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The Stone Horse

Working in the Barn

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When I am introducing a beginner to a horse for the first time, the last thing I want is for her to be frightened by him. The size of the horse is bad enough; "I had no idea they were so *big*!" is a comment I often hear. If, in addition, the horse is fidgety, it is very difficult to get the student to relax. So in describing the sort of horse I like to use, I refer to him as "like a large boulder": a horse who just stands there as though nothing in the world would upset him enough to make him a threat. Hence, the "stone horse."

Even for the more advanced rider, a horse who is fidgety on the ground is annoying to work with, and a surprising number of otherwise well-trained horses do not stand quietly in the barn. Since riding begins with grooming and tacking, and our ride is affected by how we get along with the horse on the ground, let's begin by examining how our actions affect the horse on the ground.

The information in this chapter has been covered in much greater depth in my previous book *How Your Horse Wants You to Ride: Starting Out—Starting Over*, which is intended for the novice rider. But I have found over the years that many experienced riders have not been exposed to handling concepts that are important for the horse's comfort, both mental and physical. Therefore, I will cover these concepts briefly in this chapter, so that you too may have a "stone horse."

THE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

At one time or another, all of us have experienced the way horses seem to pick up on our emotions, especially when we're nervous. People will say things like "They can smell your fear," and assume there's nothing we can do about it. Perhaps horses do smell your fear, especially if you're terrified, but transmitting

To learn more about this topic, read Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of the companion volume to this book, *How Your Horse Wants You to Ride: Starting Out—Starting Over*.

emotions is actually a physical occurrence, and *one that can be controlled*. It is dependent on two phenomena, one observed and one scientifically researched.

The observed phenomenon I call muscular telepathy, and I initially learned about it at a Centered Riding clinic some time ago. The best way to understand it is to think of a school of fish, all scooting along at high speed. Suddenly they all turn almost simultaneously and shoot off in another direction. How did they do that? Obviously the lead fish didn't say to the next fish, "At the big rock I'm going to turn right and go up. Pass it on." No. Something occurs at some deep level in the fishes' brains that enables their bodies to pick up muscle signals from the other fish. You may have observed it in horses when you are on a trail ride: You are trotting along briskly when the horse in front of you breaks into a canter without increasing speed, and your horse almost simultaneously changes into the canter as well.

This phenomenon works between species just as well as it does within the species. That is, you and the horse communicate at the muscular level. For example, it has been shown that if a trainer has some serious muscular limitation, such as fused vertebrae in her lower back, the horses she trains will all have rigid backs in the same area.

The second, scientific, phenomenon was discovered comparatively recently. It was always thought that emotions originated in the brain and then were transmitted to the body as various physical tensions or expressions. Now scientists know that the transmission is the other way around. That is, the body observes something through the senses and reacts accordingly. The brain processes this reaction and interprets it as fear, anger, joy, or whatever.

Putting these two things together, we realize that if you are fearful, the horse's body, through muscular telepathy, will pick up the tensions in your body associated with fear. His brain will then also interpret those tensions, now in himself, as fear—and suddenly you're both in trouble.

"So," you might say, "now I know that the horse and I can scare each other without meaning to. But what good does that knowledge do me?" Simple. Just as there are muscular patterns for fear and insecurity, there are also muscular patterns for confidence. All you have to do is put your body in "confident mode," and not only will your fear dissipate, but so will your horse's. If this sounds like magic, it really isn't, and it has proved itself over and over with my students and their horses, some of whom had serious hurdles to surmount.

Tidbits & Supplements

When I lost my husband, of course I informed my friends in my e-group, ridingwithconfidence. Among the expressions of sympathy was one in which the writer said, "Are you using the Seven Steps to help you work through your grief?" At first I was rather startled at the idea, but then I tried them and they did indeed help. I concluded that grief is, after all, another form of fear, so telling my body that it wasn't afraid helped me handle my grief.

THE SEVEN STEPS

To teach students how to put their bodies in confident mode, I use something I call the Seven Steps, which are a series of exercises derived from Centered Riding and such disciplines as yoga and t'ai chi. I find they work best for most people when they are performed in the order you see here, but there is no law about it and you may find that you need to work on one step more than the others. It is important, however, that you do not try to force perfection in yourself, but simply make the best effort you can at the time and then go on to the next task.

