular horse. From the beginning, with each individual horse, it is part of our job to choose the appropriate control dynamic.

The control dynamic is unique between each horse and trainer/rider. It depends on the personality and physique of each member of the partnership. If you choose to be particularly dominant in the relationship, then what you receive from that relationship will be different from if you choose a more egalitarian approach. The control dynamic works on a physical level also, and is what riding a horse is really about.

Starting to lunge a young horse without any previous experience is not ideal because you have very little margin for error with most youngsters. As with any athletic activity, they have no muscle memory yet established to channel them, and it is easier for them to evade in certain ways. Try to find a more experienced horse who can compensate for a bit of awkwardness in your technique more easily if you are not already reasonably skilled. Lunging is an art in the same way as riding is, and requires practice and attention. Only then does it become rewarding.

Step 1) Handling the line

Winding Up: The reason why it is important to master the technique for winding up the line is that you must be able to shorten or lengthen it easily and smoothly. If it catches or goes too fast then it will disturb your connection with the horse.

The simplest and safest way is as follows:

- Stand at your horse's shoulder on whichever rein you want to put her out onto i.e. for the right rein you stand beside the right shoulder.
- Face the front, and, assuming this example is for the right rein, throw the line out completely behind your left shoulder, well clear of the horse.
- Take the line in your left hand and wind the line up *towards you* in smallish loops round this hand using your left hand until you reach the end-loop.

(The size of the loop dictates how much you can let out at any one time, so the smaller they are the more subtle your changes in contact can be. On the other hand loops that are too small are also limiting because you won't be able to give your horse more space very quickly. The optimum is illustrated in these photos).

- When you reach the end-loop, take it in your right hand, and place the rest of the loops above it on your right hand too. Your right hand will be guiding the horse on the right rein.



Role of the Line When Lungeing:

The role of the line when lungeing is similar to the role of the reins when riding, and it is easy to get things back to front in the same way. When riding, the rein contact comes to be understood as a completion of the engagement circle. **It cannot initiate the postural changes made by the horse in her body, and neither can it maintain them, although it is a part of the maintenance system.** Our natural human tendency to want to manipulate (and control) things with our hands makes the correct understanding of any rein/line or rope contact with the horse difficult. In riding, the only sure way is to achieve a complete detachment, both physical and psychological from the rein, and then relearn once the natural urge to hold on has been re-routed. My sister and I had no one to lunge us while riding when we went down this route, so we just didn't allow ourselves to touch the reins for anything. For months we rode with totally baggy reins in order to break the dependence. This is something which must change in our central nervous system, because it is, in effect, an addiction.

So relating this to our lunge line contact: **think primarily of controlling the horse with your body, and that your arm is simply connected to this.** Hold your elbow comfortably but snugly against your side, and allow the communication to flow in that direction. Think almost of leading the horse forward from the tail right through to the muzzle, in an undulating, yielding bend around the circle. When you drive and initiate with the whip, you stimulate the horse's energy, which you then form (like extruding something through a mould) with your posture, and then your line contact helps to position the horse onto the bend because it is linked onto your posture by way of your elbow. **Feel that the contact goes to your elbow and that your wrist is only a link.** This is because your elbow joins into your body and further expresses the way you are holding yourself to the horse, whereas your wrist is part of the connection between the horse's body and yours, and is therefore only capable of disrupting the flow, not adding anything constructive.

Reading this you might say, 'but if the energy and information flows towards the horse from my body, how can I think of leading the horse?' Again the difference between leading and pulling is that leading has the momentum behind it, and it is merely a guidance, or a positioning. It is your side of the interaction. Like the breathing outward and inward of the listening and reacting phases described later on, first the horse gives you the drive and the energy which you follow with the line, and then in rhythm with the horse's stride (which coincides with when she can best respond to your signal i.e. when the inside hind-leg comes into the ground) you then guide and position her round the circle in the leading, active reaction phase.



As the training continues, the 'reacting phase' will moderate and sophisticate, as with riding, and the influence of the line is less and less obvious as your direct postural control comes into its own. This feeling of connection within itself, and freedom from constraints in general, is wonderful.

Step 2) Handling the Whip

The whip is better not to be used - or thought of - as a weapon or even an enforcer, but more as an extension of your own body which allows you to touch and stimulate any part of the horse's body. It is a kind of therapeutic tool which, when you are skilled enough, you will be able to direct as softly or quickly, and as accurately, as you choose.

Following on from the winding up of the lunge-line, you would take the whip in your right hand to move the horse out onto the left circle.

At first when the horse is close to you, you can use it more like a kind of baton, holding it with the handle end towards the horse, and using it to help establish the flexing of the horse's body onto the bend. When the horse has reached enough distance from you (when the whip can fit into the space between you and the horse when it is held with the handle end towards you) then you can turn it round gently and use the lash end.

Horses naturally understand the 'lunge whip language' because it is based on their reaction to a perceived threat. **Gradually their perception of threat will be replaced by acceptance as they understand that you wish to form a partnership.** It is important therefore *not* to use the whip with force or anger or as some kind of punishment. In fact most young horses which have been well-handled beforehand seem to be quite laid back about the whip, and are not sufficiently sensitive to it at the beginning. This is when caution is also advisable, because when they do become sensitive, if the aiding in the meantime has been overdone, they will express nervousness instead of acceptance. For some reason, possibly

due to the time the central nervous system takes to assimilate information, there is always a lag period between what you ask for, and how the horse will ultimately respond, this is why caution is always the better part of valour.

Less is more in the long run.

Lunge Whip Language:

- The higher you hold the lunge whip, the faster the horse will move.
- The further the whip is held towards the front of the horse, the more of a 'pushing away/out' effect it will have.
- The further the whip is held towards the back end of the horse, the more of a 'driving forward' effect it will have.
- The quicker you move the whip i.e. flicking/snaking, the more energy it will generate from the horse.
- The stiller (and lower) you hold the whip the less energy it will generate.

Think of using the lunge whip as you want to use your legs when you ride: a constant presence, in constant communication with the horse, listening and reacting like an in breath and an out breath in a perpetual breathing motion.



Use of the lunge whip to dictate the horse's speed: lower for walk work (left photo) and higher for trot (right photo). [The whip has been highlighted in black here to make it more clear].

There is one fundamental rule when using the whip while lunging a horse, and it may already be intuitively obvious to you as you go along: **never attempt to drive when the horse is not driveable.** This means that when the horse is running or moving forward beyond your aids i.e. out of your control, when you didn't ask for that

movement, then you must not drive forward with the whip. The obvious reason being that the horse will only go even faster and even more out of your control, so you would be increasing tension in an already tense horse, and in effect this is pushing you further away from your training goal, which is strengthening your horse's ability to engage. Pushing a horse to the apparent calmness of exhaustion is counterproductive, because they will just be tense but too tired to express it, and that is damaging to your trust bond.

When a horse runs in this way, it is sometimes best to let them come back of their own accord, and sometimes it is advisable to attempt to bring them back. A young horse starting to panic will often be more stressed by continuing and winding themselves up, than if they were quickly brought back with as little fuss as possible by gently reeling in the line. This is another circumstance for using your own benevolent intentions and intuition.

When the horse *is* driveable, the whip must be in continuous yet careful use because this is the kind of control you are seeking, a continuous communication that moves the horse in the direction, the balance and the straightness that you wish. To maintain this, you must be there every stride to ask for the next stride and the next. In the same way as a car that is in-gear is always slowing down when you stop pushing the accelerator pedal down, a horse that is engaged is always coming back to you, requiring you to drive him. A running horse, on the other hand, is exactly like a car that is freewheeling – the control is lost, and true forwards drive is not possible.

Ideas In Action

We rescued a young mare from the local horse fair. She was a four year-old, but looked like a two year-old, such was her poor condition. After she had regained her condition to the point where work would be beneficial for her, we began the retraining process. We knew she had already been backed before we got her. Jasmine was very intelligent and willing, and her lunging work was soon exemplary - she was calm and rhythmical, stretching beautifully and in balance. She was not yet able to lift herself up into a higher frame at this point, but her top-line seemed strong and she was able to start being ridden. It was only several months after she was really starting to engage nicely under saddle and truly lift her back, that the problems started to arise. She became grumpy to groom and pushy on the way to the arena, and on the lunge she began to twist her neck and sometimes she would start to run off out of control.

These changes took place very gradually, but I realized quite quickly that she had a problem in her neck, though at that point I didn't realize the extent of her physical damage. Although her condition was good at this time, it became clear as a result of treatments (Cranio-Sacral Therapy) that because she had been seriously malnourished during her development, when she was then backed and ridden (before we bought her) her physical weakness meant she had sustained extensive damage in her back and neck.

Jasmine needed many months of restorative herbal nutrition to give her the resources to be able to respond to the energy therapy she was having, and during that time her body bulked-out massively, even in comparison to her previous good condition.

At various points in her rehabilitation I lunged her to check on her progress, and the differences each time were marked. She really did illustrate how horses express exactly what they feel at each moment, instead of (as people often think) responding to previous conditioning or memory of pain.

She stopped the wild running away and bucking which reflected her worst time of pain and frustration, but she continued to shake her neck for much longer. When her neck healed to a certain point she began to want to bend it quite drastically to the left. I allowed her to place herself as she felt comfortable, and this violent bending gradually lessened as parts of her spine improved.

The major issues in her back had only become apparent as a result of her lifting her back in the first place, and once they became apparent, she seemed to go through a reconstruction in her entire ribcage and spinal column.

I know that when she feels healed enough to go back to her engagement training under saddle, it will be as if she had been in training the entire time, because she understood perfectly well (in a physiological sense) what she was being asked to do, she just couldn't physically do it, and she was much more frustrated with herself than I was with her!



Jasmine before (left) and 'after' (right) her strengthening and healing process

This story illustrates how graphically a horse will express their physical state on the lunge, and that *no* behaviour is without cause. Sometimes we have to accept that training must be suspended until a horse is able to continue, otherwise we will only push the problems in deeper and lose the horse's faith in our judgment. Again this decision is an intuitive one, and the situation may change at any time. In general it is pressure from expectations we have of ourselves and/or our horse, or from external sources that can cloud our judgment. It is important to give yourself the space and time, and the faith, to find your own answer.

Understanding the Groundwork Goal

Keep in mind that extreme reluctance in a horse to work is indicative of weakness or discomfort/pain, and other attentions may be much more beneficial than forcing the issue. It is also true that some youngsters are particularly averse to being directed, this is after all likely to be the first time in their lives that a person tells them where to go in a situation more physically independent than leading. There is always trial and error involved in training any horse, and often we only learn the truth by way of a mistake. The crucial thing is to behave consistently and keep an open mind.

In Terms of The Horse's Body

Think of this whole process as similar to knitting a jumper, or sculpting a statue. Every single action you make will elicit a reaction in your horse, and each of those reactions will change her central nervous system and develop her body. Unless you do something particularly violent, one single action is not particularly powerful in itself, but time after time, day after day, the shape builds and takes on a character and a form.

Accepting this helps to make us more consistent and more careful each day, because each day is not just another day of the same mediocre circles, each day is the next session spent developing your precious sculpture further.

Although you certainly will see the physical developments being made, because

horses do become more beautiful when they work correctly, don't forget that your true achievement is the formation of your relationship with your horse - the energetic bond which is built like a bridge between you. You won't even need to have external proof that it is there - you will feel it.

So what does this crucial preparation actually consist of? We're not just talking about *exercising* a horse here. Just going round in circles any old way will only fix the horse's natural crookedness in deeper, strain his joints and switch him off mentally. In fact what we are going to be focusing on is the precursor to engagement under the rider.

When a horse 'engages' with a rider, there is a particular physiological mechanism coming into operation in the muscles and ligaments. The horse contracts the abdominal muscles and stretches the back muscles, lifting the vertebral column up into a strong alignment like a suspension bridge (*see photo, right showing the principle muscles and structures that make up the ring of engagement*).



As the horse's neck is also a part of the vertebral column, it is also carried in a continuation of the arch. This is called 'telescoping' of the neck. Unfortunately it is this rounded neck shape that most people see, and they will then attempt to reproduce it, not as a result of the true ring of engagement, but as a separate 'head-set' unrelated to the rest of the spine. This is done by forcing the horse's head back towards the chest, usually via the bit and/or auxiliary aids e.g. draw-reins.

This is arguably the most serious misunderstanding that has always been made in dressage, culminating in the appalling practice of rollkür, which is willfully ignored by many modern day judges and trainers, if not actively participated in. **Any form of forcing or controlling the horse by means of the bit has no place in true dressage.** Why? Because when a horse engages his body correctly, he carries his neck in the correct posture as a result, and he then becomes controllable by way of the rider's posture.

Deviation from this in order to 'produce' horses more quickly or make up for rider imperfections may exist everywhere but it is not classical dressage.

NB. *Classical dressage* is a term which has become associated with Iberian horses, 'Old Masters' and airs above the ground, not to mention slightly mysterious clubs of devotees. No one is excluded from practicing intelligent and sensitive training in the way it has always been done through the centuries by people whose intentions are benevolent. It is normal for some mystery to surround such a complicated subject, but mystification for its own sake is the enemy of open-minded intuitive thinking. Equally, we mustn't think that just because a method was practiced centuries ago means that it is forcibly correct – some of the methods used by the dressage masters of the past would be shocking to most modern-day riders.

When the young horse is being prepared on the lunge for the rider, the same physical reactions can be induced in his body in ways parallel to what the rider will do when in the saddle. When he is ready for the additional weight and unbalancing effect of a rider, the rider can then be introduced into the lunging scenario until his or her presence is accepted with ease, and the rider's aids will gradually take over from those given by the lungers until the new partnership can go at first without the line and finally without the help of the lunge whip.

Done in this way the boundaries of the young horse need never be forced and tension being introduced into the relationship can be avoided.

Signs When A Horse Is Working On the Ring:

- The quality of the movement changes, becoming looser and more suspended, the strides are fuller and longer and he seems to take more time.
- As the abdominal muscles contract the diaphragm relaxes and opens the lungs, breathing deepens and the horse may cough, blow or snort.
- As the horse begins to lift his back, the top-line muscles relax and stretch and he will stretch his neck down towards the ground.
- The horse's lateral bend will change allowing him to follow the shape of the circle.

- Aiding from the trainer will be absorbed as opposed to deflected, and will further channel the horse.
- Self-carriage is visible in the way the horse appears to lift his own body every stride rather than shuffling or dragging along with his legs.
- He seems to 'melt' into the movement so his inherent power can surge through.
- When a horse engages their ring musculature, their jaw relaxes and they make a chewing movement.
- Saliva production is normal, but the horse must be free enough in his jaw action to be able to swallow it, so a *thin* layer (instead of excessive frothing) on the lips is a good sign.



Working on the ring of engagement on the lunge

All horses have their own biomechanical interpretation of engagement, some aspects being enhanced more than others, but is always beautiful and compelling. There is a sense of freedom as well as harnessing a powerful mechanism. It is not bizarre or gimpy or freaky like a strange, jerky dance. It is not boring or purposeless either. It has a magic which is easily lost when it is over simplified and systematized, as people have a tendency to do with most things that have an enigmatic element to them. This doesn't mean that it has to be a mystery or an impossible dream either. It must only be respected and appreciated for the accomplishment it is. One of the dangers in training horses is that we can become obsessed with consistency and make sacrifices which render all the work we do meaningless. Of course if you hold the horse's neck round with your reins it will stay in the same



position more consistently, but what has really been gained? We have to put inner feelings first to discover the true magic of dressage - both *our* inner feelings and the horses'. The outer appearance teaches us a lot, and is important, but only as an expression of the inner state of being. It feels fantastic to join with a horse in harmony, a harmony that can be seen and shared.

In Terms of The Horse's Mind

Part of making the choice between what is fair and what is too much (i.e. staying with the horse's boundary) is being able to discern the energetic relationship between you and the horse. I think of the energetic relationship like the two sides of a coin - each side is of itself, and has an influence on the other, but is never separate, and cannot exist without the other.

We have a unique energetic relationship with every other living being we meet. 'Meeting' is any rapport between our own boundary and theirs. It can be physically immediate or remote. For example, when we talk on the phone to someone, we are meeting in terms of energetic boundaries, although our physical bodies are apart. Often, when we observe how we feel, if another person is annoying or upsetting us, we actually have a perception that they are invading our boundary. 'Blame' is difficult to attribute in this scenario, because the energy vibration belongs to both people involved and cannot begin or end with either. Imagine that an orange light met with a blue one, and together they make another colour. The new colour is not the 'fault' of one or the other; it is the combination of both. It is helpful to accept that we can in fact change our own 'colour', or vibration, but not that of the other - because we have free will, and so do they.

Taking all of this into account, every horse we work with meets up with us and we make a new energy together. Since we have chosen to take the responsibility for the relationship, and therefore the 'command' as such, we can influence the colour of our relationship *only through ourselves*. The better we can analyze our own input therefore, the stronger an influence we will have. Relating this to deciding what is fair to ask of any horse in any moment means, therefore, that if we can see who we are in that moment, we will know more about who the horse is. The following story concerns the riding relationship, but this is only a more advanced stage of the groundwork relationship, and is a good example of these ideas in action.

Ideas In Action

The skewbald colt called Mojo (mentioned in Section 1 of the course) seemed to be a very bold and intelligent youngster when he was younger, but as he grew up his personality seemed to become less open and accepting as a more stubborn, recalcitrant streak developed. I wondered at the time if it worsened after he was gelded, but whether or not he would have been different, we reached the stage where we just didn't get on with each other. This is usually accepted as inevitable when it comes about, and the horse is often sold on, but this is not our philosophy, and therefore giving up on our relationship would have seemed to me like a failure.

Mojo obviously found his work difficult because of his conformation. He was one of those horses who balanced with great difficulty and wanted to run on forward all the time. He seemed to ignore my seat completely most of the time, and didn't accept the leg well. He usually felt either heavy and dead, or awkward and clumsy, probably because he was extremely crooked. There were days when it seemed as if he was made entirely of wood!

Not only this, but he had a terrible kind of black rage sometimes during a session. It was through working with him that I realized that often the emotions we feel when riding actually come from the horse. One day I felt this rage, and I thought at the time that it felt 'foreign' to me. I get enraged occasionally, like most people, but the quality of it just seemed unfamiliar. A few weeks later, one of our working students was riding Mojo out on a hack, and I noticed she seemed to be having a hard time with him. Usually a laid backed kind of person, she was getting into a real fight with him, and when we discussed it she agreed that the anger she was feeling was not natural to her either.

