

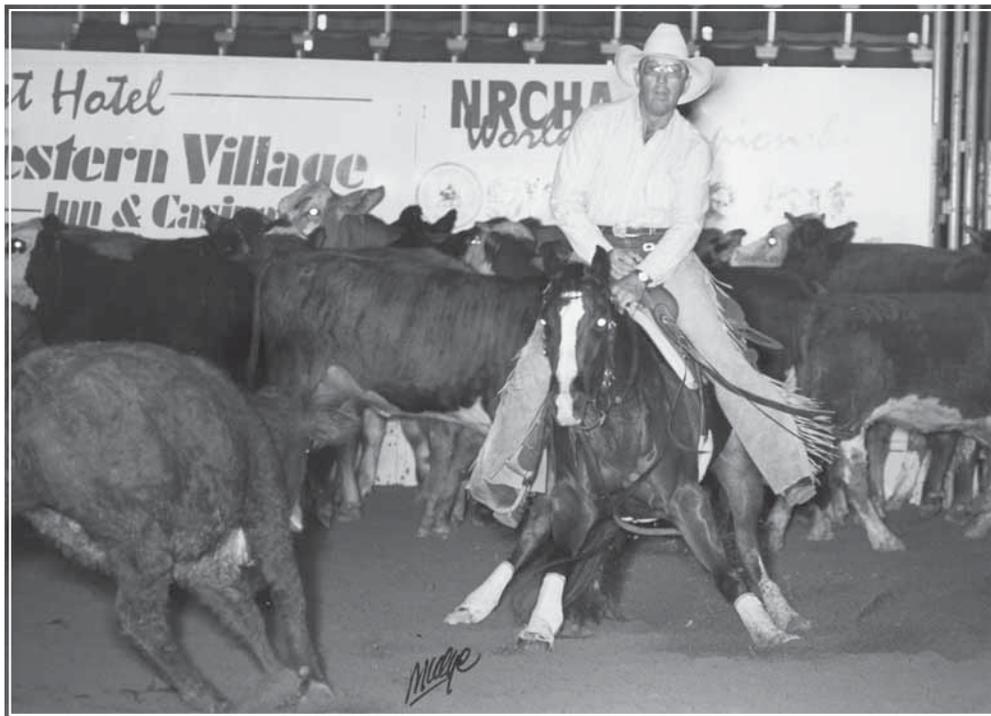
FUNDAMENTALS & BODY CONTROL

Just like building a house, the most important thing that will ensure your success training performance horses, is the foundation you put on them. And the foundation for a horse is the body control you develop in the initial months of your riding program. As your training progresses, virtually every time you run into a problem it will either be because the horse has become stiff in the poll or neck, or a part of his body is not responding like it should. If the foundation isn't there, these problems will show up again and again, from a shoulder that isn't responding to the neck rein like it should when you go to start your turnaround, or a head and neck that aren't staying relaxed and supple in your stops, or a hip that isn't moving over enough when you cue for a lead change. I can't overemphasize this concept – you simply can't spend too much time on the body control exercises that we lay out in this program.

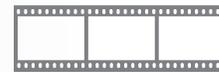
THE FIVE EASY PIECES

I call the foundation exercises that I use the most the Five Easy Pieces, and you will learn about them in this level of our training program. When you've mastered them, you should be able to put any part of your horse's body where you want it when you want it, without resistance. And once you've mastered these exercises, you'll probably repeat them at the walk and the trot every time you ride. It's kind of like a pilot

testing all the controls before he takes off. If you feel resistance anywhere, it will only intensify when you go to try a maneuver. So these exercises become the tools that help you fix problems in a structured and consistent way.