When you are first learning the Seven Steps, wear comfortable clothes. Begin each exercise by standing with your feet comfortably apart and your arms relaxed at your sides. If you're at home and have a full-length mirror you can use, it will help you visualize what you are trying to achieve in some of the exercises.

In this chapter I describe how you do the steps on the ground and discuss how they relate to ground work. Later in the book you will see how they apply to riding. Once you have learned them, and the resulting feeling in your body, you can go through them in a minimalist way any time. Besides helping your riding, they are very useful in stressful situations in the real world.

Step 1. Growing

Growing lengthens and stretches your body so that all the muscles become softer and more flexible, especially in your hips and lumbar spine area.

1. Bring your left hand up in front of your face with the thumb facing toward you.

2. Raise your arm up and watch it as it goes up until the whole arm is straight up. Drop your head again until your face is vertical and reach up a little further so that you feel the pull at your waist.

Peg growing her right side. That side now appears longer than the left and her right foot is well grounded.

3. Bring your arm down but leave your body up there.

4. Repeat with your right arm, but instead of bringing your arm all the way down, first tap the top of your head, right where a line drawn from ear to ear and one drawn straight back from your nose would cross. Imagine that your body is suspended from that point, like a Halloween skeleton that you hang on the door.

5. Drop your arm by your side. Your body is being gently pulled upward and your arms and legs are hanging down from it.

Step 2. Shakeout

Shakeout further releases tension in your muscles, especially in your limbs.

1. Allow your arms to hang naturally at your sides. Begin with your fingers, shaking them as if you were shivering or as if you had water on your hands and were trying to shake it off.

2. After a few seconds, begin shaking your hands as well, then your wrists, forearms, elbows, upper arms, and finally, shoulders, in that order.

The final shakeout relaxes your whole body.

3. Then, one leg at a time, shake your feet, ankles, calves, knees, and thighs. Be sure you shake, not twist or turn your ankles.

4. Finally, allow your body to bend at the hips and fall forward until you are bent over as far as is comfortable, and shake all over like a dog. Come up slowly and finish by growing again.

Step 3. Breathing

Holding our breath is something we all do when we're scared. But your breathing is noticeably copied by the horse, so good breathing is good first aid for releasing tensions in both of you in scary situations. Good breathing comes from the diaphragm, not the chest, so you need to learn how it feels.

1. Place your hand on your belly, palm in with your little finger on your navel, and try to push your hand out each time you inhale. You should feel your diaphragm pushing out and your lower rib cage expanding all the way around. Do not allow your shoulders to lift.

2. Relaxation breathing means exhaling for about twice as long as you inhale. You can inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Breathe out very slowly as though you were gently blowing out a candle. Exhale as long as you comfortably can. Feel your rib cage contracting and your diaphragm lifting to expel the air.

Step 4. Soft Eyes

Hard eyes are predatory and tend to make the horse nervous when you are working around him, especially if he is loose (which is why many people have trouble catching their horses). Soft eyes are less threatening and improve your awareness of where you are in relation to your horse as you work together on the ground.

1. Pick an object about five feet away and stare at it for a minute, trying to block out everything else. This sharply focused look is called hard eyes.

2. Without moving your head or eyes, keeping the object in the center of your field of vision, allow your focus to soften and spread out so that you can see all around you at once. This unfocused way of seeing is called soft eyes.

3. Hold both arms extended in front of you.

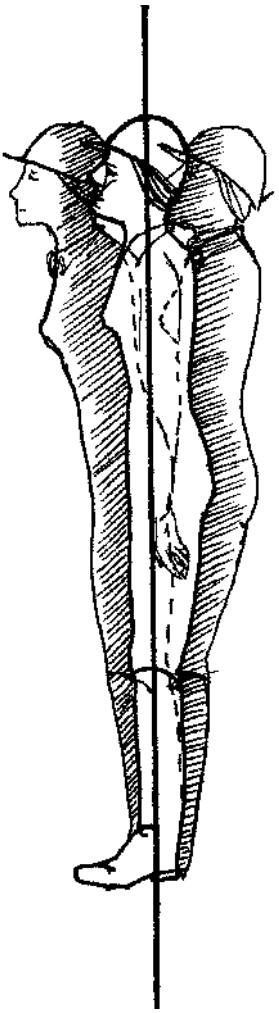
4. Wiggling your fingers vigorously, bring both arms out to the sides like airplane wings until they almost disappear from your line of sight. With soft eyes you can be conscious of the wiggling fingers of both hands at once, without looking to either side.