That was when the idea of the possibility of such a subconscious transmission of emotions struck me, and I wondered if perhaps it was happening much more extensively than just with relatively violent emotions, like Mojo's rage. Maybe there was an undercurrent of information happening all the time, like a radio station we tuned into through our energetic connection when we ride. That was the beginning of my 'live streaming' research which is talked about more in the next part of the course. As far as Mojo went, maybe this discovery opened up a chink in my subconscious armour against him, seeing him in a different light. If he felt a rage like that, it must be because it truly was very challenging for him to be ridden.

Synchronously, at this time we had just taken on another working student, Naomi Sharpe, who was beginning to discover a remarkable talent for communication with the horses. Mojo happened to be a favourite of hers, which probably helped her to see his side of things more clearly. She said that instead of behaving stubbornly in his work, he was just worried that he couldn't do what was being asked of him, and because of this he became more and more clumsy and awkward. The difference between what he felt like to me and this interpretation was so marked that it is obvious to me now how I had been largely unaware of my own influence in the relationship.

I decided to try again and treat him exactly as if he was feeling how Naomi said. The difference was subtle in one sense, and in another incomparable to before. This paradox is why much of what I am trying to get at in this course makes no sense at all to some conventionally-minded people - the world of energy is in fact all that



really exists, but we have become so accustomed to ignoring it that often we remain completely removed from it.

When I rode Mojo, if he felt clumsy or heavy and dull, instead of reacting in opposition to those sensations, I reacted as if he was feeling nice and sensitive, mainly by making my aiding more gentle and delicate. In fact what I was doing was backing right off from his

boundary and letting him come out of himself. Before it had felt to me that he was encroaching into my space with his bossy recalcitrant attitude, and I ended up trying to push him back out. In the end it doesn't really matter which of us had been doing what - when I changed my position, he naturally changed his, and the transformation within a session was almost beyond belief. He started to almost scintillate with energy when he connected and his engagement was on a different level of straightness entirely. I learned to siphon off any negative emotion which arose, and the rages disappeared quite quickly. The best part of it for me was that I actually started to like him! We have a good friendship now, and I feel a sympathy for him that would have been impossible before.

When my vision of Mojo was clouded by the antagonism that existed between us - for whatever reason antagonism exists - **I couldn't feel what it was fair to ask of him or not.** It was only by giving him the benefit of the doubt, and almost *pretending* I couldn't feel what I was feeling, that my vision cleared and the truth revealed itself. It only takes a few experiences of this kind to realize that truth is indeed love, and only love really exists. Even hardened horse people come to this conclusion eventually if they are prepared to follow their inner wisdom!

The best way to ensure a positive progression in your work is to avoid having expectations or plans of any kind in an individual session, and keep the sessions as much within the 'comfort zone' of your young horse's mind and body as possible. The more credit you build up now, the more you can take out later on.

Some ways to build up your credit:

1) **If your horse does something particularly well, give him a nice surprise and stop early.** This will fix what he did well into his consciousness most securely because he will associate it with your pleasure and the treat of going back to his friends before he expected to (hopefully your horse does go back to his friends and not just the stable!).

2) **Praise is a very powerful positive force.** Your horse will respond to praise by becoming more confident and relaxed, and therefore more able to learn. Just a nice stroke or telling him your approval out-loud will communicate your feeling if you mean it!

3) It is difficult for us to remember how we felt ourselves as small children - how much there was to take in, and how events seemed so vast and beyond our control, let alone trying to see things from a horse's perspective. Even going into the arena for the first time is a big event for a young horse. **Always think less is more.** Staying in your horse's comfort zone is not straightforward; it may take you many months to know your horse well enough to make an accurate assessment. Think of it like growing plants. Each session you want to add a little water and let the plant grow. If you over-water constantly then the roots will become waterlogged and the plant won't be able to grow. Don't underestimate how powerful your little bit of quality work can be. It will not be forgotten and will continue to form the horse's nervous system even beyond the work you actually did.

4) **Horses tend to make associations very easily.** If we can give them as much of a 'good' feeling every time they are in the arena as possible, then they will be more relaxed and able to learn there each subsequent time. Tiring them and pushing them beyond their limits will work against what we ultimately want, and can easily create problems which would not have arisen otherwise.

All of our horses expect and enjoy their sugar lump after their work, but the praise and feeling of being valued is just as beneficial if not appreciated quite so apparently!



We have a client who sometimes brings his young horses to us for schooling. Unfortunately, as his main objective is selling them as quickly and spending as little on them as possible, we often have to make serious compromises in terms of how slowly we can bring on his horses. The alternative for them would be a much less sympathetic approach elsewhere, so we don't turn him down, despite the frustration of having to go against our principles.

One of these youngsters that we took on had just turned three, and she had only done a couple of weeks of work previously, which included being ridden. She was only to stay for three weeks to get her ready to be sold to a prospective buyer who had already seen her, but had not been able to ride her on that occasion because the youngster was too wound up for her to manage that day.

Although the young mare, Poppet, had hardly done any training, and she was finely bred, her temperament was naturally generous and sensible. This was just as well, because there was only time to teach her the basic yielding responses. In the limited time we had, the longer-term gymnastic work was only touched upon.

In fact, this kind of approach with a young horse is the more common one, because most people only see the psychological aspect of training a young horse. That is, if they appear to be accepting what you do with them in their minds, then the training is seen as sufficient. The idea that no one can run a marathon without training, and

that equally a young horse should not be ridden without training, doesn't seem to be recognized by many trainers. The problem is, of course, that young horses may accept the process quite happily at first, but when it starts to cause them physical discomfort later on, they are much less happy, and by then it is too late to re-form how they think about it. By then 'work' means discomfort, and is a bad idea in the horse's mind.

Ideas In Action

*In Poppet's case, her apparent acceptance of the work was as a result of gentle, step-by-step familiarization, but it could not ensure her a physically problem-free future. By the time the buyers arrived to see her, she was calmly accepting the basic lunge work, going over a little jump on the lunge and doing a little bit of walk and trot with the rider. Although she was willing to learn, she had not developed the sensitivity to the leg aids which comes as a result of many months of patient schooling, when the horse becomes **physically able** to respond easily to what we ask. Poppet was very trusting at this point because despite the lack of time, she had not been pushed beyond her limits in any one session.*

*The day when her owner, prospective buyer and her trainer came to see her was different unfortunately. The trainer did not seem to recognize that young horses, especially those with a maximum of one month's training in their entire lives, should not have too much asked of them. She insisted that Poppet jump again and again on the lunge, up to a considerable height, which she performed beautifully because of the existing trust bond and her natural talent. It is perfectly obvious by watching a horse going over a jump a minimum of times whether there is a basic ability there, especially considering her prospective buyer was a relatively inexperienced rider. **The point is that a horse is not like car, which will perform because of what it is; a horse's next session is formed by all those which have gone before. Overdoing it one day will have damaging consequences the next day and so on. It doesn't matter how talented a horse is, the only way to access their best work is through their trust in you, and this is only gained and preserved by always putting the horse first.***

I then rode Poppet for a few minutes, followed by her prospective buyer, who was encouraged by her trainer to kick her until she trotted too fast for her to stay in balance, and then to pull her back unsympathetically to walk with the reins. Usually

a horse will respond to the aids with as much as they are ready to cope with, and their capacity to cope increases in tandem with the development of their nervous sensitivity. Because Poppet knew she could only go forward to the leg to a limited degree, as well as be able to stay in balance afterwards, she would only respond in a relatively limited way. The immature response Poppet gave to the leg meant that during our schooling sessions up until then, we were never in a situation where we lost balance, and every subsequent time I asked her, she gave more. This blind forcing through of that sensitive communication we had been forming was of course upsetting to witness, but what was worse was the feeling of betrayal because Poppet gave her best as a result of the relationship we had formed carefully and sensitively, and as in all exploitation, all the credit from this was grasped in one session of ignorance.

After that day Poppet was already different, she was grumpy and stressed and although unfortunately I didn't have a chance to work with her again in the arena before she left, I could see she was building a protective shell around herself so that she would not be so easily taken advantage of again.

This is, of course, not a perfect world, and the best we can ever do is follow our intuition. Everyone is on his or her own learning path, including Poppet. If you understand what I am talking about in this course, however, and it is in accord with your values or it strikes the right note for you, then have the courage to go with what your heart tells you, because training horses is a living art, and everyone who works with horses is an expression of that.

Incidentally I did my best to keep the demands on Poppet to a minimum and we did talk about our values with this trainer, and explain how we believe horses learn best. The only way to further good quality training though, is to work on oneself and become a good example for others.

Lunging Procedure

A rough estimate of lunging progress for the average young horse would be:

Initial sessions: learning to accept the surroundings and the equipment, learning the voice-command for stopping when leading, and taking the contact out onto the lunge. Between 5-10 minutes per session in the arena is enough.

Intermediate sessions: building up muscular strength in engagement ring, suppling the joints which allows bending and straightness to be established as much as possible before ridden work begins. Rider familiarization work i.e. standing at the mounting block, leaning over. Between 10-20 minutes per session is enough.

In my experience young horses are not ready either physically or mentally to begin lunging training before their third year. Allowing sufficient development of bone structure and joints, as well as avoiding overwhelming a young horse's mind, are vital for the success of future training, as well as avoidance of injury and tension.

Stage 1: Introduction to Equipment and Work-Area

The lunging cavesson can feel quite restrictive to a young horse. Putting it on from the front over their head, so you are lifting it above eye-level is also quite challenging for some. Hopefully your youngster is comfortable with coming in to be groomed, so the introduction of tack will be of interest to her, rather than a threat. A head-collar with a buckle on the noseband allows you to get her used to having the cavesson placed on over her head with the head-collar still in place at first. This means you don't have to worry about losing her or having her tied with the head-collar only round the neck, which could be unsafe.

Always follow the same strategy: approach calmly and quietly, and watch for signs of fear. If you see signs of whites in her eye or nervousness, remove the threatening object, reassure in the best way you have found (e.g. grooming, stroking) until the fear is gone, then continue to re-introduce the equipment again. If you always respect your young horse's boundaries in this way, then her trust in you will become stronger and stronger. She will accept that you are never associated with a threat. Don't worry if you have a particularly nervous horse and things seem to take a long time, remember the time spent now is worth months of catch-up time later if it is not

given, and the opportunity to do it right the first time never returns.

With youngsters who are pushy rather than nervous, it is just as important to stay calm and patient. In this case more to show them that you believe in yourself and your leadership qualities. It is more important that such youngsters respect *your* boundaries as well as you being careful to respect theirs, and if they cross into your space without you asking them to, simply place them back out again until they are willing to respect you. Always re-place a fidgeting horse in the same way because knowing that they must yield to you and stay where you want gives them confidence and makes them calm, whatever their temperament.

When you have fitted the lunging cavesson, it's a good idea to leave a little bit of slack in the noseband at first, just a hole or two at the most. This means it will be secure enough to stay in place on the way to the arena, but will allow your horse more time to get used to the restrictive nature of it around her jaw. You can tighten it so that it is secure just before putting the horse out on the lunge.

Leading to the arena or work area is part of the work session, and you are looking for your horse's attention and listening to how she is reacting to the new environment. Try to give the impression that you have all day for this expedition to the arena and always allow for the possibility that you have done enough at any point. Horses will rarely remember the *outcome* of a struggle, only the fear and anxiety of the struggle and where it took place. This is why avoiding struggles is the principle objective, especially the tricky 'first day'. Once you have crossed the threshold to the arena, circle on one rein, usually the left rein is more comfortable for the horse, and make sure you have a good communication by doing some halt transitions. If your horse is tuning into you, and listening, she will sense you stopping and come to a stop beside you. It is good practice to use a particular voice command (we whistle two descending notes) each time you ask your horse to stop, so that she learns that this signal means stop or slow down. This then becomes a very useful tool on the lunge.

The first times you ask her to stop, she is more likely to be focusing elsewhere, so use the exercise itself to gather up her attention. If she doesn't stop when you do, simply let her walk into the block on her progress created by the lunge line you are holding her with. You can also put a hand on her chest to help her understand that you want her to stop. Wait for her attention, usually signaled by an ear flicking back towards you, and walk on again. As soon as she listens reasonably well on one rein, swop to the other.

If you can persuade yourself to wait until your horse really is able to listen to you each time, and ask then, then over time your influence will strengthen to the point

that you will command attention seemingly naturally. Asking a horse to listen when they are focusing elsewhere will not improve your influence in the same way, because even if you succeed in bringing the horse's attention to you, it would not have been given *voluntarily*, and this is the key. **Voluntary responses are the most effective generators of progress in training.** Whether it is giving attention, or giving postural engagement.

Encouraging the horse to take a few steps back in the same way is a very good exercise. It rebalances the horse and teaches them to defer to your space and respect your boundary. Sometimes the idea of displacing themselves in this way for people is foreign to youngsters, and it can be good to familiarize them with it early on.

Asking your horse to back-up a few steps is, after leading, one of the first lessons in **yielding to pressure**, which is the foundation of all gymnastic training of the horse. Because the horse's nose is sensitive, it is better practice to start by pushing on her chest with your hand rather than pulling on the nose with the cavesson. As ever, the amount of pressure you need to use depends entirely on the individual horse's response, so let your intuition guide you, but the general rule is that the pressure

should be gently increased to a reasonable degree, and then maintained until the horse yields, at which point it is immediately released, and praise is given.

Always finish the session with lots of praise. It is very important to let time and patience do much of the training for you. Results in themselves will not necessarily procure further results, and they certainly won't if they were achieved through tension and tiredness. Often just letting something go until next time is amazingly effective.



Stage 2: Introducing Lunging

Teaching a young horse how to be lunged is the same as teaching him how to yield to you. It is only the format that has changed. This is why the clearest, most thorough way for them to learn is stage by stage from one handler, as opposed to being taken out on the circle or led in some way by a helper.

The key is to give out more line only when your horse has 'earned it'. This means

when he will *take the line out from you* because he is yielding to you, both sideways and forwards. The following series of photos show the progress of a young horse out on to the full circle.

Think about making a good example with your own posture. Stay upright and balanced, remember your horse is watching how *you* are moving all the time, and in this way you are influencing him continuously. Just as when riding, the power of your posture is in the alignment of your body. If you can maintain this alignment, and then impose it on the horse, when the horse yields to it, even in the groundwork, he will take up your straightness in his own body.

If you lean into him or compromise your posture to make him yield, the precious straightness is lost and when he steps away, he will not be carrying himself more upright, so in a sense you haven't made any true progress. If he is very difficult to move out onto the lunge at first, do your best to stay centred with your body and mind, and increase the aiding with the lunge whip. You can prod with the handle end or tap with the whole whip while holding the lash.



Photo 1: First steps pushing the horse away.

Whip held handle end towards horse, line short, asking her to step forward and round me to take up the contact. This particular horse can be a little bit 'solid' against the aids, so thinking about keeping myself upright and not leaning in towards her, asking her to yield her body before I follow behind her. I am positioning her neck slightly to the left, but not enough to lose her shoulder and misalign her body. In this position, imagine the horse supporting their body weight with the inside hind-leg and staying upright in the left shoulder so they can step across without falling in.



Photo 2: Beginning to change whip round in my hand as the space opens up for it.

Totale is successfully 'launched' out on to the circle without loss of contact. In this photo she is just passing the gate on the right and thinking about heading towards it with her shoulders, so I am holding myself more upright above my pelvis and keeping my shoulders as directly above my hips as I can, this alignment is transmitted to her and with the help of line positioning and steady whip, I can keep her straight.



Photo 3: Gradually increasing the distance between us without losing the contact. Still thinking about aligning my torso with her torso, so that when I control mine she will pick that up. It is important not to underestimate a horse's capacity to read your body language. At this point she is traveling quite easily forward so my whip aids are more for guarding her quarters out on the 'straight' bend than for driving.



Photo 4: Now in trot having prepared the transition in balance and alignment. This is why she is moving in a nice parabola, working into the engagement ring. Her neck carriage is how she is comfortable for this stage of her training, and will only strengthen and rise as she continues to work in this way. Attempting to alter it with auxiliary reins would cause her to back off with her hind-legs and drop her back. Her

'diagonals' are not yet 100% correct, but she is not in the engagement she would be in eventually with a rider (look at HHT page *What does 'on the bit' Really Mean?* - <http://www.happy-horse-training.com/on-the-bit.html> for info on correct diagonal pairs). What is important here is that she is carrying herself and aligning her body as straight as she can at this stage.



Photo 5: Halting and staying nicely out on the circle. Indicate with your body language that you want the horse to stay in place right up until you ask for them to move on again. If you are approaching to change the rein, sometimes a horse will move as you take the line in towards them to try to anticipate it - if you place them back consistently where they were initially, they will become more willing to wait in all situations.

Remember that **the quality of the contact you have in the lunge line is the expression of your progress**. If you start from the very beginning to only ever feed out to the horse what he takes up in going out nicely onto the circle, accepting the bend and yielding from your driving aids, then you will maintain a very high quality of work. Even if it takes your horse some weeks to willingly take the contact out onto a large circle, every step he makes will be strengthening him and suppling him. On the other hand, letting him out any old how, with the line often loose, he will be much more likely to rush or fall in, or to spin round or stop, and your control will be less effective because your basic contact is missing or inconsistent. Think of it like a lump of dough on a board, it is your job to stretch it out with the rolling pin - in the case of your horse you are straightening him out by stretching his body, by means of your connection with him via the lunge line. If he can connect with you like a yo-yo, elastic and sensitive, yet never slack, then you are engaging him already and forming a solid foundation for all future work in engagement.

Your mobility as a lunger is very important. It is true that if you stay in exactly the same place in the centre of the circle and ask the horse to align to the bend around you, then you will have a good idea of how straightly he is moving by how well he stays on a consistent contact around you. When you walk around while lungeing this is not so obvious, because you yourself might not be moving on a perfect inner circle

NB. 'Straight' in this context means that the horse is aligning himself straight in relation *to the bend*, i.e. his hind feet come on the line of his fore feet, like a train on its tracks. A train is built in a rectilinear format so it moves straight all the time irrespective of whether the track makes bends or straight lines. Part of our goal with a horse is to achieve this continuous straightness in movement.

I feel that it is very important, at first, to be able to move around when lungeing, and stay in touch with the horse all the time, the following are some reasons for this:

- To give you enough flexibility to be able to stay gentle with the line and not have to jerk the horse's head because he was moving too fast for you to keep up.
- To give the horse more space quickly without having to upset the contact by changing the length of the line.
- To give you a quicker reaction speed when you want to approach the horse to drive him forward at a crucial movement.

- To avoid losing the correct bend if the horse falls in towards you, so that you can quickly make the circle smaller whilst keeping the contact.

