

There is a section "Gaited Horsemanship" on the page <http://gaitedmorgansassociation.com/gaitedmorganhorsemagazine.php> of our club website. I just reviewed and it will probably answer a lot of your questions on various topics. This is another of those in the series where Larry talks to Saddle fit and other topics.



Sorry for the delay!!

Hey everybody, so sorry for the delay, it has been a great but crazy summer. I hope this gets to everybody well and I will get a new newsletter out before winter gets here with some more new articles and our 2014 schedule.

Again sorry for the delay and hopefully this will get to everybody, if you are having problems viewing, please let me know because I am doing it on a different computer and will try to get you the articles through email, my email is info@gaitedhorsemanship.com. The format for next newsletter will hopefully be back to normal, they changed things on me and I am much better with horses than computers!

Thanks again everybody for some great summer clinics and hope our articles are helping make things clear:)

Jennifer Bauer

Gaited Horsemanship

Thoughts on Saddle Fit

Understanding saddle fit is important because ill fitting saddles can create problems for the horse. However, sometimes back pain blamed on the saddle stems from other things. If you have bought saddle after saddle and still have back issues, maybe it is not just the saddle.

Horses that are very tense in the poll area of the neck are also going to have lower back pain in the lumbar region. Horses that are pulled on by the rider's hands can be tense in the poll. Often horses are put in shank bits to make them give vertically in the poll or bring their noses in. If these horses haven't learned to yield laterally in the occipital joint first, they may bring their nose toward their chest, but they will be very tense in the poll. The result is soreness in the lumbar region of the back.

Horses that are ridden out of balance by a rider must constantly tense the neck and back muscles to support themselves. Riders that pull on the face to turn the horse or lean when turning cause the muscles to support rather than help with movement. When, ridden constantly like this the muscles fatigue and become sore.

Many horses today are drilled until they start to internalize and become dull. Without being aware, many riders are discouraging the horse from using their bodies correctly. This is becoming especially true with some groundwork exercises. Often, training improves the horses submissiveness to do what we ask, but isn't always correct for the horse. Correct training will always improve the horses willingness to do what we ask. Many gaited horses go stiff in the hind end, so there is no articulation of the back during movement. When this happens the back becomes stiff and gets sore when ridden. This is also why it is important to teach a horse roundness, so that ligaments support the rider and not muscles needed to create locomotion.

Many horses today have a dish or hollow spot on each side of the withers. It is just where the front of the saddle would sit. This hollowness on each side of the withers makes it impossible for any saddle to fit correct. If you shim it, it will never fill in because the shim would interfere with the horse's shoulders. You don't want to find a saddle to fit a defect that is easy to fix. The hollow spot means the horse has incorrect muscle development in his top line. When he travels he contracts his top line or at best doesn't lengthen it. He may carry his head too high or is allowed to go on a loose rein that allows him to drop his chest. To fix this the horse will have to travel for a while with his head lower so that he will lengthenthe top of his

neck. If you just throw the reins away and ride on a completely loose rein, the horse will not lengthen the top line but just fall on the forehead.

When working to change the muscles, it will only take about two months and all saddles will fit better as well as the horse feeling better in his body. When horses are allowed to be constantly on the forehead, the thoracic sling muscles never engage. All the muscles in the front third develop incorrectly, making it hard to find a saddle that will fit the horse properly. Sometimes, it is not the saddle that needs changing, but the horse's back needs to be developed gymnastically.

I need to ask myself if my riding interferes with the horse's back and its movement. If my riding interferes, there will be sore spots. If my riding causes the horse's back to fatigue it will be a problem. Learning to ride in balance and follow the horse's movements will solve a lot of back issues as well as many emotional issues the horse may have as a result of these issues.

If you sit in a chair seat, on your pockets, all of your weight is on the spine and your pelvis, or core, becomes less mobile. You need to learn to ride with a neutral pelvis so your core is free to follow the horse's back movements. Also, if your horse acts up you are more likely to ride it and stay on utilizing a neutral pelvis because you are able to follow the horse, not be behind the motion. Your balance greatly affects the horse physically and emotionally. The horse can have sore muscles, just as we can, from physical or emotional stress. If you, as the rider, are always out of balance or taking the horse out of balance, or taking the horse out of balance, or giving unclear aids, it can create emotional tension in the horse. This tension usually manifests in the neck and back of the horse.