Step 5. Teeter-Totter (Longitudinal Centering)

Standing and moving with your longitudinal center too far forward, both of which are common, cause tension in your feet, which the horse interprets as preparation for flight, making him less inclined to stand or move in a relaxed manner. The teeter-totter improves your awareness of how you are centered longitudinally (that is, back to front).

1. Stand on level ground with your feet close together. Notice where the pressure is distributed on your feet.

2. Keeping the rest of your body straight and bending only at the ankles, allow your body to sway forward until you are forced to take a step to keep from falling. Repeat, swaying to the back.



In the teeter-totter, only the ankle joint opens and closes.

3. Try it again, but this time stop just *before* you have to take a step.

4. Next, sway forward while being aware of the pressure on the soles of your feet. Stop as soon as it begins to change.

5. Sway back the same way, but now notice that there is also some tension in your lower back as you sway.

6. Sway slowly forward from your position in step 5, and stop *as soon as the tension leaves your back*. You have found your longitudinal center.

Step 6. Lateral Centering

Lateral (side to side) centering is primarily a concern while you are riding, since the horse can be made unbalanced to the side quite easily. Becoming conscious of lateral centering on the ground will make it easier to learn when you ride. But it's useful on the ground, too. Especially when you are doing such tasks as leading or asking the horse to pick up a foot, keeping your own lateral balance square will help the horse do the same. Of course, if you want him to shift his balance, shifting yours will help.

1. Stand facing a full-length mirror. Raise both arms over your head and grow as much as you can without getting stiff. Imagine that in your center, which is located just below and behind your navel, there is a big, heavy ball.

2. Without twisting your body, carry both arms to the right. At the same time, imagine that the heavy ball is rolling to the left. Your body should form a smooth bow shape. You should feel more pressure on your left foot. You have moved your lateral center to the left.

3. Bring both arms back up over your head and allow the ball to roll back to the center.

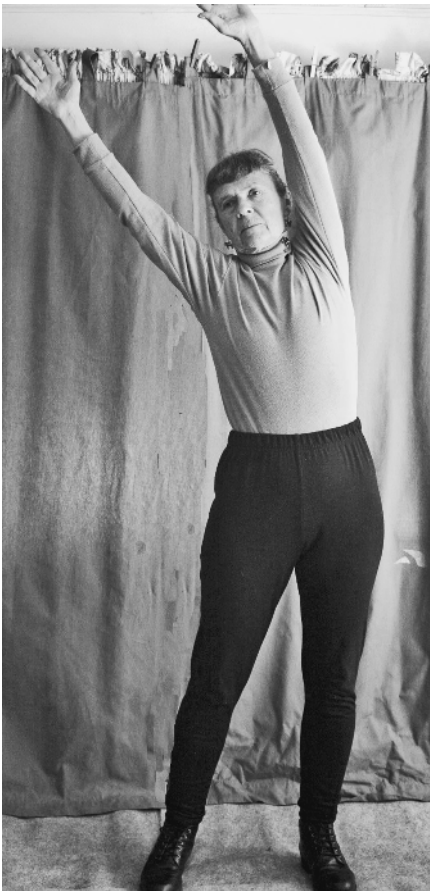
4. Now bring your arms to the left and allow the ball to roll to the right. To do this successfully, you must really lengthen as you raise your arms. If you don't, the top of your pelvis will move to the right but the lower section will stay where it is and the ball won't really roll to the right. Look in the mirror and make sure the point on the right side of your pelvis that is lined up with your navel is also the point farthest to the right.

5. Allow yourself to center again. Then repeat in both directions. Try to stay long and soft so that you sway easily from one side to the other.