It is good practice therefore to develop both your ability to stay in one place *and* your ability to move with your horse. Staying still requires enough drivability from your horse that you don't have to get closer to him by shortening the line and walking alongside (which is what to do if your horse is lagging and either doesn't respond or reacts tensely to a more active whip). Moving must be done smoothly and with some awareness of your geometry, maintaining your posture and staying in synchrony with the horse. Moving alongside the horse requires you to walk parallel with his line of movement and moving closer to him requires you to move forward perpendicularly to his line of movement.

The priority is always maintaining the calmness and engagement of the horse, and this is done primarily by maintaining the correct bend through the lunge-line contact. How much you move or stay still with any individual horse depends on this.

The young horse must learn to stay in place after the final halt transition. This is a good discipline because it encourages self-control, and introduces the youngster to the feeling of supporting himself physically, which will be part of his role under the rider. Practically, it allows the handler to wind up the lunge line in peace (if you wish to change the rein, you can take the loop in the other hand and wind up the line the opposite way round so it is ready for the new direction).

As with all of these exercises, the most important thing is to avoid making an issue out of it. Some youngsters can stay in place straight away, and others seem to have a terrible difficulty with it, usually on one rein more than the other. Mostly this discrepancy can be traced back to a gap in the learning progression.

Halting on the lunge is a step up from halting and waiting obediently beside you when leading, and if this exercise is established properly, halting and waiting with you at a distance is not usually a problem. **The best way to avoid a problem is to increase the distance at which you ask for the halt very gradually.** If he does move it is usually a good idea to gently push him on again and prepare another halt, until he realizes he has to wait. Sometimes this creates too much of an issue though, and it gives a better understanding to wind up the line and stop the horse when you reach him. **Try to stay aware of whether you are remaining in your teacher role, or if you have slipped into the role of antagonist because your horse is annoying you with his behaviour.**

Stage 3: Working Towards Engagement

How To Listen

From the beginning of training with your young horse, or any horse you wish to re-train, it is vital to look for the *quality* of the work the horse is producing as opposed to how fast she is progressing in learning the different movements i.e. transitions or lateral movements. This is because the goal in dressage is always to produce the highest possible quality from the natural movement *of any horse*. If you make the goal how many movements you can do, the quality will always be lost. If, however, you *use the different movements to improve the quality*, then they will be learned as and when they are right for that horse.

Starting with the young horse on the lunge, you will begin to be able to examine her movement as she is gradually able to take out the line and stay on the circle in contact. There is so much to see when a horse is moving, but equally, I can remember when I used to watch a horse moving and felt like I wasn't seeing anything. It is an inescapable truth that experience counts for a lot, and that practice makes perfect, but it must be *intelligent* practice. Knowing what you are supposed to be looking for helps to speed things up a lot.

What I call the ***Stop/Go theory*** may help to clarify what is going on if you are struggling:

Thinking of engagement as being like a state of connection - as if the strings were pulled and the puppet started to move in coordination, or the mechanism switches on and the cogs turn together - then any movement which is *outside* of this engagement is not *controlled by the regulation* of the engagement. Just as a bicycle freewheeling is not being regulated by the gears. It follows that this unregulated movement can be escaping engagement on the 'faster' side or the 'slower' side, or what I call the 'stop' and the 'go'.

'Stopping' is when a horse is 'behind the aids', meaning she is dropping back and not accepting some, or several parts of the engagement.

'Going' is when a horse is 'in front of the aids' meaning she is rushing past the same engagement channel.

You could also think of the horse working in engagement like tuning into a particular

radio station – if the radio is tuned to either a lower or a higher frequency, the station will be missed.

This stop/go disengagement is usually quite clear on the lunge without a rider. Some horses will be stuck on one side or the other, for example a very sluggish horse will spend most of her time on the stop side, and some horses will rush all the time, constantly in 'go'. Other horses who are probably a bit further along in their training might alternate between the two, i.e. when too much impulsion is lost the horse will drop back into 'stop' mode, and if her speed builds up too much for her balance and she runs, she will tip over into 'go' mode.

As the horse builds up more strength she will be able to spend more time 'within' engagement. When a horse works within engagement, she is also working in **balance**, and likewise if she is moving either in 'stop' (hanging back) or in 'go' (rushing) she will be unbalanced. It also follows that engaged horses are working as much in **straightness** as their present physiology allows, and unengaged horses are moving crookedly. Understanding some of the reasons for lack of balance and straightness will help you to both recognize what is going on and have a better idea of what is fair to expect of your horse over time.

It is only possible to study conformational issues when the horse is moving in a state of calmness. Tension can either improve or worsen the appearance of a horse's movement. For example lameness or irregularity in the stride can be transcended if enough adrenaline is pumping through the horse's system. On the other hand tension often makes horses rush, flatten and fall in more easily. Tension itself is just as important to identify and resolve as working on the horse's basic movement, as **tense horses cannot learn.**

The most common reasons for any horse to be tense during work in the arena:

- **Lack of exercise**, which goes back to lifestyle. The more natural your horse's lifestyle is, the calmer and more receptive he will be to working.
- **Overfeeding/wrong type of feeding**. Look at the HHT website horse nutrition page (<http://www.happy-horse-training.com/horse-nutrition.html>).
- Lack of trust in trainer.

- **Physical problem** causing discomfort or pain.
- **Not mature enough yet** to cope with training. All horses mature at different rates. In general, most horses are ready to begin lunging at the age of three. Occasionally they are ready at two and a half years, but I don't believe starting earlier than that is productive because I don't feel their bone structure is developed enough. Why start a horse too early when it shortens their functional life so much more than the time that is gained? A horse which is allowed to develop properly and trained carefully can still be working without difficulty well into their twenties. As well as the fact that a horse acquires greater and greater training value as he gets older. A schoolmaster is not easily replaced.

Often a good way to tell if a youngster is ready for work is how calmly they respond to the initial lunging training. If they seem particularly distracted and spooky there is no harm in waiting a few months.

Some '**Tension Tendencies**' to help work out why a horse may be tense:

- If the tension seems to work itself out every time and is particularly related to the first part of the session it is likely to be exercise or food related. If it seems to extend back earlier and earlier before the session i.e. at first it is in the arena only, then going down to the arena and eventually when you go to catch him in the field, then it is most likely to be pain related or trust related. Basically the horse is not enjoying the work and anticipates the bad experience further and further ahead (as in Jasmine's case when her problems started to come out).
- Occasionally a pain problem will improve with the work, but if the horse gets more and more tense as the session goes on then it is most likely to be a tack problem, a physical problem, or both.
- Tension in a horse will escalate as a result of bad handling in the same way. Whether it is abusive or forceful handling, or over tentative and hesitant, the problem will tend to worsen over time.

Of course there are often several elements which are out of balance, and figuring out each unique pattern is part of the training process. Positive and negative circles become a familiar concept when handling and training horses. It is true also that some level of tension can arise as a result of the conformational faults which are at

the root of balance problems. Equally, just because there is a problem doesn't mean things are going wrong, it is simply a part of the training process of that horse, to figure out and resolve whatever comes up.

How To React To Tension



When these photos were taken, the young mare, Totale, had been being ridden independently from the lunge line for only a short time. The first picture shows her distracted by the dog outside the arena, and as her full attention is taken away from me, I wait until she has studied the dog and decided to put her ears back to ask my advice (second photo). Then I ask her to walk on and she accepts the aid because I have her attention so she can actually hear the aid, and because she is no longer worried or distracted by the dog (third photo).



Over time, as her trust in the rider builds because she has not been forced to do something which frightened her, she will be distracted less and less. This time is well spent.



Being frightened yourself that your horse is 'getting away with it' both gives your horse the wrong signals and is a misunderstanding of his psychology. If distraction continues to build in the work, there is an underlying issue, usually physical, which needs to be addressed.

Balance: Longitudinal & Lateral

Longitudinal Balance

The natural longitudinal balance of any horse depends on their conformation to a large degree, and is also be affected by the suppleness of the spinal column and the joints. Good natural balance makes the rider's job much easier. This is why horses are currently being bred to move in a more and more 'uphill' posture from the beginning of their training (photo right). Horses, on the other hand, which are croup-high and have a low set-on neck will have to achieve complete body rebalancing before they are even starting at the same place as a level horse with a high set-on neck.



This course is more concerned with the process of training *any* horse to bring out his best movement, as opposed to how quickly and easily the advanced movements can be performed. The point is to observe how *your* horse finds her balance naturally.

Lack of balance can manifest in different ways depending on the horse's conformation.

Common Reasons for Lack of Balance Relating to Conformation:

The following are some observations I have made of the horses I have worked with. For more in-depth discussion on conformational analysis there is no better source than the books written by Dr. Deb Bennett (www.equinestudies.org).

- **Rushing** (natural tendency to 'Go') because the horse's conformation directs the horse's weight towards the front, or the horse finds it hard to carry weight behind, which ultimately comes to the same thing. Typical faults are:

CROUP-HIGH (croup sits higher than withers) (Dechie, shown in the photo's below, has many other conformational difficulties, but the fundamental fact of her being higher behind than in front means she has to collect and balance herself to a great degree before she is even balanced on the horizontal. Further collection is therefore a big challenge for her.



POST-LEGGED (angle of hock joints too open because leg is too short)

Mojo (below) is made with a thoroughbred style balance, although with a short neck, (and a big head as well!). His greatest difficulty however has been the lack of flexibility in the joints of his hind-leg, the stifles in particular, which makes sitting into his hocks very difficult for him. He took a long time to be able to listen to collecting aids properly, and to not want to rush all the time.



- **Hanging back** (natural tendency to 'stop') is because forward movement is an effort due to unhelpful conformation. Some horses rush when they feel unbalanced and some horses are more prone to hanging back. It's hard to tell if this relates more to the nature of the particular conformational difficulties or the individual temperament of each horse. Conformational faults tend to be anything which reduces the horses athleticism and therefore ease of movement.

It is normal in the early days with a young horse to encounter a bit of reluctance, in fact we have found hanging back is more common with confident, relaxed youngsters at first than rushing, so it is not necessarily an 'issue' unless it persists beyond the first few months or so of training.

CROOKED LIMBS (can be in one or more parts of the leg, and in any leg)

Ca-Va developed with serious bow-legs (below, left) which have caused her problems in her feet especially, due to the abnormal strain. She found training a struggle, in particular the preparatory work on the lunge, but work in engagement (below, right) has helped her develop musculature which straightens her movement and eases the inequality.



This is a typical fault that reduces a horse's desire to move. This makes sense because moving is more awkward and requires more energy than for a straight-limbed horse.

POOR FEET (horses with genetically small/thin soled, flat or narrow feet)

Xas (below) has always had small and badly formed feet, her mother did also. With Xas we have managed to keep them healthy enough not to develop debilitating sand-cracks (as her mother's feet did), and they are gradually taking up better size and shape. Although she has always been reluctant to go forward, she has so many other issues that we are not sure how much of it can be attributed to her feet. It is not really possible to separate out nature and nurture for any of these examples, but feet in particular are extremely dependent on good management, and for feet that have a genetic susceptibility to problems it is all the more important. We suspect that in many cases, soreness and over-sensitivity in the feet is one of the major reasons for apparent reluctance of horses to go forward.



Lateral Balance

Horses are well known to take their corners 'like a motorbike' when they move in their natural way - leaning their bodies into the bend and counter-bending as opposed to 'describing' the bend with their bodies, as we train them to do under saddle. Their hind-legs push off from the ground and propel their body forward through the transmission of the force in the sacroiliac joint (where the pelvis joins the spinal column). As each hind-leg pushes off it causes the rib cage to swing out at that side, when the pelvis tilts backwards and that side of the spine stretches. The hind-legs thrust in a way that sends the weight of the horse forward towards the

shoulders, similar to the way a chicken runs on it's back legs.

This action is fundamentally different to that which is desirable to a rider who wishes the horse to compensate for his weight - a weight which would completely destabilize a horse moving in this way. A rider wants to influence the horse to thrust with the hind-leg both straight in relation to his body, and reaching as far under his body mass as possible. The rider must also minimize the swing of the ribcage as much as possible by strengthening the horse's abdominal musculature, so that the full energy of the hind-legs is transmitted straight through the spine, which lifts to support the rider. This requires a lot of postural strength in the horse and is obviously not an economical way for a horse to move without a rider.

As is discussed below, the situation is complicated by the developmental crookedness which causes horses to thrust differently with each hind-leg and be uneven in their bodies, displacing the ribcage to differing degrees. This discrepancy must also be regulated by the rider.

Different conformations of the hind leg, pelvis and ribcage will result in different types of action, but the basic natural 'motor-bike' lateral balance is there in all horses and must be re-channeled by the same fundamental postural control in all riders.



In the photo above (left) Hope is obligingly demonstrating the 'motorbike' counter-bending posture that is natural to all horses. The main reason that we want to train horses to carry themselves differently when carrying a rider is that this way of moving is too unstable to allow a rider to control a horse with their posture. Controlling a horse posturally requires enough stability that the horse can respond to differences in weight in different places. In the above photo of



In this photo Hope moves in a balanced way, 120 upright on the correct bend.

Hope it can be easily seen that there is not much room for error, and the weight of a rider would push her beyond what she could manage and she would have trouble staying upright, let alone responding to subtle aids. The other reason for re-balancing horses for a rider is that the additional weight of a rider places too much strain on the horse's joints, particularly in the front legs where most of the weight is supported. If we don't go about it in the right way bio-mechanically however, we can cause considerable damage to the joints in the hind-leg as a result of the 'whip-lash' effect of rein -based riding.

Ideas In Action

Hope is an interesting case in terms of lunge training. When she arrived she was only a six year old, but her confidence was at rock bottom. Physically she was unbalanced to the point where she found it hard to stay upright in a field with the other horses. She was a typical young horse who had been backed and brought on without addressing her physical educational requirements, and this had then influenced her mind. She was insecure and prone to panic attacks, and had decided that people were fundamentally untrustworthy. It took some years to rehabilitate her, but she became a horse particularly gifted in engagement. I think it gave her confidence because she felt absolutely secure and she probably felt a kind of physical high when she worked.

She had worked on the lunge in the beginning, and there was a reasonable degree of stress which was accelerated when I tried to lunge her with a rider. This stage had been missed out in her original re-training because no-one was available at the time, and as she had been being ridden before, she was started straight out off the lunge albeit very gradually. It was probably better to have done it that way, because by the time I eventually discovered how she felt about it, I already had a strong trust bond with her. She froze in terror when she was in the scenario of being lunged with someone on her back. It was surprising because she was very reliably forward off the lunge by then, but this was a classic PTSD trigger (see Trauma appendix) and she went straight into a panic attack. I can only imagine it came from her original backing process. She had certainly been very weak, and her behaviour suggested she had been in a highly restrictive auxiliary aid.

As is necessary with such traumatization, there was nothing to be gained by continuing that day. We addressed it over time in a much less direct way,

occasionally putting her back into a similar situation, such as teaching someone on her and standing close by, and incorporating more lunging without a rider.

She continued to go through her healing/training process, and she let go of a major compensation in her pelvis which provoked a fetlock strain and a massive abscess in the other hind-leg, all in one year. As part of her recovery, I started lunging her again because as her back musculature had changed so much she was not yet comfortable with a rider. Much of her previous stress reaction to the lunging had 'normalized'. Although without a rider she had not had the full-blown freezing, or 'dissociation' response, she had been more difficult to reach. Now she expresses stress in a more natural way by having a leap about, and she doesn't get wound-up and lost in her own panic, which did happen quite often before.

This time it will be interesting to see how she copes with a rider on the lunge again.



It is always a long journey in these cases, but what we notice most is that the more 'layers' of stored up damage and negative emotion that are released, the clearer and brighter their energy becomes. This comes across that they seem healthier, their coat is brighter and the colour richer. They behave more normally and seem more present and responsive, and their movement becomes more supple and relaxed.

Straightness

It is odd that despite the fundamental importance of straightness and its development in dressage horses, it is discussed relatively rarely and it is even rarer to see a dressage horse in competition, moving with a nice bend round the corners, equal on both reins. More often than not it is obvious that riders are bringing their mounts into the corners and bends with the outside rein, which means true straightness and acceptance of the inside leg of the rider has not been achieved.

Straightness does not only mean that the two hind legs are working more and more equally, it means the horse's *whole body* must achieve more and more equality.

Often the extent of a horse's crookedness is not apparent because it is so well managed by the horse. This perfect compensation begins to form as soon as a foal begins to move. The crookedness is expressed in the whole body; it is in the way the rib cage sits under the spine, in the way the scapulae sit, and the sacroiliacs. Sometimes it is aggravated by injury, often pelvic injuries and the effects of injury in any part of the horse's body will radiate through the whole system in the same way as ripples in a pool.

Horses bred with bigger, stronger and in particular more flexible joints are less restricted into their crookedness pattern. This means they can perform better despite it, but it is always there to some extent, and true dressage is about addressing it. This is why it is a *gradual* process, because straightening a horse requires the actual physical **re-formation** of his body.

Straightening a horse is not only transiently reshaping their posture for the duration of a ride, it is about bringing about a lasting change in primarily the musculature, but the whole structure can remould itself. Obviously some parts of the body are more susceptible to change than others, the fascia and the muscles reform more easily than bone, but we all replace all of the cells of our bodies over time. **If the fundamental energetic patterning can be changed, then the physical manifestation of that will change.** This process can be achieved to some degree by training both on the ground and riding, but true re-patterning also requires some form of energy work/therapy. The physical differences we see in the horses over time can be remarkable, upside down necks become elegant and dipped backs come right up. In particular we notice the shape of the belly and rib cage area which flattens and strengthens, so the swing side to side is minimized and transmission from the hind-legs maximized.

Teaching yourself to recognize the crookedness of your horse on the lunge gives you a huge advantage for when you come to ride because the three-dimensional understanding you will have developed will help you to feel better how to place yourself in the saddle in order to avoid becoming just another part of the compensation process.



The longitudinal crookedness/straightness of this young horse can be seen clearly in these different photos – the photo's on the left show hollowing and lack of correct bending, and those on the right show longitudinal stretch and bend.