EXERCISES 3 & 4



OBJECTIVE

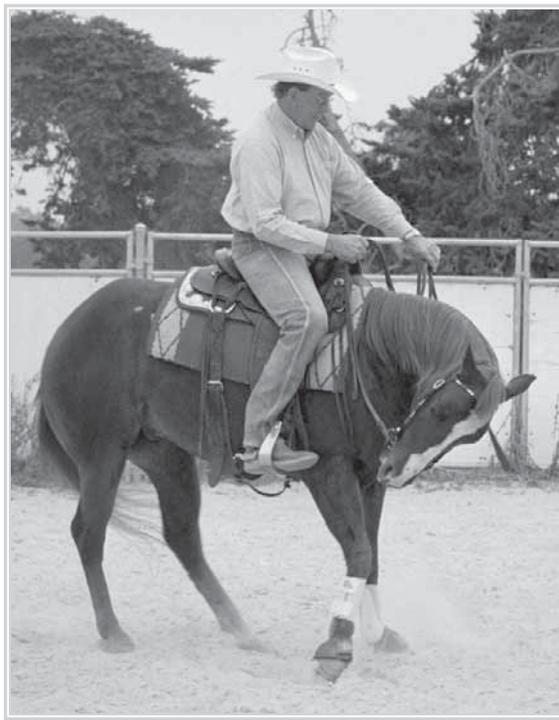
- To start teaching your horse to let you move his whole body laterally
- To start teaching your horse to let you move his hip
- To learn to do both of these things without letting the shoulder lead the movement
- To improve your back-up or overcome resistance if you're having problems
- To learn to feel whether your horse is straight from head to tail and learn how to correct him if he is not
- To learn how to back your horse easily and softly

THINGS TO CONCENTRATE ON

As you continue working on body control your movement should become more and more automatic. When you first learn something, you have to do a lot of thinking about what you are doing and how you need to do it, what to do if it doesn't work and so forth and so on. But your main goal is to get to the point where you no longer need to think, where your subconscious takes over and your body automatically reacts. If you've ever studied any one-on-one competitive sports like, karate or fencing, or a partnered activity like pairs figure skating or ballroom dancing, then you know how much time is devoted to learning the individual moves,. You are required to practice them over and over and over again until you don't think about them anymore, they just happen on their own, as natural reactions.

As you work at putting your horse's body in different positions you want to stay at it until giving your cues becomes an automatic response to your thought – I call it developing "muscle memory". When you think, "move shoulders," the cue should just happen, if you still have to go through a mental checklist: "rein over and up, inside leg," you are not ready to move on. You also want to be able to feel it whenever you are getting resistance from your horse. Alignment is a good place to start to develop that feel, but as you pay more attention you'll find that in everything you do, there is probably one body part that could be a little lighter or a little softer, a little better positioned, and your goal is to identify it and fix it ... without thinking about it.

So stay with every exercise until it is "thoughtless." Visualizing the exercise helps a lot of people. Or do the cues in front of the TV until they are "thoughtless." Just resist the temptation to move ahead before you're ready. Unlike karate – where, if you try to spar before you are ready, you'll get



COLLECTION

OBJECTIVES

- To concentrate on driving your horse from the back with your legs, in order to create a soft, round frame
- To continue to integrate the concept of 50 percent hands/50 percent legs into your riding
- To learn how to handle a tough or belligerent horse
- To learn about the elevator bit and how it can help you in your training program

THINGS TO CONCENTRATE ON

- Developing a conditioned response of using your hands and legs together to soften any resistance
- Learning to feel when the horse actually starts reaching further underneath himself in response to your legs
- Start to condition yourself to reinforce collection with your legs first, then your hands
- Maintaining the correct vertical flexion in all your work and exercises

HOW THIS FITS INTO THE PROGRAM

A horse can't give you really athletic maneuvers if he isn't collected. First, collection's emphasis on carrying the weight on the hindquarters puts the horse in a posture that allows him to maximize his power in all his maneuvers by loading the weight to the hind quarters, allowing him to move his front end more athletically and with less effort. Second, a collected frame is one that's ready for anything. Think of a football player ready for a play to begin – poised, coiled and ready to go any direction. A collected horse is the same way – with his weight on his hindquarters, he is spring loaded and ready to unload into your next cue.

With reining and cow horses, our goal is to eventually teach the horse to maintain this collected frame on his own, without him depending on us to enforce it or remind him. So while we'll spend a lot of time on it during the next few months, our goal is to encourage the horse more and more to take responsibility for keeping himself in this collected frame that stays pre-loaded behind. Then we can move more confidently into the next levels of difficulty in our maneuvers and starting to work on cattle.