It is important to have a well fitting saddle, but also consider and examine other possibilities. Sometimes the cause may be cheaper to fix than a new saddle. Many physical things can create a sore back that can be blamed on the saddle. For instance a horse that is not trimmed correctly and whose feet are out of balance can be at fault. In the gaited world it is common to leave toes long or unbalance the feet to enhance gait. Dental problems can often cause back pain. However, riding lessons are not cheap, but could solve a lot of the horse's issues. However, for rider balance issues, riding lessons, though not cheap, could solve a lot of the horse's issues. Even the most advanced rider still needs riding lessons. All great horsemen work hard on their riding so as not to interfere with the horse's back and movements. If you want a better horse, become a better rider.

Larry Whitesell

Aids

The aids we use are the signals we give with our hands, legs, seat, upper body, and weight. There are many combinations and variations of the aids, but also classifications. The two classes of aids I find most riders are confused about are the mechanical aids vs. the cognitive aids. Mechanical aids are those aids given that "make" the horse do what we want - like a strong rein aid to make the horse stop, or a pulling rein to make him turn. The mechanical aids are not always strong, but they specifically address the causation of the physical action we want. Cognitive aids are the aids we use to cause the horse to **understand** what we want. Cognitive aids speak to the horse's mind, or understanding, while mechanical aids speak to his body.

Very often riders give a light, polite mechanical aid to a horse, but since the horse does not truly understand the aid the rider then goes to a stronger mechanical aid. Or in some cases, the rider gives a cognitive aid, but then resorts to a mechanical aid when the horse does not respond as desired. It is important for the rider to distinguish between the two types of aids every time an aid is given. In some cases it is acceptable to give a strong mechanical aid - like if a horse takes off the rider is justified in pulling him around to a stop. But even in that situation, once the horse is under control, the rider should immediately go back to a polite cognitive aid. The important thing to remember is that most horses ignore or resist mechanical aids because they do not understand them - meaning the horse has not been taught to cognitively respond to the aids.

When giving cognitive aids it is important to:

1) Only give one aid at a time - such as do not apply leg pressure at the same time hand pressure is applied or the horse will not know which aid he is supposed to respond to. One prevailing problem with the success of cognitive aids is riding with an "emotional parking brake" - i.e. the rider may intellectually want the horse to "Go", but emotionally there is a little voice that says "But not too fast" - so the rider inadvertently gives conflicting aids.

Cognitive aids can begin at the walk in a controlled environment, and it's important for the rider to be able to give them in a state of relaxation. The time to teach the cognitive stop aid is NOT while galloping out in the middle of an open field.

2) The aids in their most simplistic form say: Start, stop, and turn left/right. That's it~! ALL movements, no matter how complex, are simply glorified versions of start, stop, and turn left/right. Turning left and right begins as simple changes of direction, and then progresses to where only the front feet turn (i.e. a turn on the haunches), or only the hind feet turn (i.e. a turn on the forehand). The turning left and right when

coupled with the lateral release of the poll and topline becomes bend. Shoulder-in, haunches-in, half-pass, counter canter, etc., or sliding stops and spins, are all merely glorified and/or more sophisticated combinations of start, stop, and turn left/right. So at the core of all riding the horse must cognitively understand start, stop, and turn left/right. That is the foundation of all future training.

3) When giving cognitive aids the focus of the rider is NOT strictly on obtaining the response, but rather on obtaining the horse's UNDERSTANDING of the response. This often requires a paradigm shift in thinking, and it seems counter-intuitive, which is why there is often confusion about the mechanical vs. cognitive aids. I often think of giving a cognitive aid followed by a "pregnant pause", and my intention in the pause is for the horse to think about the aid. I try to convey the idea that "I am trying to convey something to you here, can you figure out what it is??". I want the horse to THINK. Sometimes when giving cognitive aids the horse will come up with the wrong answer, and while that is part of the process that is often the part where many riders then resort to a mechanical aid thinking the aid didn't work. Actually offering a wrong answer means the horse IS trying to figure it out! Again, that is a defining difference between mechanical and cognitive aids. Once the understanding is there via the cognitive aids, the correct response/s will be there as well - AND they will be there with light, polite aids. Many riders feel the need to give stronger aids when the aids are not understood, or when the rider gives conflicting aids (even if inadvertently).

In your riding start to pay attention to every aid you give, and ask yourself whether you are giving an aid in attempt to enhance the horse's understanding of the aid, or if you are simply trying to manipulate his body. Don't be afraid to use a mechanical aid when necessary, but

consciously give cognitive aids in the bulk of your riding. It also helps to go back to the 4 basics to figure out where a problem lies. IOW, if the horse does not respond as you want, which basic needs addressing - the start? the stop? the turn left? or the turn right? The answer will be there even at this most simplistic level.

Ann

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