Looking for straightness is not a question of trying to see how each individual limb follows another, or watching for where the footfalls land in relation to each other. It is much grander than that. You are looking for straightness of *the whole structure*. Being able to see the whole structure requires an ability to sense as much as to see, to feel the movement. Almost to *put yourself into your horse's body* and understand how it feels for him. Information from the following physical sources will inform this intuition:

- **Contact consistency** in the line: crookedness expresses itself in the inability of the horse to carry herself **upright** in her rib cage and **around** the circle. This sideways slant of the ribcage, causes a horse to fall in towards the trainer, or hang out away from them, and this is evident in the lunge-line as a lack of contact or a hauling weight respectively. When a horse straightens up, all the different parts of her body straighten together, like a puppet when the strings are pulled. When the horse is straight in this way, the movement is channeled from the driving hind-legs into the line contact at the nose, and it can be felt in the contact as a steady connection right through the horse's whole body to the hind-legs.

- **Driveability** is affected directly by the level of straightness i.e. the straighter the horse, the more driveable she is. Think of driveability like the horse being 'in gear', or having 'traction-on'. When a horse is crooked it is like a lorry which is fishtailing and has no traction, and putting the accelerator down will not help the situation. The gradual improvement in the consistency with which you can ask your horse to go forward is the best evidence you can have that your horse is becoming straighter. Drivability mustn't be confused with the horse being push-able because he is hanging back though. The difference is that truly drivable horses are willing and sensitive. You can tell if a horse is hanging back, or in 'stop mode', because when he comes out of it he will tend to overshoot into rushing (go mode) before becoming correctly driveable. It is a bit like tuning a radio when you are seeking to engage your horse through lunging, he will come closer and closer to the precise connection, and you need to refine your aiding accordingly.
- **Alignment Observation:**

Longitudinal straightness can be seen by fixing your eye on a particular part of the horse's body. I usually look at the ribcage area because it is the middle of the horse's body and also where the rider sits. Keeping this as your reference point, allow your eye to travel over the rest of the horse's body and see if you can perceive the whole body alignment. Horses moving in their natural fashion will 'jack-knife' i.e. their neck will bend round the circle but their body carries straight on. It can be clearly understood that just bringing a horse's neck round without correcting the whole body alignment will not improve the horse's transmission of power from the hind-legs or control of the horse's direction and balance.



The left-hand photo above shows a clear 'jack-knifing' – the neck is bending in but the shoulder is falling out on the circle. The right-hand photo shows the horse's whole body correctly aligned on the bend.

Lateral straightness is easier to feel than see, but look for a slight rotation or tilt of the pelvis and spinal cord. This tilt usually follows the direction of the lie of the horse's mane i.e. if the horse's mane lies to the right, as is more common, the crest will be tilting slightly to the right and the whole vertebral column tipping right, including a slight dropping of the right side of the pelvis. As the pelvis also turns in to the right (what I have referred to as the 'longitudinal' alignment) the right hind-leg will then be carried more angled-in under the body (towards the horse's midline) than the left, which tends to get left out behind more. It seems that the majority of horses follow the above pattern of an 'easier' right bend, but it is equally possible that your horse may be the opposite way around, and be more 'contracted' in his left side. Some horses may also change bends during the course of their training.



It can be seen in these two photos that although Dechie is aligning nicely longitudinally, the rotation of her spine and ribcage to the left is still marked. It can be seen on both reins, despite the change of bend on the right rein. On the right rein she appears to be holding herself up straighter round the bend but this is mainly because her ribcage rotation goes to the outside so it acts against the destabilizing forces of the circle. She does have a particularly unhelpful conformation in that her back is very long and her ribcage is large and round, her joints are relatively small for her body-weight and she is also croup high. The lateral rotation of her ribcage is pronounced because of its size and shape, and it is therefore hard for her to hold it upright under a rider and then tuck her pelvis under and raise her forehead against her horizontal top-line. Sometimes horses who are really up against their own physiology in this way give the most rare feelings of connection

however, when they do transform, and I am sure they feel the achievement as deeply as we do.

The subject of balance and straightness is discussed further in the riding part of this course, but even at the preparatory lunging stage understanding something of your horse's balance and straightness tendencies is certainly helpful for preparing him to carry himself in the way which will strengthen him physically to be ridden. The longitudinal straightness is easier to influence on the lunge than the lateral straightness (as the above photos illustrate), which must be corrected mainly from the direct postural influence of the rider.



How To React

The next part of the process is the reaction phase. The **listening** phase and the **reaction** phase are two sides of the same coin, and are virtually inseparable such is their necessary synchrony; the less apparent the divide between them, the more skilled the training. If either phase becomes out of balance with the other then the balance will be lost. Think of it like breathing: listening is the in-breath, and reacting is the out-breath. They both originate from the same source, you, and connect with the same target, your horse.

It is interesting to learn your own personal preference i.e. whether you are a 'doer' or a 'watcher', this will make it easier for you to harmonize your training. Your natural tendency will often try to overwhelm the side which comes less easily, but sometimes after years of taking care to promote the lesser inclination, you will find you have lost too much of your original disposition.

Many horsey people start out as doers, and as they get older and wiser they back off and listen more. The opposite can be true of riders who have an initial lack of confidence, which they overcome to such an extent that they become almost too 'effective'. It is through fusing the strengths of both that the greatest harmony is achieved.

Practice being aware of whether you are listening or reacting. When you watch the horse in order to gauge his balance and mood in that moment you are listening, and when you either push him on or wait for him to relax, you are reacting. Try to observe how easily and smoothly you can slip between one and the other. Notice if you forget to take the time to listen to him, or if you are slow to react at the right moment. Eventually they become so harmonized that seem to almost mould into one state of mind. Highly concentrated, but without tension and before thought.

This kind of self-assessment requires a high level of concentration, but as powers of concentration are often a stumbling block for riders, it is good practice!

Creating the Right Rapport

Unfortunately the paradoxical nature of dressage has led to a particularly universal misunderstanding: when a horse is highly trained and he remains consistently balanced, he is then consistently driveable, and he can be asked to work towards the maximum of his impulsion range for as long as his energy allows.

This capacity for forward movement is then misunderstood. Instead of being seen as the accomplishment of years of work developing the strength in balance which allows it, it is seen as something which must be created artificially and imposed upon the horse's way of going. It is a similar mistake to 'pulling a horse's head in' because engaged horses carry their necks in an arched position, and it results in the same vicious circle.

Horses pushed 'forward' out of rhythm perpetually do not develop the ability to balance, they simply seek to balance themselves in the rein, and often the rider is only too happy to support them in this because in turn it supports their own posture. While such horses are not accepting the leg, because they are running and undriveable (the same scenario as rushing on the lunge) they also gradually become less and less sensitive to the leg because they are perpetually tense and their body becomes gradually more wooden and stiff as the vicious circle goes on.



These two photos show the difference between a horse (left) that is ready to push on (or driveable) because he is in balance, and one (right) that is not driveable because it is falling forwards onto the forehand. As described above, this is very similar to the difference between a car that is in-gear and one that is freewheeling.

Horses which begin their training by being pushed out of rhythm on the lunge will begin to stiffen in the same way. This is very easy to do with a young or untrained horse, because they do not yet have the postural strength to remain in balance when pushed forwards. It must also be remembered that flight is often a fear response in a horse, and anything which resembles that must be avoided until enough trust exists in the partnership.

The horse must therefore be encouraged and allowed to work in relaxation. This subject has been discussed in terms of the horse's general state of mind during the session i.e. whether he displays tension or not, but applying it directly in his work means that he must above all learn to *take his time*.

A horse pushed to move 'forward' too enthusiastically will encounter the following difficulties:

- Not having the time within each stride to complete the full muscular contraction and relaxation results in a loss of quality in the movement, and inefficient muscular development.

It requires much more **postural effort** for a horse to maintain a pace at the slowest possible rhythm than it does for him to rush. Training a racehorse concerns primarily the aerobic musculature and the cardiovascular system. Training a dressage horse is about training the anaerobic musculature i.e. the postural/core muscles. It is only when horses become strong enough in their core

muscles, and supple in their joints, that they are able to move with more elevation and cadence. Ultimately the goal is to develop the maximum possible elevation and drive, but the muscle memory and strength for the basic balance must be **established before it is jeopardized** by pushing on. In fact it is usually a case of gradually stretching the boundaries each session, otherwise not only the balance is threatened, but also the good will of the horse.

- It is only at that magical moment when the horse is nearing the downward transition that, in controlling his forward impetus, he *has* to use his postural muscles more actively to balance himself. He will contract his abdominal muscles, which lifts his back, tucking his pelvis and dropping more weight into his hind-legs. This means the hind-legs are lifted further forwards under the belly to receive the extra weight, and the hip, stifle and hock joints all flex more to control the weight and slow the whole horse down. The front legs and shoulders are then freer to describe a more elevated stride.

This muscular pattern is the ring of engagement of course, and it is exactly what we are looking to strengthen.

Young and untrained horses, unless they are particularly athletic, will only bring these muscles into force as a result of adrenalin (getting excited or nervous) or as described above, as a means of balancing themselves. Working with stressed horses, as has been discussed in several ways, is undesirable because the horse's body must be receptive to physiological development, and their mind must be receptive to the connection we wish to develop with them.

Horses pumped up with adrenalin are receptive, neither physically nor mentally, and will only learn in this way by conditioning. For example, some trainers might teach a horse to perform certain dressage movements because he moves in that way when he gets tense. The problem with this is that the rider's 'voice' is then short-circuited, and the horse's reaction becomes unpredictable, because it was not initiated as a result of systematic development of rider-horse connection, both physical and psychological. Such horses can become erratic and bizarre in their behaviour, especially when they become tense because tension was used as a trigger in the first place. It is a bit like the idea of a machine starting to work away of its own accord once it has been switched on.

Returning to the subject of the magical 'balancing' moment, we can only create the window of opportunity for this by working the horse closer and closer to the

moment in the stride where it is a natural consequence of rebalancing i.e. in trot working as close to the walk transition as possible.

- It is obvious that if a horse is pushed out of balance he will then use the opposite musculature to that of the ring of engagement. He is being pushed further away from the opportunity to rebalance himself in the desirable way. More weight will become displaced to the forehand and he will often tighten his back muscles and therefore hollow his back to act as a brake. Incidentally if his neck is being forced into a false roundness by restrictive side-reins or other gadgets, this hollowing will be more difficult to see. The damage done by forcibly dividing the reactions of one muscle group from those of another - in this case the back and the neck - is one of the most difficult to heal. We always want to know exactly what is going on for the horse, nothing must be disguised or inhibited by means of force. In order to properly address undesirable resistance, its source must first be understood and the way we deal with it must induce calm not tension.

Putting the above argument into the context of the 'stop/go' theory, pushing a horse forward out of balance is the same as pushing him into the 'go' evasion. As many youngsters start out favouring the 'stop' evasion i.e. they tend to hang back and are ambivalent about going forward willingly, if they are then over-pushed for the sake of 'forwardness', they will often become stressed and tighten up physically.

Think about it in terms of control, which is the bottom line in training. If your youngster is hanging back in the stop phase and you push him forward out of balance, he will just go from one out of control state into another. If however you push him just enough that he no longer dawdles and hesitates, and his forward movement has been created by *you*, he will remain in balance and continue to be able to listen to you. As well as being in the balance which has the most potential for him to engage his postural muscles, you will also remain *in control throughout*.

This is the secret: **you are the catalyst between the stop and the go phases**. You are responsible for maintaining enough impulsion to keep your dinghy afloat (horse going forward), yet moving with enough balance and straightness not to be swept off with the current (horse rushing).

When the horse begins to realize that it is you who keeps him in balance (feeling safe) and also you who keeps him going forward (accepting your aids) then he will really begin to trust you. In this way you are fulfilling your role as leader. So you are training his body *and* reaching his mind.

Just as with riding, the bulk of your work on the lunge is devoted to successfully establishing the connection with your horse described above, where you feel as if you and the horse are connected through the line in a flexible, elastic relationship. The horse goes forward from your driving aids into relaxed but energetic movement and is in the process of improving his balanced carriage and physical alignment each time he works.

In the same way as someone who is skilled with a yo-yo can perform more complicated manoeuvres as a result of the quality of the basic connection, so will a good lunging connection initiate successful transitions and lateral movement. **It is very important to appreciate that these exercises all come about *as a result of the existence of this basic rapport.***

When you successfully bring your horse to the moment where he is required to balance himself, you will find that instead of complying, your horse may attempt to evade taking up this more engaged posture. This is obviously because it requires extra effort and sometimes it is difficult for horses to stretch their spine in this way, take more weight into their hocks or stifles, or even loosen their neck. Most horses will evade by seeking out their natural lateral balance. As described above, they will push their bodies into the circle and lose the alignment. This loss of bend is accompanied by falling in towards the trainer, and loss of the precious contact in the line. This evasion is as common as rushing and hanging back, and will be triggered by any circumstance where the horse is challenged either mentally or physically because although for us it may be an evasion from what we desire of our horse, for the horse it is entirely natural. Just as we will subconsciously attempt to control with our hands or protect our vulnerable organs by crouching when we feel threatened, so will the horse slip back into his elemental locomotion.

Part of our skill as a trainer is to anticipate this persistent undercurrent which is always waiting to lure the horse out of his new training, when we sense the signs of our communication breaking up we must react instantly. Eventually we can avert most evasion because we become skilled enough in this, and in parallel to that the horse becomes stronger and less susceptible to slipping back.



These three photos illustrate the two extremes of the stop/go evasions, and the desired state of engagement. The above left photo shows the 'stop' reaction where the horse is backing off engagement, above right is the 'go' evasion when the horse speeds up and loses balance, and the photo below shows engagement in balance.



Preventing & Salvaging The Loss Of Contact

It is vital in your lungeing work to pay close attention to the quality of your contact in the lunge-line, as this is your principle connection with the horse, and it has the vital role of positioning the horse's front end in onto the bend, allowing the whip to then do its job of flexing the horse's body out. Your goal is to make the contact as consistent as possible, and to have a steady, elastic, 'leading forwards' feeling. Whenever you lose this feeling in the contact, you need to identify why it happened and what to do about it.

- Slowing the horse down at any time leaves him more vulnerable to misaligning his body, so be ready with the supporting lunge whip aiding. This means holding the whip steady at the part of the horse's body you sense he might fall in with, like making a preventative wall. Use your own posture to signal to the horse to stay 'upright' and bending around you. You may find to begin with that whenever

you attempt to prevent your horse from falling in with the lunge whip as described above, he evades by speeding up (the 'go' evasion). This can be a frustrating problem, whether the horse is simply misinterpreting your use of the whip, or deliberately evading it. The solution is, above all, to remain patient – wait for your horse to slow back down again and go back to gently asking him to stay out with the 'pointing' whip. You may need to moderate your use of the whip to find the point at which the horse accepts it pushing him away without running off, for example holding it lower, pointing in more towards his shoulder, or keeping it stiller. Visualization can also be a remarkably powerful tool for slowing a horse down who is running – for example, imagine turning your lunge line into an energetic wall that slows the horse down as you use the whip gently to keep him out.

- Much of the channeling of the horse's body, as has been explained, is in maintaining the contact by driving aids and transmitting your own postural engagement. Just as the reins will 'complete the circle' when riding, so does the line do this in connection with your arm. As described above in the previous section 'handling the line', when the contact in the line is lost, it is not only important to readjust the length of the line as quickly as possible to the new requirement, but also to accentuate the positioning of the horse, with the line, onto the bend, in harmony with his momentum.

Remember that re-forming your horse's movement is a gradual process, and he is moving crookedly to a certain degree at all times. When you are bringing him into the slow, careful motion which makes him more susceptible to engaging himself correctly, it will also render him more vulnerable to misaligning himself completely as previously explained. This is because this 'magical' moment of susceptibility is like a portal, a doorway to change. If there is a key to dressage then this is certainly it, at least in the gymnastic dimension. It must be sought at all stages of training, and the more frequently it is found and used to stretch and remould the horse into the new engagement carriage we desire, the quicker we will see the results. In fact the results are utterly transformational and your horse will change into a sculpture of beauty you could not have imagined. Many horses never transform in this way because they are never brought to that moment and redirected. It is not in itself particularly complicated, but it is not obvious either, a bit like redirecting a fast flowing river onto a new, less defined channel.

- Once the horse is realigned and the engagement 'stretch' is re-established, it is important to continue to concentrate on maintaining it for every subsequent stride. There is never a time when it is appropriate to 'switch off' your focus and interaction. Even when the interaction becomes more and more subtle, it is still a state of being which only ceases to be when you are no longer in the proximity of your horse.
- If your horse stops suddenly, or spooks and your line is suddenly ten feet too long, stay calm and gather in the line as rapidly as possible, trying to avoid tripping yourself or letting the line get under the horse's feet. Keep the whip in a supportive, 'ready' mode, you may be able to quickly send the horse on again and reestablish the contact *while the line is still loose*, but usually the line has to be taken in again and you can start off from your usual connection.
- Persistent falling-in characterizes physical weakness and a particularly established hollow posture. The principle remedy for this is patient, steady work in the right direction. I don't believe that a horse must be made to work in an apparently 'round' posture in order to strengthen his propensity for that. Obviously if you never attempt to establish a correct contact and re-alignment, then nothing will ever change and the hollowness will only fix itself in further. If, however, you patiently and attentively train him in the way described throughout the course, then the changes will happen. They may be too gradual to see at first, but like roots growing in the ground you will be laying down the foundations within the horse's structure, and you will begin to realize how it is working.

Ideas In Action

When Rafael was given a death sentence and fortunately came to live with us instead, he started his re-training from the very beginning, even down to accepting the head-collar and learning how to be tied up. His lungeing training took at least six months because he was 9 years old when he came, and had a lot of bad habits to undo.

When I started lunging Rafael he was probably the least likely candidate you could imagine for dressage training. Physically he was hollow to the extreme, croup high with an upside down neck. It was hard to tell at that stage how much was

conformational and how much was his restriction pattern. Psychologically he was even worse, being a rig (castrated incompletely) he behaves essentially like a stallion. Because of his previous experiences in life he was highly insecure, and this expressed itself as a perpetual distraction. He now had mares of his own to live with (he would not accept the other geldings in the normal herd), but had not yet learned to accept his work was time away from them, and all he could think about was getting back to protect them.



Day after day we worked with only the lunging cavesson. He ran forward perpetually and fell in on the circle, tried to spin round and sometimes even attacked the lunge whip as if it were a snake. We were working mainly in trot because at first he wouldn't walk and he couldn't canter. He fell in towards me when he went round

away from the gate, and pulled out of the circle going towards the gate. He ran forward relentlessly beyond my aids and some sessions I hardly moved the whip at all.