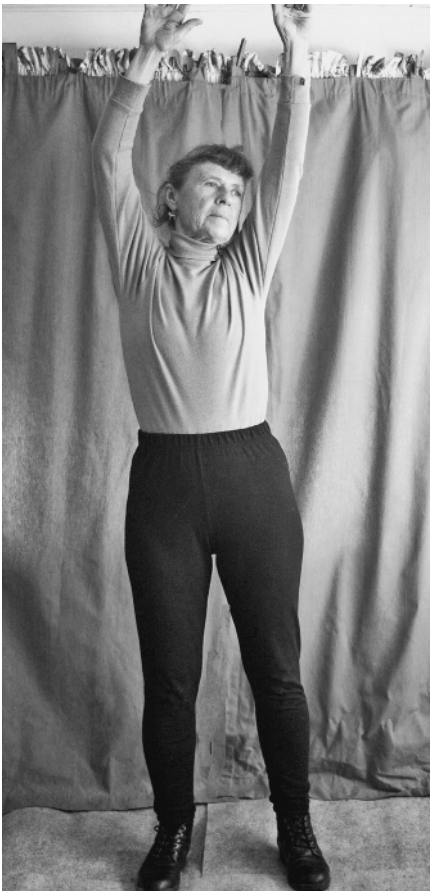
Try to make a habit, whether you're sitting or standing, of checking your lateral balance now and then. Think of keeping your spine at twelve o'clock, then feeling the pressure on your feet or seat bones to see if it is even.

Step 7. Following Seat

This step is also more important in riding, but learning it on the ground will help you ride and also (believe it or not) have an influence on your horse's way of moving. That is, if he is following you and you move freely and athletically, he will tend to copy you.



Moving my center to the left. The vertical left leg shows clearly that my weight is over my left foot.



Moving my center to the right. It's not so easy, and not just because I'm not as young as I used to be!

You need a fairly large open space for this exercise. Use a full-length mirror if possible. Begin by doing all the previous exercises, then start walking in place as follows.

1. Keep your feet solidly on the floor and your torso upright and still from the waist up, and place your hands on your hips.

2. Now bend your left knee by pushing it forward; straighten it by pulling it back, but don't lock it. Do this several times and feel how your hip drops as your knee bends. This is very clear visually in the mirror. Keep your spine vertical and don't allow your hip to sway to the side.

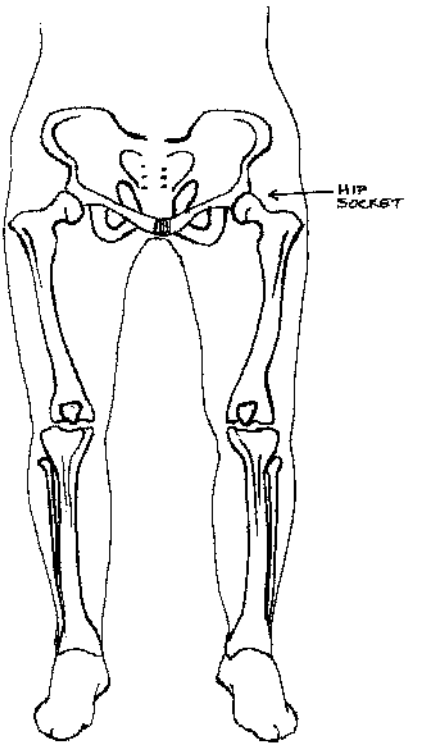
3. Try the same thing with your right knee. See if one side feels different from the other—which is true for many people. If there is a noticeable difference, try putting both hands over your head and stretching and growing as much as you comfortably can; then, with your arms still extended, walk in place again and see if you feel looser and smoother.

4. Thinking about how your hips drop, and not allowing them to sway from side to side, start walking around. First let your arms swing, even exaggerating the movement to free up your shoulders and give yourself room.

5. Now tighten your shoulders and neck, stop swinging your arms, and feel how this restricts your leg movement.

6. Return to the vigorous swinging, and when you are moving freely, bring your arms down to your sides.

7. Imagine that you have a bicycle pedal sticking out of each hip joint. Hold your imaginary pedals in your hands and start pedaling backwards while walking forward. Try the pedaling while walking in place. Also try it running in place (you do have to lift your feet to run).



The location of the hip joint within the pelvis.

Working on the following seat on the ground will raise your awareness of the movement in your pelvis that is necessary to enable you to follow the horse's movement when you're sitting in the saddle. You should also be aware that the following movement is exactly the same whether you are absorbing the motion of your own legs or the horse's. This is why riding, in the sense of following the horse's movement, can and should be extremely easy, because it is already hard-wired in our bodies.

GROUNDING

In any athletic endeavor, or indeed any physical activity, to perform your best you must be free of tension yet still muscularly alert. You also need to have a solid connection with something in order to control your movements. If you're trying to run and you hit a patch of ice, you become an instant comedy act—at least until you hit the ground!