Without a soft neck and poll, collection is impossible, so if you still have any resistance in the neck during any of the exercises that we've done so far, go back and work on them. In the video, I ride a horse in a clinic that is stiff to start with, and you'll see me work one side and then the other until he starts to lighten up. There are a lot of great concepts explained in the video, but I want to point out that because it is a clinic situation, I'm throwing more at this horse than I would at home. If the horse had been developed with all the tools and guidelines that I'm giving you, he would never have been that dull to begin with. I guess what I'm saying is that there will probably not be the need to handle your horse like I do Jerry's, because hopefully you've never allowed him to lean on your hands or become dull like this horse was. But you'll see that as soon as he started to figure out what I wanted, he started to lighten up considerably. It always just leaves you hoping that the owner learned as much from the experience as the horse did or he will fall right back into the same routine. Remember that 90 percent of the time, a problem that a horse is giving you is just a reflection of your own riding, so work 90 percent on yourself and 10 percent on your horse!

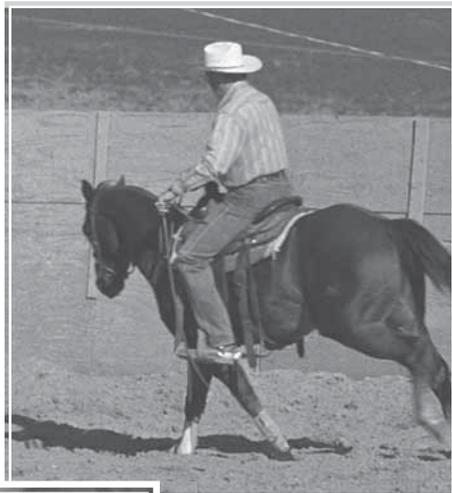
Rather than just work on his head I do shoulder in and out exercises to stretch his spine laterally and encourage him to shift his weight to the back to make his front end more maneuverable.

RIDE WITH ME

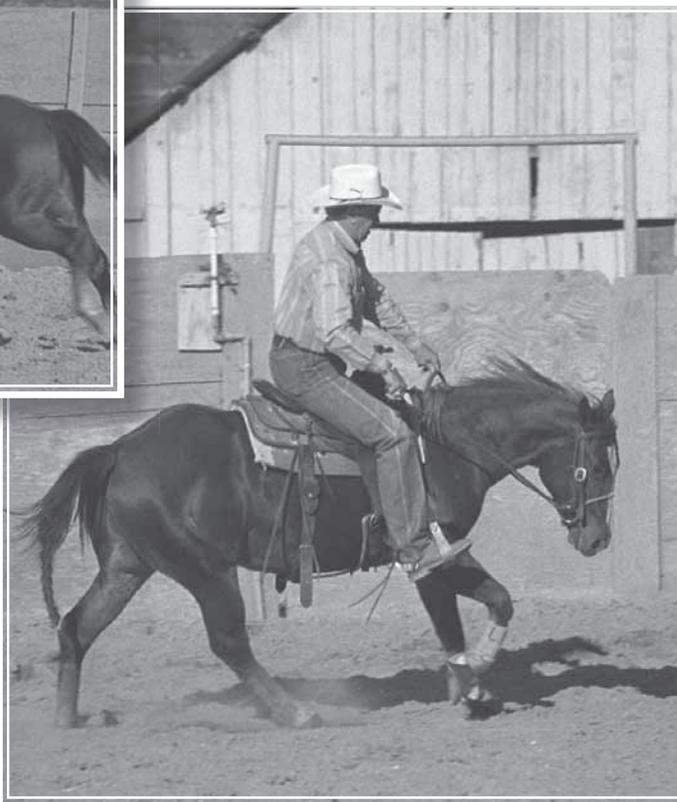


1

Tricky was pretty fresh when we started this ride. Note how high his head is and how big his stride is in front and how shallow his stride is with his hind legs



2



4

Within a few minutes his head has come down. But just as important is what has happened to his stride. See how deep he is reaching with his back legs! Compare his posture and think about which would produce the nicest stop.

3