*Such was the extreme nature of his crookedness that instead of insisting that he take me out and forward, which is the normal approach because the horse must essentially yield to the trainer, I turned the tables and took up contact with him by backing away from him. Although stepping backwards while lunging a horse is traditionally seen as incorrect, in this case it was an interesting solution in many ways, because our root problem was contact. Rafi did not want to have contact with people because they had mostly only ever caused him unhappiness. In his case the most important thing I could do was simply **establish a contact**, whatever the means, so that I could actually prove to him I wouldn't hurt him. It was the training equivalent of following him around the field in the rain until he stopped and let me put on his rug. When he fell in towards me, I couldn't drive him out again, because that would only have added to his speed and stress, if I only sent him out as much as he would go, we stayed on perpetual tiny circles in the middle, but when I backed off and kept the line in play, staying with him, instead of adding to the threat because I was insisting he give in a way he had no resources to be able to do, he discovered that I was still there with him, supporting his balance.*

Gradually over the months, his abdominal muscles developed and stretched his back so I could treat it and free off the muscular restrictions. He is a strong and healthy little horse and he responded rapidly to any healing work. His back changed shape so radically that my memory of him at that time is of a different horse. He realized that his mares



didn't go anywhere when he was away at the arena, and slowly it dawned on him that a bit of light relief from his responsibilities could be a good thing! It did surprise me how differently he began to move when he could eventually hold himself up, bringing his ribcage straighter and his spine more upright, and he was able to slow down and let some swing come into his movement.



By the time I decided he could manage my weight without losing our foothold on engagement, I took him through the backing process again and we began to address his training from a more direct physical contact.

My experience with Rafael convinced me for good that there is nothing to be gained by using auxiliary aids or impatience. It is the extreme cases that teach us the most because these horses cannot compensate for our lack of comprehension or integrity; their lacks are too great. They change us as much as we change them, and this for me is the true benefit.

Using The Rapport To Train Transitions and Introduce Lateral Work

Training Transitions Between The Gaits

If you have managed to focus your horse for as much time in the session as possible on approaching and maintaining the boundary between the 'stop' and 'go' phases i.e. encouraging her to engage her postural muscles and carry herself in balance, then transitions both within and between the gaits are simply an extension of this. Any issues which arise when you ask for transitions either up or down will indicate where the basic connection is lacking.

The most important aspect of the downward transitions is that the balance is maintained throughout, and therefore the horse's hind-legs stay underneath her right through, so she can continue in the slower gait in control and with impulsion but not running. If your horse has already been learning to maintain her movement at the slowest possible rhythm, then she will have been strengthening her ability to keep her hind-legs underneath her body mass. Continuing to slow down until she changes pace, while maintaining her balance will be straightforward for her - depending on her conformation of course.

I use whistling to encourage horses to collect themselves and decrease the pace. I find that starting the whistle on a higher note and dropping to a lower one is easy for them



These photos illustrate a downward transition carried out in balance, without losing the support of the hind-legs stepping under the horse's body.

to understand. As well as the whistle, I signal with my own posture by standing taller and holding myself stiller. Eventually they can respond to the body language only depending on their sensitivity.

It works very well whatever you are trying to communicate, to *imagine* the horse moving as you wish her to. When I say 'imagine' I mean using the power of your mind to transmit what you want. Horses are very receptive to this, and it is particularly useful on the lunge because you are not directly physically connected. Practice the particular imagery that is relevant to the way your horse moves. If she tends to hollow and put her head up, encourage her to stretch herself out longer and lift her back by *focusing in yourself on the way you would feel to go in a rounder outline*. This might not mean anything to you at first, but think about watching someone you support jump a round of jumps, or watching your favourite football team, you can imagine what it feels like to clear a jump or score a goal. It is understood now that when we watch others performing, our central nervous system is stimulated in an almost identical way as if we were in their place.

Of course, communicating to a horse in this way is different in that you are not a horse, and you don't know what it feels like to be one, but a good rider does all the same things in their own body as the horse does when moving in engagement, and horses definitely do respond to the psychic transmission of this 'human' take on it. It is not airy-fairy sorcery, but simply making use of the energetic connection between all living beings. When you can learn to stimulate the sensory impulses within your own system, then in energy terms you are holding up a big sign that says to your horse, 'this is how I would like you to move'. Most of us underestimate the power of such communication because we aren't aware it exists, but everyone is capable of becoming aware of it if they choose to.

Correct upward transitions require the same 'collected' engagement posture as downward transitions. *Correct* in this context means the only way a horse can hold herself which allows her to compensate for the rider's weight and stay undamaged physically. Correct transitions do not rely on speed, but on timing and balance. Timing, because we can only receive a successful response if we ask at the moment when the horse has firstly achieved a sufficient degree of postural control, and secondly when the horse can respond straight away because the leading hind-leg is coming into the right place. Learning to ask the horse at this particular moment is not as complicated as it might sound. It is similar to learning when to rise and sit to the trot, at first it is learned by observation and gradually the ability to feel it is developed. Simply observe the point in the stride when the inside hind leg comes

into the ground, and time your aiding to that rhythm. If you get used to it at this stage, doing it when riding will be second nature.

The upward transitions are easier for most horses from the balance point of view because there is less momentum, but on the other hand they cannot benefit from that momentum to help them jump up to the next gait. **This momentum must be created in the preparation**, and a good transition is not possible without that preparation. Often people will use the element of surprise i.e. making a sharp movement or noise, or they will condition a response by the use of a certain word or signal in order to create the momentum required to jump up a pace. The problem with this is that it is disruptive. Any kind of surprise (shock) will make a horse act out of tension, and tense acts are not smooth and flowing, but awkward and jerky, and they are not pre-disposed to engagement. As well as the fact that such shock responses are not the best way for a horse's central nervous system to assimilate and learn. The conditioned response may allow the trainer less preparatory work, because it will tend to override what is happening at any particular moment, but that is exactly the problem with it: it is not based on a connection between two beings in the present moment. A robot could do it, and it pushes you further away from the direct, living communication with your horse which is so precious. The present moment is lost and all the potential it holds. Any kind of 'trick' learning works through conditioning i.e. a certain signal elicits a certain response. It is probably not possible to escape this entirely when training, but to rely on it too much is a recipe for fabricating a machine.

Don't cut *yourself* out of the equation by conditioning your horse to obey a limited set of one-dimensional signals. This is one of the most dangerous enemies to the relationship between you and your horse, because it institutes a barrier between you that diminishes your genuine influence.

Training, for me, is the opportunity to have a real, present moment dialogue, which has never happened before and never will again, because it is unique every time. It is that very uniqueness which is beautiful and exciting. It may be unpredictable, but that is exactly why it is interesting. There is nothing duller and sadder than riding a horse who only responds to particular signals and whose mind went on holiday long ago. Why do we want to make horses into machines? Their fascination for us is surely in the novelty that is possible when two different consciousnesses meet. Of course if we want to be absolutely sure of getting our transition at X in the dressage test, then we might have to go down that route, but is it really a sacrifice worth making? The predictability of a sophisticated, highly tuned harmony between a horse and rider which has been achieved as a result of years of working with each

moment as it arises is far superior. As ever, it is not *when* we do something that counts, but *how* we do it.



Each upward transition you will make with your horse will be born out of a unique circumstance made up of his state of body/mind and yours, that day. Stay with what is required that day, at that moment, to perform the transition. In general, the pattern I think of is that enough 'credit' has to be built up to have the right amount to spend on a quality, 'higher' gait. Think of the analogy that you are filling up a lock on a canal (building up impulsion) so that the boat will rise (the horse will collect/engage/ assemble himself) and at the right moment, the boat will be high enough to reach the next level of the canal (the horse smoothly and powerfully changes gait). This process cannot be embraced fully by one word or signal; it must be guided and attended to at each moment.

Every time a transition is successfully performed in this way, the muscle memory for it is strengthened, and the process is consolidated so that eventually it becomes immediate, but no less present and *available* to the trainer/rider.

Training Transitions Within The Gaits

The essential form we are working our horse towards is the same in all of the work we do, within as wide a spectrum of expression as can ultimately be created. At one end of the spectrum is the highest collection, and at the other the highest extension, but always within the engaged posture. It is helpful to think of this relationship when considering different manoeuvres, because the differences are only superficial. Transitions *within* the gait are therefore the same as those *between* gaits, it is only the degree of collection that changes.

The same preparation is important in the amplification of a gait, and the impulsion stored up is managed and released in order to stay within the boundaries of that gait. For example asking for a bigger, more extended walk must be prepared so that the horse raises his energy while improving his balance to compensate for the extra momentum. He takes a deeper stride under his body and has a bigger push off as well as taking a longer stride in front. It is probably more difficult to perform well than when asking for the jump up to trot, because it requires more subtle aiding.

Collecting within the pace is also more subtle because all the preparations are made to drop down a gait, and at the same time the gait must be preserved. The difference between falling or dropping out of a gait, and a correct, composed, down transition however, is whether or not the engaged posture is lost, and with it the sitting pelvis and carrying hind-legs. This is the same whether the horse stays in the gait or not. The hind-legs must always be there to push off again.

Transitions within the gaits are a very good way of refining your connection with your horse, as well as strengthening his postural control. Practice, in walk or trot, collecting your horse's movement for a certain period (perhaps for a circle, or whatever seems right) and then gradually extending the movement - being careful not to initiate running onto the forehand – and then repeat the cycle several times. In collection imagine that you are channeling the horse's energy more vertically, and in extension stretching it out more horizontally.

Introducing Lateral Movement

Aligned sideways movement, both away from the bend (e.g. shoulder-in) and towards the bend (e.g. half-pass) are crucial tools to be used to improve the straightness of the normal two-track movement. They are also ridden as an end in themselves to display the repertoire of training of a horse.

As long as the underlying goal of training a horse is understood to be **the gymnastic suppling and straightening of the horse and the rider that allows them both to move together in harmony and without physiological damage being incurred**, then these two roles of lateral movement do not conflict in any way, in fact they are expressions of the same thing. It is only when such movements are sought-after simply because they are required in a dressage test or because they signify something other than a reflection of the core straightness of the horse, that the purpose of training lateral work becomes lost.

Using lateral work as a tool to improve the horse also reflects his ability and highlights the areas of weakness in the partnership. It is an exercise which will promote his engagement as well as supple his joints and sculpt his physical responses to the rider's aids. In this way, it functions in the same way as training the transitions does.

The main thing to be aware of when asking your horse to move sideways is the ease with which he will misalign himself. This will take the form of the neck bending in towards you, and his body tending to carry on regardless. It is the classic jack-knife posture in which normal, crooked horses feel quite comfortable! What you want, on the other hand, is that the horse angles his ribcage, while turning his shoulder towards you and his quarters away. **Now when he steps away from you, he is moving with his body in this new angle and therefore he is moving on three or four tracks.**

Two-track movement (straight): one track for the right hand side foreleg and hind-leg and one track for the left hand side foreleg and hind-leg.



Three-track movement: One track for the inside foreleg, one track for the outside foreleg and inside hind-leg, and one track for the outside hind-leg



Four-track movement: One track for each different leg of the horse.



Correct two-track movement is when the horse is straight enough to bring his hind-legs into alignment with his front legs on these two tracks, and correct three-track movement requires the bend of the aligned horse's body to match the angle which brings the horse onto three tracks. Four track work is when the angle is greatest, of course, and is often necessary at first with young horses so they can achieve enough angle to actually be able to step laterally, and not just bend their necks. This is because their ribcage rotation is more pronounced in relation to the position of their legs. The more a horse can hold his body upright, the less angle he will need to be able to step across under himself. As long as the outside of the horse is supported and aligned under the rider, or on the ground, the neck and ribcage are maintained as one moving unit, then the movement is correct.

As soon as you have established the basics of lungeing, it is a good idea to incorporate into your routine a few steps of correct sideways movement in-hand before putting your horse out onto the lunge. The sooner the sideways yield becomes normal for your horse, the better, as long as you have enough control to produce it properly, otherwise you will only be strengthening the innate crookedness.

The key to controlling the alignment of the horse is **within you own posture**, exactly as it is when you ride. It is up to you to *transmit your straightness*, and use it as your *leverage* to keep the horse going sideways straight.

As when you ride, the aids for asking the horse to move sideways are akin to saying 'hey, look at this' and when he looks at you, i.e. goes forward from your leg, he sees your straightness and reflects it, that is, his forward movement allows your posture to influence him in straightening and therefore engaging his body.

When you ride you do this 'attracting attention to your posture' with your leg primarily. When working in-hand you have the lunge whip or a long whip. You can use the handle-end to encourage the horse to move forward, usually around the girth area. Reluctant horses can be persuaded with the whip held the other way and agitated or tapped against the horse's second thigh. Once you have some forward movement, you can then influence the horse's posture with your posture. This is the heart of the gymnastic side of dressage training; it is the art and the beauty of it. The horse will reflect you, and the movement will express that, like light shining through a prism.

Hold your body upright and engaged, tall in your spine and relaxed in your shoulders. Use your abdominal muscles to flatten and stretch your lumbar spine so you are not hollowing, but tucking your pelvis. In order to ask that the horse resonates with this posture, you must feel it within yourself like a vibration. Some horses need a high vibration to catch their attention, and that includes your 'calling-to-attention' aids with the whip, others will be sensitive and their tendency towards tension will demand that you lower your vibration and remain stiller. Whichever point on the spectrum your horse is at, if you lose your posture, you will have nothing to transmit even when your horse is listening. It is harder with horses for whom you need to get your vibration up, because that tends to put more strain on your posture. This is why riders with sluggish horses end up doing a lot more than their horse, shoving about in all directions to try and get a response. This has the opposite effect, in fact, because the less you maintain your posture, the less leverage you have on your horse and the more they ignore you.

So think of slowing the whole thing down as much as you can, ask for movement, but as little as possible is easier to control. Leading your horse on a circle, hold yourself in the engaged posture, and position yourself at the junction between the horse's ribcage and shoulder. Start to ask your horse to yield sideways, out onto a bigger circle: when the inside hind leg comes in to contact the ground, you simultaneously take a step towards the horse, at the angle you want him to step across himself. Place the hand that is holding the whip against the horse's side around where your leg would be if you were riding (about half-way between the girth and the back of the ribcage), and apply a gentle but steady pressure as required to initiate the yield response when the horse moves away. Remember you are not asking the horse to move 100% sideways, in a 'full-pass', you want a movement which incorporates forward and sideways, to form a suitable angle.

The angle at this stage tends to decide itself. Some horses find stepping sideways easier than others and they may wish to take a greater angle, it also depends how naturally forward your horse is. What is most important is that the horse can *maintain his balance*. Just as when asking for a transition, when the horse steps sideways, he is required to take more weight on both hind-legs, but in particular the inside one. This puts his joints in that limb, including the pelvic joints under more strain. If the angle is too great, and he has to take more weight than he can manage, he will stop stepping forward and the control of his body will be lost. He will attempt to escape by barreling back towards you, swinging his quarters away, or turning the other way. Although it happens quite easily, it is best to avoid this kind of scenario because it is essentially you putting your horse in a situation where he could not comply with your wishes and he had to save himself. In general we want to be keeping the horse in comfort because he is balanced and able to comply with our wishes. When we ask the impossible we lose respect. This is why it is better to control the movement very carefully, step by step, and start with less angle until the horse gains confidence, comprehension and control of himself physically.

Often the first stride is a success and it is only when the horse must take the stretch of the sideways movement through a full wave from the inside hind-leg, displacing his ribcage across, that he revolts and either tries to barge off forward, or comes to a stop. This is because he can only avoid the engaging effects of the exercise by escaping it. The first step was a kind of half-step because it started from straight, and the second step really demands abdominal input from the horse and also that he lift his back, stretch his neck and soften his jaw. Extremely hollow horses find a correct, aligned step across virtually impossible for this reason.

If your horse barges, maintain your posture, and let him come against the lunge line. It should be connected to his nose so there is no involvement from the bit. This is a simple channeling manoeuvre. The rule is always 'you don't pull/push me, and I won't pull/push you'. Your horse will accept not to barge if he is always presented with a 'wall' when he does. As soon as he stops, release any pressure. Theoretically there shouldn't be any pressure once he stops, but it's not always easy to maintain your posture as effectively, as this would require to transmit a wall to half a ton of horse coming up against you. A useful alternative to stopping the horse with the cavesson is putting your hand on his chest and applying the necessary pressure to stop him barging, releasing it as soon as he stops. Some horses respond better to this more direct form of channeling.

If he stops-out after the first step, take your time and encourage him to go again. The less he gives you at first, the easier it is to shape it as you want. Remember the training goal is always to keep tension at a minimum.

The above two evasions are the same 'go' and 'stop' evasion as was talked about previously. The third evasion mentioned above in reference to lungeing, the jack-knife or misalignment, is equivalent to the perpetual crookedness we are working with each time we come into the arena. The only difference is that out on the lunge the influence we have over our horses straightness is much less direct and less 'in place'. This doesn't mean it is less effective though, all the means of straightening and influencing the horse that are at our disposal must be used, and no particular one over-used. Each way of sculpting a horse has its merits.

Preventing the horse misaligning himself (jack-knifing) is the key to all successful biomechanical influence of the rider and trainer, and it is the culmination of all we have been discussing in this exercise. It relies on the **quality of the transmission of your posture to your horse**, as if the horse is made of clay and you are shaping him by preventing him from escaping through the cracks as we have discussed, and opening the channel that you *want* him to flow into. **Hold yourself in place and step out the movement as you want from your horse and transmit that directly to him as you are doing it.**

Just as you have been careful to control the sideways movement, remember to continue to concentrate just as carefully when you ask for a straight step again, and each straight step after that. After all, you want every step your horse ever takes to be a result of your initiation and your posture when you are connecting with him, and it will only happen if you *make* it happen.

If you have difficulty getting any angle at all, it may be that you are losing your posture when you are giving the forward movement 'attention' aids. Ask someone to watch what you are doing or take a video and see if there is something you are not aware of. Sometimes a horse really is too weak to manage sideways movement correctly, and you would have to force him to achieve it, which would probably cause some damage.

Remember 'forcing' is when you put the horse into a state of tension

Yes there are horses, native ponies and heavy-horses in particular, who need a particularly high vibration in their handler, and a higher level of pressure, to notice that they exist, let alone bringing themselves to yield sideways. The decision comes down to your appraisal of your own horse and your own integrity and intuition.

Ideas In Action

During those lungeing sessions when I was preparing Rafael to be ridden (see previous 'Ideas in Action'), several times I asked him to step sideways at some point during the session and he just didn't want to know. He held himself like a solid lump of rock and if anything pushed closer towards me. Just shy of fourteen hands high he is hardly a monster, and energetically he is quite a sensitive, responsive animal, but his response to asking him for a lateral yield was very revealing. Both in the level of confidence in me, and the level of physical strength and suppleness he needed to respond to the simple request. In his case his tension was phenomenal.