The name for this connection is *grounding*. I find the best way to create a clear image of grounding is to think of playing dodge ball. Your feet are firmly connected to the ground, while the rest of you is flexible and able to move in any direction that is consistent with the laws of gravity. Waiting to receive a serve in tennis is another example. In fact, in any sport you can name, what you see in the good players that you *don't* see in the novices is the ability to ground. The lack of grounding is particularly evident in riders, mostly because of their wiggly stirrups and the body's almost unconquerable desire to hang on with the legs! Let's look at what we have to do to become grounded.

Tidbits & Supplements

At a recent seminar on Feldenkrais for singers, we were given an exercise for our feet. Sitting on the front of a chair, first we lifted the toes of the left foot several times, then the heel, then one after the other, being careful to find the most comfortable position to place our feet. Next we lifted the inside and the outside of each foot. We were to be very conscious of each movement, repeating it several times and being careful not to cause tension or strain. Then we lifted each section in turn, moving around the foot first in the "easy" direction, then in the "hard" direction. Finally, we repeated the whole exercise with the right foot. A little later on we were standing and walking around, and I realized I had rarely felt so thoroughly grounded!

Finding the bubbling spring.

The Bubbling Spring

Sit down and take one shoe off, then feel around on the sole of your foot, just at the back of the ball, behind the second toe. You'll find a little hollow there that's a tiny bit sensitive. The martial arts people call this the *bubbling spring*, and it's the point at which, they say, the energy of the earth enters your body and gives you power. Certainly it is the point that must be connected to the ground for you to maintain standing balance. Try your teeter-totter and notice that when your bubbling springs leave the ground, *that* is the moment at which you lose your balance and are forced to take a step to regain it, whether forward, back, or sideways.

Now go through the Seven Steps again and when you finish, think about your bubbling spring points, then imagine that your feet are becoming very wide and flat, like a duck's feet, allowing your bubbling springs to really connect to the ground. Next, imagine roots growing into the ground from these points, spreading out to make a wide, secure base. Or make up your own images to create the idea of being totally connected with the ground.

Finding Freedom from Tension in Balance

Next, start mentally "looking" at your body, beginning with your feet, and trying to locate areas of tension. As you find tense areas, release them by breathing out, imagining that they are made of something soft and melting or that the space they occupy is actually empty. Think of allowing your shins to rest on

your ankles, your thigh bones on your shins, and so on up your body, but don't lose your growing in the process. If you can find true balance and release from tension, so that you are solidly grounded, you will discover that you feel very confident and secure, and very athletic at the same time.

Sometimes tension can be released with something as simple as the thigh and shoulder squeezes found on pages 118–119. If you find it difficult or impossible to release all your tensions, it may be because your body is structurally misaligned. Often this can be corrected through disciplines such as the Feldenkrais technique described in the box on page 19. There are many such programs available, and what you decide to learn at least partly depends on what is available in your area.

Tidbits & Supplements

If your leg bones don't form a straight line there will be some compensatory tension when you try to ground. Sometimes this can be corrected with orthotics (shoe inserts that level your foot). It is worthwhile for the serious horseman to be fitted with them. For such things, I happen to be a fan of applied kinesiology, a diagnostic technique used by some chiropractors, in which your own body determines whether the device is correct for you.

You will need to practice the Seven Steps and grounding over and over until you are very comfortable with them and can use them with little or no thought or effort. At first you may need to do them in their entirety, using the exercises above, but with practice you will find you can simply picture the Seven Steps in your mind and your body will release its tensions with a minimum of external effort.

The Seven Steps assist you in grounding, so by going through the steps first, then envisioning the grounding, you will find that, too, becomes fixed in your muscle memory and more easily available. I find a very useful way to practice them daily is when I'm walking downstairs, especially if I'm carrying something. Many people use them in stressful situations such as turnpike driving. However you use them, the more you do, the easier they become and the more secure you become, both physically and emotionally.

EQUIPMENT FOR GROUND WORK

The basic equipment you use on the ground with your horse is a halter and a lead rope, but there are a number of variations. The standard English halter is made of either leather or nylon strapping, about an inch wide. It has a number of rings that allow different ways of fastening the horse. Both the crown piece

and the throat latch can be undone, allowing for more convenience in putting on and removing the halter, but also providing an opportunity for abuse if the halter is dragged over the horse's head in such a way that it hurts his ears. Because the strapping is wide, the English halter does not apply a particularly strong pressure on its own, so it is often used with a chain lead placed over the horse's nose.

