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# ETHICAL EQUITATION – PART THREE DIRECT TURN AND THE IN-DIRECT TURN

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Ethical Equitation is about using training principles that your horse can clearly understand, to gain a happy relaxed horse. In the previous two articles we have discussed the eight principles of ethical equitation and how they apply to the first of the basic signals - Go and Stop. This article will address the final two signals - Turn and Yield. By mastering all four signals you gain total control of the speed, stride length and direction of your horse's body.

There are TWO types of turn - the DIRECT turn and the IN-DIRECT turn. Both of these turns are elicited from rein aids only. This is because turns are about decelerations of the front legs - NOT accelerations of the hind legs which is what turning a horse with your leg encourages. (Remember the exclusivity rule that leg aids and reins should never be used at the same time). The reins are most definitely there to tell your horse to slow, shorten, step back, stop and turn, whilst the legs aids signal the horse to go, lengthen, do upward transitions and yield (turn) the hind quarters. By splitting the signals almost 50 – 50 between rein aids and leg aids we give the horse the best possible chance of understanding what we want.

Direct Turn is the response given to a single rein aid - it decelerates the front leg on that side causing the opposite front leg to push the horse in a new direction. For example when the right rein is used slightly open and DIRECTLY off the neck a step to the right with the forelegs is achieved and vice versa. It is in effect half of your 'stop button', an extension of stop, as it provides another tool to control the forelegs and more often than not a horse with a poor stop will also have poor turn.

By using the word 'Turn' we get a clear idea of what it is we are asking for, it is not neck bend or flexion (at this stage) but simply the front legs changing direction. It gives us another tool for gaining control of the horses' legs and therefore limiting their fear/flight response to gain a calm horse. Once the turn signal is well established and understood it can be used to teach a horse to maintain line. By this we mean when you put your horse on a particular line - say the edge of the arena - he does not vary off that line unless given a signal to do so. The use of a direct turn aid keeps his outside front leg on your line, which diminishes the horses' ability to run away from the wall or shy at outside stimuli which would reinforce his fear/flight response.

In-direct Turn is the use of one rein to move the horse away from that particular rein i.e. the right rein is applied against the neck and the horse steps his forelegs away to the left. This is a very useful tool in gaining straightness, balance, and bend, whilst achieving the added bonus of relaxing the horse by relaxing his neck. Effective training of the direct turn and later, in-direct turn will achieve a relaxed neck, without confusing the horse. In many circumstances, especially in Dressage and Show Jumping, horses are taught to merely bend their necks left and right to each rein aid in an attempt to 'loosen the neck.' If the horse learns to only bend its neck to a single rein aid it DETRAINS the turn signal, as two responses are expected from the one signal. Imagine from the horses' point of view if there are two answers to the one question he will often give you the wrong answer when you least expect it or require it! (Remember every signal must be EXCLUSIVE - one response per cue.)

Once turn is solidly learnt at the basic level, SHAPING can occur.

Ideas such as flexion can then be introduced and will achieve better engagement and, as a result, roundness. However, the basic response must first be trained so that there is no confusion for the horse.

Signs that your horse's turn is not installed properly are rearing, shying, tension or simply a horse which wobbles along your line. To test whether your turn cue is correctly installed try at halt opening the right/left rein, increasing the pressure until the horse responds. If he knows turn well he will step immediately with his front leg to the right/left but, if it is not installed well, he might bend his neck only, refuse to move, or turn his hind legs.

Another simple test is to ride centre lines and diagonals in your arena, or ride from point A to point B out in the paddock, and check your horse stays exactly on your line, unaided by leg or constant rein aids.

YIELD is the yielding of the hindquarters - it is the last response to be trained. The aid for yield is one leg slightly back from the girth with a little push that achieves the hind quarters to take a step away from that particular leg. Like the turn, which builds on the stop, yield builds on the go as it works on accelerating the hind legs away from a leg pressure. A common mistake made, when training yield, is expecting the horse to yield one half of the arena on the first try with the horse on the bit and moving straight! To promote relaxation and understanding, the horse must clearly comprehend what is being asked and, to do this, a release for a basic attempt must first be given.

To effectively train yield, it is best started in hand with a whip tap above the hock, as it is probable that the horse will choose the correct answer to this tap and step away from it first time, therefore allowing you to release and repeat until learnt. Once you are mounted, you can use PAVLOV'S PRINCIPLE of association to swap the whip aid onto your leg signal.

Remember to never hold a signal on as the horse will either habituate and become dull to that signal or become hyper-reactive. This is particularly easy to do in yield as it is tempting for the rider to expect too much too soon, which turns into a pushing and pulling match. Two steps sideways - release - is a good rule to follow, as not only does it give the horse a very clear idea of the goal but also avoids common mistakes such as the shoulders leading.

Further uses for Yield lie mainly in Dressage training as it is the beginnings of lateral work, half pass, travers and pirouettes - all needing the horse to move his hindquarters in response to the rider's leg. However, it is also very important for every horse as it is one of the four core signals and gives you another tool to control the horses' legs.

Kept paramount in any horse trainer/rider's mind must be the PRESSURE PRINCIPLE - the application of pressure, followed immediately by release, when the correct response is given - trains; it is the release of pressure which trains the horse. To achieve a light and responsive horse, the training must be predictable - a light aid is given, a stronger aid is applied to motivate a response and finally the release of pressure when the correct response is achieved.

Be consistent with your expectations, predictable in your signals and remain relaxed in your training - it can be very difficult to teach a tense horse to relax once he has learnt tension during training.

Remember to appreciate the fundamental cognitive differences between horses and humans and, as Jane Savoie wrote "You are the one with the desire to ride. Your horse would probably rather be eating out in the field. The least you can do is reward him for his cooperation so that he is happy in his work."

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