I think his natural temperament is so forgiving and gentle, that despite undergoing what I am sure have been terrible experiences in his life, he is not a deeply traumatized horse. When he was allowed to respond in a different way, and given a different environment, he changed rapidly, and his old behaviour was not easily triggered again. His main triggers became apparent later on under saddle. His rehabilitation did take time though, because he had to reconstruct himself physically for a start. His front feet were borderline navicular cases, his back was chronically hollow, and he had quite a hard mouth and a damaged neck.

When I came up against that wall of tension, I didn't push against it. Instead I

became as soft and gentle with it as was possible. He tended to swing between different states, sometimes he was relaxed and then I could channel him quite firmly, particularly under saddle, with strong postural control to keep him straight enough to strengthen. Sometimes he was tense and he would move with the high knee action particular to stressed Spanish horses, and I had to stay gentle with him until he relaxed again. Most of the time he was distracted, but his concentration span did improve (painfully slowly it seemed), to the point where he now enjoys listening because he can let go of his responsibilities for a little while. I could only speak to him when he would listen though, and it was a continuous juggling act to keep him in the present. Gradually his postural muscles developed and he was able to bend better, both laterally and longitudinally. So he was able to slow down and hold the circle better. I didn't worry too much about asking him to yield laterally on the ground at this point, occasionally I asked him and he was definitely a bit less 'stuck to the ground'.

When he was ready to be ridden he was safe from the start. The reason he had been about to be euthanized in the first place was because he habitually got rid of his rider. Considering the unbelievable lack of true education he had in all ways, it was not surprising he felt unsafe with a rider. He was safe but he had to start at the very beginning again. He could only just cope with the weight of a rider, but he had reached the point where he needed to be ridden - without ridden work towards engagement I would never have been able to develop him further.

I realized that his tension and his physical weakness were a kind of body-mind state, one feeding the other. The more he was able to respond and balance himself through engagement, the calmer he became, and the tension could dissipate. On the other hand, when he got tense (his main triggers were any change in routine at the arena e.g. new people around, someone filming, anyone approaching him on foot was the worst) I had to become exceptionally gentle and although not abandoning him with my aids, they had to be as unthreatening, and therefore as subtle as possible. This had the effect of melting his tension-block, and he became receptive again.

At some point I added up that his apparent 'stubbornness' on the ground, was simply the same 'tension-block' I had been encountering when riding him. He had no physical problem at all with lateral movement as long as he was relaxed, but when he was tense, his body didn't work. He probably had no control over it, even if he had been able to see it from an outside perspective. I didn't need to do anything special on the ground to train him to go sideways other than to wait a few years until

he was relaxed enough. Groundwork was even more threatening for him than being ridden, and he was managing shoulder-in and some steps of travers under saddle before he became 'unstuck' on the ground. When he was though, it was instantaneous, like a stone unfreezing from the soil, and it was as if there had never been any issue about it.



Interestingly with Rafael I didn't feel the necessity to try to unfreeze him on the ground by directly working with him in that situation. I think there was probably too much tension in the situation to avoid re-traumatizing him, and the rest of his training - and his life with his 'family' in general - did the work for me. Often coming up against things head-on with horses is a mistake. They are flight animals after all, and therefore their most trusted solution to problems is to leave them as far behind as possible! Accepting this is important for humans if we want to convince them to trust us.

There was certainly an element of physical weakness in Rafi's inability to perform the sideways movement, but perhaps the majority of the problem was the layers and layers of fixed in tension which had become difficult to recognize, and seemed like pure stubbornness. Only my intuition told me that it was not.

This is where, in training horses, our basic compassion for them is so important – if that had not been present in my relationship with Rafael, it would have been so easy to react to his apparent stubbornness with dominance and force, precisely the response that would have reinforced his tension.

Once you have introduced the idea of making a sideways yield in walk before your horse is actually out on the lunge, and it has been accepted and become familiar, it is usually straightforward enough to start incorporating this into the actual lunging. It can be done in exercises, as described below, and as well as being very beneficial for his gymnastic progress, it helps you to observe how your horse uses his inside hind-leg in particular.

Many trainers begin the lateral work which moves towards the bend i.e. travers (haunches-in), renvers, and ultimately half-pass, on the lunge. They do this often using an extra line round the outside of the horse's body to control it and encourage stepping towards the handler.

I have found that with conformationally compromised or previously damaged horses this exercise is too fraught with possible trust-losing incidents. Using two lines requires a lot of skill and, unless groundwork is your only aim, the risks at this point of training seem to outweigh the benefits. I do genuinely believe also that horses willingly do what they can physically cope with without damaging themselves, and many horses take many years of riding to achieve the suppleness in their joints and strength in their musculature to perform these movements within correct engagement, and without physical damage.

Let your horse tell you how he feels and what he can do, and stay in his comfort zone. When he trusts you he will give his heart and soul to you and may even go far beyond his comfort zone for you without a backward glance.



Hope (left) was a confirmed rearer before she came to us, and she needed many years of acceptance of her boundaries, which had hardly any give at all. Some days we only walked for five minutes. It has never been easy for her physically as she has a serious sacroiliac lesion and weak hind-leg conformation. Her mother rejected her at four months and it is unlikely that she developed certain structures in her brain properly which are necessary for normal

handling of stressful situations. I believe this lack of development has made her more prone to being traumatised by events than other horses. Despite all this, when she had the resources to give something back, she gave without reserve.

How To React To Extreme or Difficult Behaviour

In training, it is not at all unusual to encounter difficult situations with each different horse, particularly when you are truly getting down to real gymnastic work. Horses which do not work in or towards engagement are similar to a car moving along out of gear, they are not taking up the traction and pushing forward in energetic connection with you, and it is easier for them to poodle around in a state of semi-distraction, concentrating neither mentally or physically. When they work in this way, they are less likely to seek other evasions because there is less to evade. Few horses are actually *happy* in this state though, because horses are only really happy when they feel safe, which means being guided by someone they trust. They have no reason to trust a trainer who cannot command their effort and attention, so they are likely to be freewheeling in a state of tense semi-distraction. Sometimes they are so familiar with this state that the tension has become less obvious as an attitude, but having been absorbed into their physiology, it has become more of a physical state of stiffness and apathy.

In fact the process comes back round to a trust-building process. First of all your horse has to be willing to accept you as a leader, so he will question your handling skills, with his body as much as his mind, and you may have to accomplish some successful demonstrations of your ability! If you pass the test, the concentration you are asking your horse to make physically will reach his mind and calm him, and he will become less and less evasive. As with every interaction with your horse, this is never achieved by force and unfair demands. Demanding insensitively without listening only decreases your horse's trust in you. No one trusts a slave driver after all, and work that is forced is not beautiful because it is without alliance. Beauty is the flow of the energy of life, and it never flows more easily than when it is expressed through altruism.

Horses bolting/bucking/throwing themselves about in general:

This kind of behaviour is rarely a display of playfulness and high spirits in my experience. In fact the vast majority of the time bucking is indicative of stiffness, discomfort or pain in the back and/or pelvis. If very young horses buck in play it often coincides with difficult stages of growth, and they are including bucking in their play to free themselves up and stretch out. Usually the more comfortable a horse

feels in themselves, the less they throw themselves about. On the other hand horses that seem reluctant to move, in the field or in their work, are just as likely to have some level of discomfort. The fact is that horses are just like us, and how many people do you know who never have an ache or a pain? The majority of horses are also subjected to being ridden by people, often without preparation or attention to their physical needs. If ordinary people were made to perform on the football pitch, which is incidentally much more natural for us than being ridden is for a horse, how many would manage to survive it pain-free for very long?

Probably as a result of having been a therapist for animals and people for over fifteen years and gaining an insight into how many horses feel, this subject is close to my heart. It saddens me to see how reluctant people can be to even consider their horses' physical well being as being at the root of a problem. In my experience it is extremely rare if it is not.

It is understandable for people to feel this way when the therapeutic options are still fairly limited, and when most of us can't actually feel what is going on ourselves it is easy to misunderstand. We do need to appreciate just how much we expect from horses though, and start trying to put ourselves in their shoes a little bit more. The benefits for us would be considerable.

So, as all horses have a 'restriction pattern' like people, which is a pattern unique to them, made up of all the injuries and damages their systems have sustained from birth trauma onwards, it is inevitable that many horses will feel like kicking-off a bit, especially when they are excited, such as the first time back at work, or the arrival of, for example, a new donkey across the road. Always see it for what it is though, it *does* have significance, and note when it happens and how often.

If it becomes a regular occurrence it is then time to address it, especially if it begins to interfere with your training, even if it is just a general blowing off of steam. It is an unfortunate arrangement which necessitates the building up of steam in the first place - it is unhealthy both physically and psychologically for horses to build up tension in this way over extended periods of time. In our management system at HHT, we used to bring the horses in for the day and put them out at night if they were working, otherwise they stayed out. We thought it would be far too much work to have them out permanently - catching and grooming etc. In the last few years however, we decided to try it, and any extra work is worth it a million times over for the improvement in their stress levels and health. They weren't exactly unhealthy or unhappy before, but seeing how they are now, how much happier and more integrated as a herd, and how many little physical niggles have cleared up, we

would never go back to keeping them in for any period of time on a regular basis.

Hope is leaping about here (photo, right) because she anticipated a canter transition which she finds difficult as a result of recent release of chronic pelvic compensations for an old spinal injury. She is neither happy nor being naughty, she is reacting to stiffness and discomfort in her right hip. How much 'physiotherapy' (which is what real dressage essentially is) can be done with a horse is highly individual, depending on that horse's mind, body and how they feel on each particular day. In this case I asked her despite a feeling of tension, because we were filming, and she had managed them well in the previous session. It's not usually a good idea to make compromises however, especially with chestnut mares!



Horses that are perpetually distracted:

Distraction is primarily a state of mind, but horses' states of mind are not complicated by thought processes in the way ours are. They tend to behave as they feel physically. **Usually distraction is indicative of the internal state of the horse.** It will appear to relate only to external influences, and in a horse's case that means separation from the herd (or what constitutes their herd) but that is only because when they feel bad they want to return to where they are most safe and secure. Gymnastic training is physically challenging for most horses, and it highlights any weakness or damage that is there. The fact that horses behave as they feel is in fact our greatest advantage in training them because not only can we tell what is going on for them, we can actually improve how they feel through strengthening and rehabilitating their bodies, and they become calm and willing to work with, In fact we become the substitute for the herd, and stress behaviour is forgotten.



Spooking and napping behaviours are the same thing. If a horse is fixating on something outside of the arena, we need to refocus her inside of herself and address what is going on there. Sometimes we need to find a therapeutic solution - sometimes a care solution e.g. addressing sharp teeth etc., and sometimes the training itself is all that is needed. I tend to make this decision based on the regularity of the occurrence of the problem, the severity of the difficult behavior it causes, and the degree of ride-ability. I can't help the horse if I get hurt or lose confidence, and horses don't trust people who insist that they suffer pain. On the other hand it is our obligation to train ourselves to have the postural strength to be able to bring a horse into balance and avoid panicking them with unbalanced riding.

Horses that spin round and change rein:

This is another case of determining how much discomfort a horse is experiencing on the rein they prefer not to work on. Most horses will favour their contracted side, usually the right rein, and their degree of crookedness usually determines the extent of this, unless there are complicating factors such as injury. Minimizing the risk by starting on the easier rein, and giving the horse enough time on the difficult rein to loosen up are good ideas. Be aware of the danger when you start out on the tricky side, and remember the horse will give you always some kind of warning however subtle. Sometimes hesitating a little, or falling in, or tensing up. Try not to get yourself too far out of alignment in terms of the 'lunging triangle'. You want to be creating this triangle with the line and the whip as two sides and the horse as the other. If you get too far ahead of the horse especially, or too far behind, then you are opening up a wider channel for them to spin into.

Ideas In Action

My sister brought-on a horse who was particularly difficult for spinning round on the lunge on her more difficult rein. This was due to the fact that her near-fore foot was quite severely pigeon-toed, and this made her feel very unbalanced on the left rein, where she tended to lean-in anyway. As soon as she was put onto the lunge in this direction she would instantly and dramatically switch round onto the opposite rein, despite skilled attempts to prevent it. After some persistence without much improvement, my sister decided that in this exceptional case, the lunging work was not helping as it was introducing more tension and lack of trust in the relationship

than the strengthening benefits it would normally have provided. She therefore decided to move onto riding work sooner than normal, in order to give the mare the extra postural support from the rider that she needed to be able to bend, balance and engage. Her ridden work progressed well, and when she was subsequently put back on the lunge, the spinning round evasion was no longer a problem, as she had acquired the postural strength she needed to be able to bend and balance round the circle without the rider's support. Had my sister decided that her evasion was 'naughtiness', got angry with her and insisted she work on the lunge, a serious breach of trust would have certainly resulted, with even more extreme difficult behavior.



Horses that rush forward and/or break away:

Unless they have an injury or pain which is panicking them, horses rush on the lunge due to a lack of strength to be able to carry themselves consistently round the circle. If this is happening, remember you can't drive a rushing horse, so keep the whip quiet. Try to keep the whip in place if it is not too inflammatory, because its presence, held low and pointing towards the front end of the horse, will help indicate that you are not driving but wishing the horse to stay out and keep the contact. Sometimes it is necessary to remove any hint of driving aids and then you can hold the whip pointing back behind you, more or less out of sight, until the horse calms enough to be able to re-introduce it. Remember the goal is **to be able to drive the horse forward into engagement** so you are always waiting (preferably patiently) for the opportunity to drive again. The word 'driving' means asking the horse to go forward within the limits he sets i.e. to a degree that induces calm not tension. As discussed before, some horses must develop extra strength to compensate for conformational imperfections, and it will take more time for them to come back to you.

It is important to always be able to attract your horse's attention, and a horse which has a tendency to ignore you *must* realize that you exist. If you are sure he is not

running out of fear, but unwillingness to make the effort to balance, you can insist that he comes back to you by winding him back in until he has to stop. When he does stop, wait until he has absorbed your body language which meant stop, and then quietly and calmly feed him back out again, and test his attention again. As long as you are consistent he will start to listen to you because you are assuming the leader role by controlling his flight response. **Try to stay calm because this is how a leader behaves.**

It is also possible to angle yourself so the horse meets the arena wall/fence and stops independently of you, but this approach is less easy to control and introduces tension as well as the fact that I don't think it actually impresses the horse as much as you stopping him at a closer proximity. The step up to stopping at a distance is really not difficult for horses to comprehend. It is more important that they understand that it is *you* who is instrumental in stopping them.

If a horse is running because of fear, the fear must be addressed at each stage of the handling process. The idea that everything will sort itself out once the horse is moving i.e. moving out on the lunge, is illusory because tension is either present or not, at rest or moving. If a horse dives away or rushes off when the line is let out then he is not accepting the circumstances he is in calmly. In this case it is important to look at the whole picture, and figure out the source of his stress. Sometimes horses who do this have been unnecessarily frightened when lunged in the past, and they need to be re-introduced to the process very gradually, stage by stage, and shown that they can go steadily and that they won't be made to run this time.

Horses exploding and breaking away have usually been overwhelmed by the situation they are in. My thoroughbred mare, Xas, has done this on more than one occasion because she needs to release a build up of anxiety or excitement. She has autistic tendencies due to Neonatal Maladjustment Syndrome at birth, and when she was younger she had a very short concentration span which made her tolerance threshold particularly low. In her case it is something which is better prevented if possible, by keeping demands within her coping range, but if not and she has an explosion, it lets off some steam and we continue without comment.

A young horse becoming habituated to getting away from their handler may not seem to be exactly the same thing as rushing, but it is usually still a reaction based on anxiety and fear. This is why the solution is allowing the horse to realize that his time with you is not unpleasant or threatening. It is not therefore a solution to put the horse in more pain to gain an apparent control e.g. attaching the lunge line to the bit in any way, or using some kind of gadget. All of these devices work in the same

way, by putting your horse in pain. The horse may be frightened simply because he is leaving his friends, or the work place frightens him. Making the experience agreeable for him and gaining his confidence is therefore more a case of giving yourselves enough time in a comfortable relationship for the horse to realize it is not so bad after all. Our conditioning from traditional horse training logic is that bad habits will only get worse and they must be nipped in the bud, etc. This is only if you want to train your horse with force the whole way through his education, and if you don't end up with a robot, you will have a nervous wreck or a freak. In fact 'habits' are only an expression of the horse's state of mind. *State of being* is actually more accurate, as horses are not thought-orientated, intellectual creatures like us. It is true that those horses who have been traumatized will have patterns of behaviour which are triggered consistently by certain circumstances, come what may, but it is still the case that force and discomfort will never resolve their behaviour patterns either.

So if your horse gets away from you and runs back to the gate, why not just go and retrieve him, and start again. Don't praise him, but instead of getting angry and telling him off, try to stay calm and patient. Make him feel really good about the work he does well, and keep it short and sweet when it is going well. Take things extra slowly and introduce new things, like a pole or a little jump very gradually. Gain his confidence by making yourself nice to be with. Imagine yourself in his shoes and make yourself a confidence-giver. Watch him closely and try to figure out when he runs so you can think of ways to prevent it. For example:

- Xas is stiffer on her left rein, so I always start on the right rein and ease her into the work left.
- Although it is not something I make a habit out of, because in general it creates more problems than it solves, when Amy was in her difficult periods of tuning out and dissociating, I gave her sugar lumps to bring her back into the 'physical' world. It is important to keep little help-mechanisms like that as temporary and inhabitual as possible, otherwise they are only diverting the issue. It did act as a kind of bridge to reach her by, until it wasn't necessary. Then she had to accept that she couldn't have them whenever she wanted them! Later on when she was backed, if she started to panic out on I hack I would get off, and always keeping a head-collar on under her bridle, I just clipped on a lead-rope and led her until she calmed down and listened again. Then she would let me mount and we could continue as normal. Her panic attacks became less and less frequent although she did need to go out regularly enough to maintain the positive reinforcement.

She has always been a bit like a dense jungle; if she is left for too long the paths tend to grow over again. I haven't found this to be that case with most horses. If their training was well done in the first place they never forget it, however long the gap in between may be.

In one scenario it was the sugar lump that provided the bridge, and in the other it was the security of being led. The key was to regain her confidence, and whatever worked well enough to enable me to reconnect with her was a solution.

- Working with Rafael in the arena, I kept him the furthest away possible from the gate at first, at the opposite end of the arena, because the gate was too much of a temptation for him, such was his desperation for his mares.