Western halters are usually made of rope, only unfasten at the crown, and have only one ring, which is under the jaw. Natural horsemanship halters are similar, except they are made of two strands of narrower, softer rope and have no rings or metal fastenings. Because they are made of narrow rope, both halters are more severe than an English halter—overly so if the rope is stiff and hard.

Lead ropes vary mostly in length and in how they are fastened. The fastener should be strong but easy to undo. Some of the fasteners require two hands, which is not always possibly with a frightened horse. Eight feet of rope is comfortable for most leading and short-term tying, and twelve feet is right for basic training.

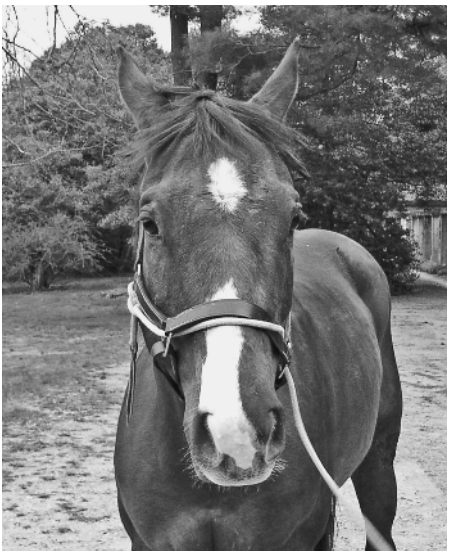
With the flat English halter many people use a chain lead for extra control. Chains present the opportunity for abuse, but when applied and used correctly they teach the horse to be responsive, not fearful. (The chain should be applied in the same way as the zephyr lead shown on page 23.)

The zephyr lead is a nice compromise, being a short piece of soft rope (about thirty inches) of the size and type used in natural horsemanship halters. It has a ring on one end to which the lead rope is attached, and a snap on the other. I first saw this in a TTeam book, so they can probably be purchased there (see appendix C), or you could make your own.

Chains and zephyr leads are only useful on a horse who tries to run past you or turn and pull away. Since they put additional pressure on the horse's nose, if you try to get the horse to come forward by pulling on these types of leads, it sends the opposite signal and you get a confused, and either frightened or angry horse. A natural horsemanship halter is a better answer because the pressure is placed on the poll and to some extent on the back of the jaw, thus asking the horse to drop his head and come forward.

Crossties often come with a quick-release snap on one end in case the horse pulls back. This snap should always be on the end of the tie closest to the wall. The last thing you want is to be grabbing at a frightened horse's head in an effort to unfasten him. Stretchy ties are good for a horse who tends to pull out of fear if he feels resistance, but might be dangerous for a horse who is a really determined puller, since there will be a great deal of pressure if they break.

So which one should you use? It depends on what you are planning to do and how much control you expect to need. And also what you are accustomed



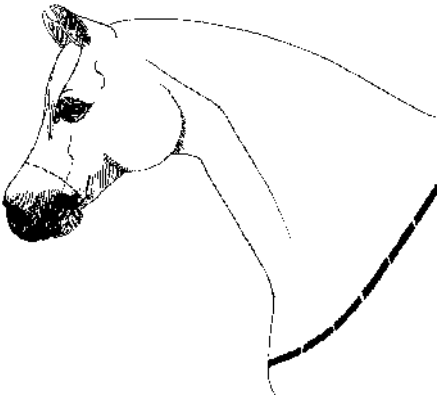
When the zephyr lead is attached this way, most of the pressure on the nose is on the halter rather than the horse.

to. I grew up with English equipment and crosstying horses, so I generally use an English halter. But for ground training I like a soft natural horsemanship halter. However, if I had a very aggressive horse and lacked the time at that moment to improve his attitude, I think the English halter and a correctly applied chain, with a second lead attached under the jaw, would give me the most control. (See the photo on page 45.)

FIRST CONTACT

There are certain rules to keep in mind when you start working with any horse. To begin with, the horse by nature thinks of humans as predators. If he has always been well handled this reaction will be minimal, but even a small amount of clumsy handling will quickly bring it to the surface.