Being flexible and compassionate is the most effective approach. Persistence is part of that. If you have to retrieve your horse calmly fifty times then do that. He will realize that he is not achieving anything and that you are not hurting him. He will be far more likely to see you as leader-material and eventually give you his trust than if you attempt to dominate him with aggression.

Ideas In Action

My sister has a very strongly built Irish Cob youngster who was at the beginning of his training, learning to carry himself out onto a circle and accept the forward driving and speed regulating aids. One time his lungeing was started up again after a break, my sister tried to work him at the 'scary' top end of the arena – furthest from the gate. Uno had a better idea however, and tried out running at high speed for the gate. He was born with us, and although he has always been surprisingly bombproof for his age, his reaction to situations he finds testing tends to be blast off and think about it later. As he is built like a tank, there was no hope of holding onto him. Attaching the lunge line to the bit is the traditional solution for this kind of situation, but the last thing we wanted to do was subject his mouth to that. Imagine the force on a horse's mouth if his own body-weight comes up against a relatively narrow piece of metal. It would stop him in his flight, but only by damaging his mouth, and then he would begin his career by understand that the bit is his controller and it can hurt him. That makes the bit his enemy, and already his relationship with it would become one of tension. Sometimes there is a sense of wishing to punish a horse who behaves in this way, and because of this, more severe methods might be

*thought of as reasonable. It must be remembered however, that it is **our** idea to 'train' horses for us to ride. Why should they obey us? It is therefore **our** responsibility to make the experience a pleasure for them so that they will be happy to join in our plans. In a case like this, what was needed was a way to channel his behaviour until he had the confidence and strength to have no reason to evade. If he were subjected to pain his confidence would only be further eroded.*

In understanding this requirement, an idea came - why not just put the lunge-line round his nose and back through the ring? It would be stabilized by the lunging cavesson and only come into action by tightening when he bolts, but without hurting his mouth. No doubt there would be an element of discomfort when it tightened round his jaw, or he wouldn't stop, but no association with anything he would encounter again in the future as we don't use tight or flash/drop nosebands. This approach was a good alternative, but as Gaby continued with Uno's training she realized that his temperament was far more unstable than she had assumed given his breeding and apparent confidence. Every time she introduced new things, if she went a little too fast he would panic again.

She found that taking more time and working on his confidence made a huge difference, as well as making a definite choice not to get angry or frustrated with him if he ever did pull away. He knew he was physically stronger than her, so why try to convince him otherwise? What mattered was that he wanted to be with her and work with her, and this desire would become far stronger in time than any scheme for prevention.



Horses which are exceptionally reluctant to go forward:

Some young horses do take a while to respond more sensitively to the driving aids because it is a foreign concept to them. It can be a sign of confidence or a more dominant temperament. Gradually increase your aiding with the lunge whip until you illicit a response, and immediately back off as reward. Always increase gradually otherwise your horse will never have the opportunity to respond to a more sensitive aid and will therefore not become more sensitive. If you continue aiding even after the response the horse will become less sensitive still because she is never rewarded for effort so she will learn to switch off from your demands.

Again there are always many factors, and no such thing as a lazy horse in my mind. If the situation does not improve gradually and your technique is not at fault then the horse is likely to have a physical discomfort or pain. Reluctance to go forward often comes back to a respiratory or cardiovascular problem or pain in the feet. Joint problems and shoulder problems are also common causes. Sometimes 'working through' will help and as long as it feels right and work seems to improve the horse and you are not forcing the boundaries i.e. causing tension, then correct training is highly therapeutic physiotherapy for any horse.

Ideas In Action

Many years ago now I had a mare who was always sluggish to ride. She had a certain threshold, and up to that point she was 'lazy' but fairly safe. If she was pushed beyond that point she became dangerous. She would put her head up and bolt, buck and throw herself about, or rear. Although I didn't have to look far to find physical reasons with Tiggy, the mind-set at that time was that a horse must work, come what may. Several of my teachers advised what was essentially beating her up until she went forward. Of course this apparent 'forwardness' did not last even until after her next rest period during a session, let alone until next session, and she became more and more violent if it was pursued. I didn't feel happy about it and gradually started to explore other avenues.

Over the years it became clear that her feet were a major source of her unwillingness. They had always had sand cracks, a genetic fault which had deepened over time due mainly to shoeing. Eventually, having removed her shoes, we found a herbal solution which brought out the huge abscesses hiding under the cracks, they only became visible when the cracks literally opened out and healed from the inside. She had other therapies which revealed respiratory issues and a slightly misaligned jaw. She also had an injury in one of her hind-legs which had weakened the bone.

Tiggy was simply not capable of the work I had been so enthusiastic about. I know now with hindsight that I learned more from my disappointments with her than I would have done from competing successfully - at least about training horses, not competition riding. The most valuable thing I learned was to let go of expectations. I believe that healing can be miraculous, and we can never predict what is possible.

*The only way to release the potential in any situation however is to **let it go** to the forces we can't see. Pushing and holding on are not the answer, either philosophically or physically.*

*Tiggy (right) taught me to listen and to accept that what horses tell us **is the truth** for them, and it is rare that we know better. When we do listen, answers will come as long as we don't filter them too much. She was an old horse for a thoroughbred by the time she could go forward happily with a rider, and in her case it was nothing to do with training.*



Training, in general, is to work with and shape the energy that is already there. If it doesn't come and doesn't come after some months of encouragement, we

have to stop and look deeper for the blockage. There are also cases where a gradual improvement is made as a result of the physiotherapy of correct gymnastic work, and that can be an incredible journey of transformation. Above all we must not sacrifice our horse's goodwill, because it is the heart of our relationship, and without it we might as well ride a machine.

Horses which attack the handler, run backwards, or lie down:

In any situation where you are trying to judge your course of action with a difficult behaviour, it is important to consider the history of your horse. A young horse that has been handled with consideration and affection is obviously a different case from a horse which has built up a distrust for people. Likewise it is helpful to think about the physical case history of a horse, but remember that there are sometimes underlying health issues we are ignorant of, even if we bred a horse ourselves. As long as you are making a decision because you love your horse and believe in her I don't think you can go too far wrong. Basing decisions on fear of lack such as:

- This horse cost a lot of money, I can't afford to have problems (lack of money)
- I want to compete this year and I don't have time for this (lack of patience)

- This horse is taking advantage of me (lack of self-confidence)

These fear-based motivations will not be beneficial to you as a person in the long run. The deepest fear many of us have is expressing love, both for ourselves and others, horses included. This is why there are long-held beliefs in the horse world that horses must be dominated and shown who is boss. This way of thinking is at the root of many educational systems, even if they would pretend otherwise. Why should horses be in a position to take advantage of us? We are the ones who have taken control of their lives and forced them out of their natural habitat to serve us.

Ideas In Action

Totale could be described as self-confidence impersonated, some would say to a fault, but I find her very easy to relate to as a result, even if she is not the ideal horse to work with on a fragile day! When I started her lunging training she was quite recalcitrant about going forward, her mother was a pony native to the Ariège region of France, and they are known to be somewhat dour in their outlook. Several times she also tried to dominate me in the way she would another horse, a frontal charge, but it was fairly benign and just a case of standing my ground and pushing her forward firmly enough. Once she accepted that I was sure enough of myself to be trusted to take command, she accepted her work and enjoyed it more and more. She continued to test occasionally whether I was really certain of my leader role.



One session, after she was going under saddle and in the weaning off the lunge process, she felt quite tight in her back and she wasn't happy to go forward on the left rein. I stayed at her boundary, and it felt better not to push it. After that she came into season and I was glad I had backed off, she was also growing at the time and with additional ovary/uterus pain or discomfort, she didn't need to be put off her work with extra

demands. I gave her some time off, and when she started up again she no longer felt tight in her back and was much easier to bring left.

Many years ago now we bought a young mare who was imported from Ireland. She bucked in canter, and as her training progressed she became more unpredictable in her behaviour. We knew at the time that something was seriously wrong with her pelvis and we didn't have the resources to help her, if it would have been possible. I remember that when she was lunged she would sometimes turn on the person lunging her, ears flat back and rearing. It was obvious enough then that she was desperate to escape what was a torture for her, and we were never able to continue her training for very long stretches at a time. Eventually my sister had a bad fall from her when one day during her work in the arena she suddenly, and for no apparent reason, reared and threw her head backwards, knocking my sister unconscious. Her physical problem was too severe for us to resolve, and she reached the point where she couldn't tolerate the demands of work.

This mare was the same age as Totale, and she displayed similar behavior, but the reasons were worlds apart. This is why training horses is so complicated, not only are all the riders and trainers different people with different abilities and limitations, every horse is also different in character, physiology, and age, and has a different history. This is why we must be so careful about prescribing rules and systems.

There are truths, both gymnastic and spiritual, and it is our responsibility to learn them, but applying them is down to our own individual wisdom. I believe that every horse can be trained within its own capabilities, and every person can train horses if they wish, because wisdom is available to everyone.

Running backwards is unlikely to be other than a sign of serious unhappiness in a horse's situation, and I have not seen it in another context. It requires fairly brutal handling to actually motivate a horse to do it, and if they do it as an alternative to going forwards it means they are very unhappy about moving for some reason. Tight side-reins and other gadgets can cause a reaction like this because the horse is attempting to evade the damaging forces against their neck and, sometimes, their thoracic spine. This is absolutely not a good idea and makes me cringe even imagining it. Maybe it is because humans have a short little neck and can't imagine themselves in the place of a horse in these horrible devices that we can be so insensitive to it.

In general however, behaviour can never be taken out of context. When Amy, the piebald mare I have talked about above, actually lay down during a lunging session, it was because she wanted to stop an experience she found too traumatizing. This is completely different from the time Xas lay down when I was giving a lunging lesson on her because she wanted to roll! Experience and hindsight do make a big difference, but keeping an open-minded outlook is just as valuable.

Ideas For Exercises On The Lunge

- **Straight lines**

Benefits

The better your horse can maintain the new way of balancing you are teaching him, the more manoeuvrable he will become on the end of the line. If he is not balancing through being aligned and engaging his pelvis and spine into the ring, then he will not be able to carry himself into the straight line correctly. He will either continue to circle and not take the contact and be drivable down the long side, or he might go but by bending to the outside. This exercise is an excellent test of your progress.

Procedure

Start by asking for only a few straight strides in your circle, so in effect your circle becomes more of an oval. By asking for only a few strides you can both gauge the horse's reaction and capacity on that rein, as well as maintain the quality in your contact.

You can then gradually increase the length of your straight line until eventually your horse is supple and strong enough in his body to be able to go straight or bend wherever you ask him in the arena.

Small circles followed by straight stretches then small circles again is a good exercise. You can aim to do the circles in the corners of your working space.

Helpful Hints

Keeping control as well as performing the straight line requires a skilled feel for matching your pace with your horse. It is a good way to practice moving with your horse, and good preparation for working with trotting poles or cavaletti. Only move as much as the horse is moving away from you, and remember you must also match



your angle with your horse's angle. If you want to walk *with* him you must walk parallel to him, if you want to walk *towards* him you must walk perpendicular to him.

• Enlarging & Decreasing the Diameter of the Circle

Benefits

This exercise is an extension of the sideways steps made when the line is short. You are asking the horse to step gradually sideways and forward in order to change the size of the circle, but at a distance from you. It is therefore a test of the horse's comprehension and capacity to respond to the sideways aids.

Procedure

It is easier for a horse to go faster rather than go sideways, so the more carefully and gradually the horse is asked, the better he will stay in the contact and rhythm, and displace himself across. When enlarging the circle you will be able to play out the line when the horse successfully steps over. If he seems to speed up rather than step away, you can keep the line at the same length and walk towards him, keeping the connection as you go. This gives you closer control and a bit more leverage with your posture as well as more influence with the whip. Point the whip towards the part of the horse's body you would like him to yield - usually this would be around the girth area. This is the junction where the bend alignment is most susceptible to being lost, and as a result is also where there is the most influence on the horse's balance when he is carrying himself straight.

If he turns his quarters in towards you particularly obviously, or bends his neck in a lot, those places can also be focused on. Keep the whip very steady and only just high

enough to indicate the pace you want. Remember the steadier the horse is moving, the more easily he can displace his weight to the side.



The whip has a less direct influence when decreasing the size of the circle, as in the ridden travers, it takes the role of the inside leg, which is primarily the guardian of the bend. Gradually shortening the line, while maintaining the contact and bend will encourage the horse to step in towards you.

Loss of balance and rhythm indicates evasion from the sideways displacement, and it is best to slow back down again and set up a good balance and alignment before you ask again. Remember that your 'window' for asking is when the inside hind-leg is coming in to the ground, so the slower the horse is moving (as long as he is still taking up the contact and accepting the whip) the wider your window will be.

Helpful Hints

I always imagine that I am fixing the precise orientation of the horse's body in my mind, (orientation as in how he is holding himself when he is straight and ready to go sideways) and I hold that image like holding something physically, so that when I am asking the horse to go sideways with the aids of the lunge-triangle-connection, there is the same kind of leverage as when I can be close by and stabilizing the horse with my posture either riding or in-hand.

It is the same concept as shooting with a bow and arrow. To fire the arrow, it must be stabilized against the bow to create the leverage to power the shot. Normally this leverage is created by the rider's posture directly, but with the horse out on the lunge it is less simple. Using the lunge triangle as far as is possible is obvious, but the power of your mind is a considerable addition. It is sad that there are still so many people who miss out on this dimension of life by denying its existence. Of course it is always those who know the least about it who deny it exists. Horses already have a head start on us and one way to convince them you are worthy of attention is to learn something about their powers.

• Slow Walk

Benefits

Slow walk is the most basic exercise in finding the magical moment of transformation into engagement. The slower the horse walks the easier it is to realign his body into the lateral bend which shapes him round the circle and the longitudinal bend which shapes him into the ring of engagement. The two are inseparable of course. Slow walk is the same exercise as is done for preparing downward transitions to halt, without the transition at the end. It requires concentration by the handler to maintain the contact in the line through careful driving, postural indication and positioning of the line. It is apparently simple but done well contains everything desirable in a dressage horse and trainer.

Procedure

Once you have successfully stepped the horse out into the line, not necessarily too far - especially at first - walk parallel to him, concentrating on keeping him in contact and going forward. It is better to walk because you can communicate the way you want him to walk more easily if you are walking yourself. Once he is truly in front of the driving aids and calmly striding out round the circle, start to walk in a more controlled way yourself, staying very upright in your posture and imagine that each stride he takes he is moving a bit more slowly. Always think of changes happening bit by bit, in a way the less you ask for the more you will get. As the horse comes back, beware of him stopping out completely or falling in, use the whip very low to the ground and still, pointing at wherever he looks like he might be losing the bend. Be very aware of the quality of the contact in the line, and if you need to, put some 'slowing energy' down it, imagining the line like a solid wall bringing the horse back to you. The slower he can walk without stopping the more supple and focused he has to be, and the better his balance has to become, so there is no fixed end-result for this exercise, it is always very useful.

N.B the walk should be relaxed, four beat with each beat the same length. One - two - three - four. It should be pure-looking. Many modern dressage horses have a deformed walk due to being restricted in their movement in order to control them, rather than having been trained to balance themselves without restraint. A 'ruined' walk tends to be more like two time pacing strides i.e. onetwo - threefour, it looks stilted and gimpy not low-strung and relaxed. If your horse walks like this, reestablishing the natural rhythm can be done by working between the walk he presents to you and the slow walk. While you are doing this, think of creating space



and time in between the hind-leg footfall and the foreleg footfall. He has to go slowly in order to reorganize his striding pattern, but obviously his slowness has to be *self-induced* as a result of your aiding and not forced in any way. Force is always at fault when damage has been done so it isn't going to solve any problems.

Helpful Hints

As part of your slowing-down aiding, try focusing on a part of the horse's body - wherever your eye is drawn is good - and imagine you could fix it in space, as if you were pressing a pause button. This is using the strength of your mind again and might take a bit of practice, but it can be very effective.

• Big trot

Benefits

As well as being concerned with improving the quality of the movement of the horse we are working with, we also want to expand his range of movement as far as possible. This means working to improve both the collection end of the spectrum and the extension end. Collection has already been described in terms of finding the moment of rebalancing and maintaining the horse in that pace. Extension must be built up gradually as a product of balance and straightness; otherwise the horse will end up rushing and losing the rhythm and quality of the movement. Beginning to widen the horse's spectrum of aligned and balanced movement at this stage will strengthen the horse considerably before he is ridden. Only moving in the fullest extension possible for that horse will build him up in that way.

Procedure

Start at the other end of the spectrum (collection), because the better a basic balance you can achieve, the better the extension that comes out of it will be. Ask for the horse to steady the trot back almost to walk, and try to keep him as close to the drop into walk as possible. After a while he should begin to stretch better and blow and snort as his diaphragm starts to open. This is a very good sign whenever it happens. As the abdominal muscles start to work, the diaphragm starts to open and stretch better, causing the breathing to deepen, and coughing and snorting is an indication of this. The quality of the trot will also improve, becoming smoother and more suspended.

At this point the horse is ready to begin to build up the power in his trot. This has to be done within the limits of his strength and ability, otherwise he will not be able to continue working in the ring and he will start to rush out of rhythm. It is better to ask for less than to lose the 'stretch' you have, once it is lost you have to return to the 'slow trot' until the quality is regained. The best way to stay within the horse's limits is to ask incrementally. A tiny bit more, and hold it, then a tiny bit more and hold it and so on. But stop when you sense the ceiling is approaching. It takes time to expand a horse's trot in this way, especially the less athletic ones, so don't expect it

all in one day. A little bit at the end of most sessions when the horse is as supple and straight as possible is the most effective strategy.



Helpful Hints

Having a rhythmic tune in your head which matches your horse's stride will

help you to assess the rhythm better, when you want to start amplifying the trot think of the tune getting louder and more insistent with more space between the notes, but no loss of rhythm, in fact the rhythm becomes more defined.

• Unwinding Exercise

Benefits

This is more than a simple exercise in fact, it is a form of gymnastic therapy, and I see it as an essential part of the session with most horses. In general, horses have a crookedness pattern in their body which forms the shape described previously, but all horses are unique. They all have a personal **restriction pattern** which is memorized by the central nervous system. This 'story' begins at conception, includes birth trauma, and continues onward throughout their entire lives. Anything which has introduced a constriction in the body tissues, whether it was a negative emotion or physical illness or injury, is 'stored' and compensated for unless it is healed. Healing requires considerable energetic resources which are usually only expended by the body's intelligence to enough of a degree to assure the survival of the animal. This is why if we want our horses to heal themselves as a part of their training process we have to make sure they have the resources available - both nutritionally and energetically.

It is possible to introduce a 'healing' aspect into your training by addressing this restriction pattern within the work itself. Some horses have a heavier restriction pattern than others and this is often expressed as what is sometimes referred to as 'bridle lameness'. This name refers to the fact that the unlevelness or lameness only surfaces when the horse is being ridden or lunged. This is because when a horse moves at liberty they will absorb the inequalities of their body by way of moving crookedly, and this compensation then makes them appear sound. As soon as we disturb this balance by getting on board, or even by imposing the control

of lunging, weaknesses and stiffnesses which were hidden can come to light. Horses are masters of dissimulation and they can carry serious injuries and physical problems within as well as perform with phenomenal success. If we want to improve the quality of their movement however, our main task will be to bring these issues to the surface, whether they are relatively simple weaknesses due to uneven development in the womb, or additional injuries and damages picked up later on. They can only heal once they are recognized by the horse's own healing intelligence.

In fact the process of *revealing* the horse's restriction pattern is subtly but fundamentally different from the conventional 'direct' approach. As I have said, the restriction pattern can be revealed by a rider and hidden by the horse's natural compensations. It would seem logical then to attempt to straighten the horse as usual in the lunge work in order to take him out of his normal compensating displacement and show the weaknesses up. In fact if a horse is correctly straightened both under saddle and on the lunge, the restriction pattern can be directly addressed and apparently resolved. This happens because the rider demands that the horse uses his structure evenly and the restriction pattern can be over-ridden or transcended in a way which *can* help it to resolve itself, but this is not the same approach as the 'unwinding' method. **The unwinding approach is indirect, and can be thought of as letting the horse go deeper into his restriction pattern, allowing the pattern to find a resolution on a more profound level.** Both approaches rely on the horse's innate healing capacity which is taken for granted on the whole.

'Bridle lameness' or restriction patterns which become apparent under a rider or during lunging work are either coming out as a result of unbalanced riding or because the process of transcending them directly has not yet been completed in the course of the session. In the unwinding exercise we are attempting to encourage whatever pattern is in there to come out and be seen. It is done purposefully, and if done well, in my opinion there is no more powerful way to train a horse. I also believe that both direct and indirect technique have their place in training and understanding both approaches give a trainer the best chance of reaching every horse. My experience as a Cranio-Sacral Therapist has helped me to understand how each approach works and what distinguishes one from the other. The vast majority of equestrian training is undertaken by the direct method, and incidentally it is more difficult to define the line between what is forceful and what is not when training 'directly'. To understand indirect technique at all demands a basic comprehension of how to train without force.

Every time you complete a successful unwinding, the restriction pattern of your horse will be less severe and your horse more supple and able to do more.

Procedure

As with all healing processes the key is recognition, so simply put your horse out on the lunge and wait for him to show you what is going on. Part of the dissimulation of the restriction pattern which happens when horses move at liberty is achieved by speed, so the slower he goes, the harder it is for him to compensate. For this reason you want to encourage him to go gently. Take on a particularly 'listening' approach in yourself, so instead of using your posture to impose the correct bend and balance, allow him to move as he feels comfortable i.e. keep the line less 'in contact', because you do not want to communicate to him how to balance just now, instead you want to see how he manages himself without any help, and as long as he is actually moving keep the whip quiet.

He may react by turning in more or trying to turn out. He might want to stop or be unwilling to slow down. Your role is to support the unwinding process, so you become a catalyst. This means you are *creating the circumstances* in which he can reveal his physical crookedness, or any other physical complaint or even emotional issues that he feels. For this reason you will have to have a certain trust bond with him in the first place, and then you must communicate to him that whatever is going on for him he can reveal to you safely. Horses are highly intelligent in this way, and if they feel that letting go of compensations will threaten their security then they won't let go.

Whatever he does, try to *maintain* it without interrupting or manipulating it. Stay at the boundary of it. The boundary is the place where the energy dynamics can change, and if you can concentrate on staying there, both physically and mentally, then over time - maybe minutes or even over days or months, then the changes will take place. Aim to restrict an unwinding process to no longer than half an hour. It is intense for trainer and horse and quality is far more important than quantity. Don't push for a change, wait for the restriction pattern to arise and allow it to manifest itself completely, then support it until it changes. If you push for change then the vital point where the true depth of the pattern has been reached may be skipped over. It works like a gate with a latch you have to push down far enough before it frees itself. Go into the pattern as far as it wants to go and the release will find itself. Sometimes you will expose a lameness or an obvious awkwardness in the neck. Often you can see a twisting of the whole body where a particular source is difficult

to identify. If the pattern is not too severe, the horse will respond to the unwinding process by gradually easing out of the restriction pattern, and his stride may lengthen as his body starts to release and swing. Occasionally a pattern will not be able to release as a result of the exercise itself, and in those cases therapeutic help can be necessary.

Helpful Hints

As you are acting as a catalyst in the process, your awareness of how things are unfolding is critical. With practice, that awareness will become more astute. It is an interesting approach to allow your focus to rest on the part of the horse it is naturally drawn to - this is usually a place where the energy is blocking. Then draw your awareness back out again slowly to include the whole horse. Then back in again to wherever your eye wants to rest. Notice if it is a different place. You can think of your focus like a kind of receiver sweeping the energy waves of your horse for signals. You can also imagine the horse as a giant knot which is gradually revealing its shape to you, and see if you become aware of a time when the knot begins to undo itself. Stay patient and think of it as a game without pressure or expectations.



Some horses are so stuck in a particular pattern that they never appear to change. In those cases it is important to keep applying the same concentration for as long as it takes to make a crack in the defenses. You can think of it as like melting a big lump of ice.

These photos show Rafi in his restriction pattern (photo above), then having worked through to the end of



the unwinding. He took many months on the lunge to reach the point of 'melting' (photo below). The restriction pattern corresponds with a hollow and crooked posture, and when it has released he is able to work in engagement on the ring, with correct longitudinal flexion and bend.

• Rolling into Canter

Benefits

This exercise introduces young horses to the canter transition without pressure and tension so they can build up the necessary strength without associating it too much with excitement, rushing or lack of balance. It is the same approach as has been described for any upward transition i.e. building up enough impulsion (contained and balanced energy) so that the transition itself is smooth and seamless. As the canter motion is by nature less regular than the trot - being a series of leaps - it is all the more difficult to keep the transition gliding and smooth, and avoid jerky or explosive reactions. If a young horse can learn to make a gentle, smooth, uphill transition at this stage, it will be less disturbing for her later when being ridden.

Procedure

Prepare the trot for the transition by building up the energy, then 'storing' it by slowing the horse back down again. The energy will still be contained as long as the horse maintains her rhythm and balance. Continue to build up the impulsion until the transition seems to happen by itself. The idea is as if you were filling up a container in the bath, with little amounts of water, which has a tiny ship floating on the surface. At some point the water will reach the top of the container, and the ship will sail out over the edge into the bath. Instead of trying to push the little ship out of the container and creating turbulence that ends up sinking it, you build up the water levels, which correspond to the energy levels in your horse, until the transition is easy for her. Nothing is lost, because your trot maintains its quality, and so the resulting canter will also be of a high quality, turbulence is kept to a minimum, so you don't threaten your trust bond.

The only apparent cost is the time taken in the preparation, but as you are truly training the gymnastic capacity of your horse, the preparation is necessary anyway and will decrease radically over time as a result of the real physiological development you are achieving.

Helpful Hints

The more patient and exact you can be in your preparation, the more accomplished your transition will be. This means that it is crucial never to push for the transition if the horse is not quite there yet - he will probably go, but the balance and rhythm will still be sacrificed to some degree. Remember the more often he performs a *perfect* transition, the deeper that patterning will be retained in his central nervous system,

so the more likely he will be to do it perfectly again. This is why nothing is ever gained by pushing for the result. No one will ever know that you took another circle to prepare, only the quality of the transition is ever judged. Obviously, ultimately you will want to be able to ask at a particular place, but in order to be able to do this as well as produce quality, the training must be thorough. Thorough means addressing your horse's needs at each moment of his progress, not trying to superimpose your own needs.

You want to think of it as that you are almost holding her back from making the transition, so that it is at the height of readiness when it is made. This also ensures the style will be as accomplished as possible at this stage.

Some horses will of course find this easy, and some will not be ready for it at all. If your trot is prepared beautifully and the strike off just doesn't want to come you can try calmly performing a strike off yourself.

This can make it clearer to the horse, although I think usually they know what you want, they may just find it difficult. If the trot itself is not balanced and energetic, then the canter can wait. Quality reproduces itself.

Just as when a rider is learning to balance correctly on the lunge and there is nothing gained from them being made to bounce wildly about in a trot that is too much for them to cope with, there is nothing to gain from pushing a horse to canter in a motorbike fashion. Both rider and horse will learn much faster by staying within the limits of their ability, and extending that gradually. Otherwise they will search for ways of balancing which are counterproductive.

Once you know your own horse's range of sensitivity, you will know how much you can ask without introducing stress.



Rolling gently into the canter without hollowing or loss of balance.

• Circle Into Shoulder-In

Benefits

This is a good exercise for encouraging the horse to carry himself more upright round the circle. By going between a smaller circle which requires more of a bend, and the shoulder-in which asks the horse to both support himself in the bend and carry himself sideways, he will gradually move with less rotation in his ribcage and keep his spine more upright. Becoming familiar with shifting his body weight in alignment is important before a rider gets on to avoid overwhelming him with the idea of shifting himself sideways as well as the extra weight. If he is already used to moving in that way, then the rider's weight (correctly positioned) should be able to help him.

Shoulder-in is the cornerstone of lateral movement. In general it is easier for horses than the movements in which the bend travels towards the movement (travers, renvers, half-pass and pirouettes) because shifting their weight away from the bend is more natural to horses. They never make a travers configuration with their bodies when moving at liberty, and although they don't hold themselves as we train them for a shoulder-in either, if they spook or move sideways it will be to displace their vulnerable middle away from the threat, which means bending away from the direction of the movement.

Traditionally leg-yield is seen as a more basic sideways movement than shoulder-in because it is supposed to be done with a 'straight' horse or in other words with no bend. This doesn't make much sense because horses are either moving straight (in alignment) or not, whether they are bending or not, so a leg-yield without the helpful leverage of the bend would be a difficult movement to perform correctly, thus making it more of an advanced movement than a shoulder-in. It has the same relationship to shoulder-in as half-pass does to travers, in fact it is asking the horse to move sideways on a diagonal line, whereas shoulder-in is asking the horse to move sideways on a straight line, or a circle. It may seem to be a simpler exercise simply because a horse can misalign himself less visibly on the diagonal so it is more obvious that he is struggling on the straight line in a shoulder-in.

In any case, what matters is keeping the horse straight so that the sideways shifting he does manage will actually alter his carriage and bring him onto the ring of engagement musculature.

Procedure

This exercise is best attempted after your horse is comfortably with the sideways stepping on the ground, and it is a good exercise to practice either in walk or trot. In walk you will both have more time to respond to each other, and you can start on a

shorter line and gradually increase the distance as you become more skilled. Don't worry too much about being absolutely precise with the figures, it is more important to do whatever you are doing in the best connection and straightness you can manage.

Have a rough idea of where you want to circle and where you want to try for some steps of shoulder-in, but stay flexible. Point the whip quietly at the horse's middle or shoulder, and walk towards him in the direction of the shoulder-in steps you want to make, making sure that you keep the contact (i.e. only walk towards the horse as much as he yields sideways to the pointed whip) in order to maintain the bend. At first keep the shoulder-in steps to a minimum, two or three is enough then back to the circle. This keeps the horse in better balance because to come back onto the circle he has to step under himself straighter with the inside hind-leg. If you carry on too long in the shoulder-in he may begin to lose his weight to the outside, and then his shoulder and it will only be his neck bending in at that point.

Helpful Hints

You can think of this exercise as an opportunity to improve the horse's lateral straightness (uprightness) of the ribcage and his lateral bend (motor-biking tendencies) in the shoulder-in phase, and then you take that improvement into the circle phase to improve the horse's longitudinal straightness (alignment) and longitudinal balance (uphill posture) then back into the shoulder-in phase and so on, until one phase is raising the quality of the next and preventing the evasions which creep in after too long spent in one.



Shoulder-in steps along the long side of the arena (top photo) then returning to the circle again with improved bend and longitudinal flexion (bottom photo).



If this training course is working successfully for you up until this point, you will be in the process of laying a solid and secure foundation for your riding relationship with your horse. It may seem like a different

relationship once you are in the saddle, but everything you have done before either limits or releases the potential of that relationship. The time you spend is never wasted. You may have seen your horse go through many different physical changes throughout the lunging process, but it will become apparent when he or she is ready to begin the next phase.

The time that you spend on each different stage of the process described above is individual to each horse, but there are some universal guidelines to help you know when your horse is ready for the next stage:

- A horse is ready for leading work once he completely accepts general handling, grooming, and having a head collar put on.
- Once your leading work has resulted in the horse happily going with you wherever you ask, stopping in response to a vocal command, and backing up a few steps when asked, then work on the lunge in a lungeing cavesson can begin (minimum age of 3 years old recommended before beginning lungeing training).
- Once the horse is working on the lunge with a fairly consistent longitudinal flexion (head stretched down and back raised) and on the correct bend, then you can introduce first the saddle, then the bridle (after the biting procedure has been accomplished) while you continue the lungeing work. At this stage you can also introduce sideways yielding in-hand.
- Once the horse is fully familiar with the saddle and bridle, then you may introduce *loose* side-reins which (as described above) the horse only brings into contact when he is fully stretching his neck down and round.
- At this stage the more advanced lungeing exercises described above can be developed (e.g. lateral work, developing extension and collection), and once you feel intuitively that your horse is strong and balanced enough to begin ridden work, you can begin his training under saddle, described in Part 2 of Training A Horse Without Force.

It doesn't matter how long each step takes your particular horse, what is essential is that the *quality* of the work required in that step is well established before moving on, both gymnastically and in the horse's acceptance of what you ask.

EXERCISE 2

ENERGY CONNECTION: RESOLVING FEAR

Self-awareness is a very important part of being ready in our own minds to connect with our horse's mind. Fear acts like a dark coloured wash over a painting, and when the layers get too thick it ends up obscuring the reality underneath. This means we are often not even enjoying the experience with our horse, let alone finding that magical sharing of consciousness which happens as a result of profound mutual trust.

1) Recognising the fear:

The first step can be practiced at any time, either when fear arises because of exposure to a personal trigger, or because we summon it. Personal triggers are external influences which set off our fearfulness. They can be intense, like if we are almost trampled by a bolting horse, or they can be more subtle, like knowing we are going to attempt a jump during our session. Even something as minor as a slight change in routine is enough for some people to put them into that powerless state of fearfulness.

Summoning emotions is the first step to gaining control over them. It gives a better idea of how transient they are, and how they are not necessarily indicative of a real threat. If we can make fear come, then we can clear it from our minds too. The very first step however, is **recognition**. It may be a simple idea, but often admitting to our fear is the last thing we want to do. This is because fear is an ego-based reaction, and when we recognize it, we are distancing ourselves from our ego. Distancing ourselves from ego is also dissociating ourselves from it, which weakens it, and strengthens our 'real self'. When we do this we come closer to absolute truth, and in terms of our training with our horse, we will then come closer to finding the best answers to all our on-running questions. Questions such as knowing how long you should continue a particular session for, perceiving the sources of physical issues and knowing how to react to your horse's behaviour in each moment.

Sometimes emotions we feel when working with a horse may not always originate from ourselves. So far, this is something I have noticed mostly when actually riding, but I have understood from the nature of the emotion several times that it was not

"mine". I believe that we can become a filter for the horse's emotions as well as our own, as a part of our rapport and our trainer/healer role. In this case in responding exactly as we do when the emotion is sourcing from ourselves, we can successfully release negative emotions for the horse. It is powerful to recognize the source of the emotion, and fear can manifest itself in many different ways, including anger and sadness, but simple recognition and acceptance of the emotion is the most important step. Too much analysis about the source can distract you from dealing with the present moment. Recognition is being *present* with reality after all, and when we are fully present we are in an enlightened state of mind.

Don't expect to pick up on everything and be able to stay concentrated all of the time, especially at first. Think of it as a muscle you are strengthening up, and every time you are able to say 'I am experiencing fear now' your ability to pick up on it next time will improve. Sometimes it will get away from you and you will react to it before you can recognize it. Recognition at any stage is valuable, but if you get carried away by it sometimes, and miss the opportunity to make the bridge back to your real self, then just let it go till the next time.

2) Experiencing the fear:

One of the 'tricks' of the ego is disguise, so recognising the fear is the first step away from being controlled by it. The next step is to increase the visibility of it to the maximum. Although this may seem counterproductive, after all if you are feeling afraid or angry, why would you want to intensify it? In fact when you choose to face it directly and experience it for what it is, you are not feeding it or encouraging it, you are simply exposing it to the light of reality. What it may actually represent is immaterial, what matters is what it *means* to you. If you are a visual person, you can give it a colour or a shape. If you relate more to sensation, you can give it a texture or a shape. Sometimes making it visible for you is about feeling how it affects your body, for example fear can make you feel weakness in your legs or tension in your head. However you do feel it, the key is to feel it as fully as possible. However far it stretches, or deep it goes, stay with it and accept it until it starts to recede. Fear is an energy like any other energy, and by accepting it is there and engaging with it, you will start to take control of it. This turns it eventually into positive energy which can boost you rather than drain you.

The difference between releasing a negative emotion based on fear in this way, and wallowing or feeding that emotion, is *consciousness*. When you are choosing to heal

it and therefore let it go, you are willing to 'see' it directly and accept it. If you are not ready to do that and you still feel there is something to gain by feeling that way, you will not look at it head on or accept its presence fully. You know you are ready when you have enough clarity in your mind to address the question at all, if not this exercise will sound like nonsense to you!

Horses have an innate understanding of these kinds of energy processes, and they have much more respect for people who can confront such issues than those who ignore them. When you take on the training process with a fundamental motivation of love for your horse rather than fear, then you will tap into the right path, timing and skills with your horse's training.



Copyright Notice

©2012 Camille Dureau

This book is copyright 2012 with all rights reserved. It is illegal to copy, distribute, or create derivative works from this book in whole or in part, or to contribute to the copying, distribution, or creating of derivative works from this book.

If you try to copy, steal, or distribute all or any part of this book without permission, you will regret it and be pursued and punished to the fullest extent of the law.

By purchasing this book, you agree to the following: You understand that the information in this book offers simple guidelines for horse training, and cannot be held responsible for any damage or injury incurred to horse or human whilst carrying out the techniques described in this book.