Good handling begins with the way you approach a horse, especially an unfamiliar one. It is important to approach the horse so that you are clearly visible but don't come across as threatening. This means you use soft eyes and approach at an angle from the front, where you can be seen but are at least risk of being kicked if the horse has any issues. And you *never* touch the horse anywhere until you are sure (by his turning at least his ears toward you) that he knows you are there.



The horse's personal space lies between the dotted lines on the neck and the muzzle.

As with other humans, you don't invade the personal space of strangers. With another human, the only place you are allowed to touch at first, and then only if it is offered, is the hand. With a horse it is the muzzle. This is because both are used for the same purpose. After using the other nontactile senses—sight and hearing primarily, and probably smell more than we realize—the human uses her hand to touch a strange object if she wishes to explore it further. In a similar situation the horse touches with his muzzle, which in his case improves his ability to smell and enables him to taste quite easily as well. So the horse's muzzle serves as his "hand" when dealing with the unfamiliar, and therefore is acceptable as the first place for contact. But just as if you reached out to touch something and it suddenly reached out at you, you would recoil, so you must offer your hand but wait and allow the horse to reach out and touch you, not the other way around. Once he has done so, you can show your intentions by gently rubbing him in the muzzle area—sort of the equivalent of the squeeze you give during a handshake.

The horse's personal space extends from above his nostrils all the way back to the area just in front of his shoulder. Many people feel the horse should willingly accept touching anywhere. Yes, once he gets to know you he should, but that should be a result of his learning to trust you, not out of compulsion. And certainly it should not be demanded in a first encounter.

After the horse accepts your touch on his muzzle, you can proceed to his shoulder and then to the rest of his body. If the horse shows any signs of fear or resistance, such as moving away or raising his head, accept them as signs that he needs work in these areas, and some sort of advance-retreat exercise is in order to start creating a safe, trusting relationship.

Tidbits & Supplements

There are a number of ground training systems that are of great help in developing a good relationship with your horse through ground work. These are described in my book *What Your Horse Wants You to Know: What Horses' "Bad" Behavior Means and How to Correct It.* Or see appendix C for some suggestions.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE HORSE

Of course, besides the general messages your body sends, you need to send specific messages. Even more essential, you need to listen to the messages the horse is sending you. If the horse is tense or worried about something, you have to deal with that before you can expect to hold his attention in such a way that he is ready to learn or to take suggestions from you.

Some Subtle Messages from the Horse

We are all familiar with the obvious messages: ears forward or back, head high or low, tail quiet or swishing angrily. But there are more subtle messages that tell you, for example, whether the horse is listening or ignoring you. Here are some ways horses communicate what they are feeling. Just for fun, try doing each of these things yourself and see how they make you feel!

- Wrinkles around the mouth and eyes indicate tension and worry.

- Hard eyes indicate annoyance and unwillingness to listen. Soft eyes, by contrast, indicate acceptance and mental processing. This one takes a while to learn to see, but horses' eyes in general are very expressive and, like people's, are often a truer indicator of the underlying emotions.

- Licking and chewing indicate the horse is thinking about something that just happened, and processing it.

- Giving or not giving you his eye is an indication of his attention and willingness to listen. The best way to describe this one is to think of a teenager who is getting a lecture from his parents. He looks up, off to the side, anywhere except at the speaker. The message is, "I don't want to hear it!" That's why you'll often hear a parent say, "Look at me when I'm talking to you!" A horse

in hand who is not giving you his eye—usually by raising his head and looking over you—can potentially be dangerous. He has taken over and is ignoring you, trying to take control. (Dealing with this is covered in Chapter 2.) If something spooks him he may jump right on top of you. Conversely, looking at you attentively indicates he accepts your guidance and will listen.

- Invading your space includes pushing on you, stepping or almost stepping on you, or forcing you to move out of his way. This is a dominance game. In herd dynamics, the lower-ranked horse moves out of the way of the higher-ranked one. If the horse can get you to move, that means he's in charge. Not the way you want it to be!

We'll learn more about understanding the horse's signals in later chapters, and the ground training disciplines listed in appendix C have a good deal of material on this subject.

Making Yourself Understood

At this stage, while you're working with the horse in the stable, you don't need a great many commands. The big secret to communicating is found in positive reinforcement, given at the correct moment. How often have you seen someone with a dog who jumps up? The dog jumps up and the owner says "down!" The dog gets down. The owner says, "bad dog!" What does that tell the dog? That getting down is wrong! Very confusing. The correct response would have been "good dog," said at the moment the dog started to get down.

Other than leading, which is covered in the next chapter, when you're working in the barn you want the horse to stand still, and move forward, back, and sideways a few steps with both front and hind feet. You also would like him to pick up and hold up his feet. These are all covered in depth in the disciplines listed in appendix C, but we will touch on them here as well.

Standing Quietly

This is mostly a function of age, feed, and exercise. With nothing going on to disturb him, the average horse is more than happy to stand still. However, a young horse getting too much grain who is asked to stand quietly while all his buddies are going out to play is not going to be very good about it. Other than cutting his grain, a good project to help his overall training would be to teach him, using positive reinforcement as much as possible, that if he stands quietly, at first only for a few seconds, he will then be let out. He learns a little useful self-discipline, which can then be applied in other areas. More

extended standing, as for grooming, should wait until he comes in from playtime.

Gentle grooming and TTeam touches encourage quiet behavior. Overly vigorous grooming, as well as noisy or overstimulating surroundings, tend to make the horse nervous and fidgety. But it does make sense to gradually accustom the horse to unusual sights and sounds, while asking for quiet behavior. All the ground disciplines have some system for teaching this. I have found Parelli's the most useful, but what you use depends on the nature and experience of both horse and handler.

> ***Tidbits & Supplements***
>
> Positive reinforcement is used in many training systems, but the easiest way to learn about it is through clicker training. (See appendix C.)

Moving Over

The best way to teach the horse to move around in small increments on the ground, I think, is Parelli's porcupine game, especially when combined with positive reinforcement. If you use the four levels of pressure, being very careful to observe the slightest reaction, you will soon have a horse who moves easily with minimum effort from you. The important trick here is never to allow yourself to think in terms of *pushing* the horse, or *making* him move through your efforts. Instead, you think of applying the pressure and *letting him move himself* away from it.

When moving the horse's front legs to the side, one of your hands asks his head to move over first, usually about thirty degrees, then the other hand asks for the feet to move. Similarly, when moving his hindquarters, one hand brings the head around gently about seventy-five degrees, then the other hand, placed in the hollow above and behind the stifle, asks the feet to move.

These exercises should usually be practiced in the following order, which is best for most horses in terms of the way they bend most easily (see page 128 for more on crookedness in the horse).

1. Step the front feet to the right.
2. Step the hind feet to the left.
3. Step the front feet to the left.
4. Step the hind feet to the right.

Voice Commands and Rewards

In the barn, about the only voice commands you need are the cluck and the whoa. It's your tone of voice that is the more important factor in getting the result you want, and that depends on the circumstances and the horse. Shouting "whoa" at a horse who is frightened is, of course, only going to frighten him more. On the other hand, a horse who keeps wandering away when he is ground tied needs a firm, authoritative voice to get his attention. Again, it is essential to recognize the moment when the horse *begins* to respond and praise immediately. Praise can take the form of a "good boy," or a pat, a scratch, or a treat.

Many people believe using treats makes the horse pushy and distracts him from the work, but I find that this depends on two factors. One is your ability to teach the horse that treats only appear when *he* performs some desired action. That is, a treat is a reward, not a bribe. One of the first things you teach a horse is that pushing or begging *never* results in a treat.

The second factor might be called the piggy factor. Some horses are simply extremely greedy, perhaps from having been chased away from their feed as youngsters by larger, older horses, or from malnourishment, or just their natural inclination. In any case, piggy horses are usually better off not being offered treats, because they tend to focus on them too much. On the other hand, with such horses sometimes you can use treats to get a very quick behavior change, because food is so important to them.

HALTERING, TYING, AND GROOMING

Putting on and taking off the halter is something you do every day, often several times. It is just as easy to do it considerately as it is to do it roughly. Many horses learn to throw their heads or pull away because of clumsy handling during haltering. The main things to remember are:

- Stand behind the horse's head, rather than pushing the halter at the front of his face where he can't see it well.

- Always point the ears forward gently when putting them under the crownpiece. Don't pull the crownpiece backward, crushing the ears.

- When putting the halter on or removing it, always do so one ear at a time. If the halter is safely and properly fitted, forcing both ears through it will be quite uncomfortable.

● Adjust the halter so the nosepiece lies about two fingers under the cheek bone and is loose enough so the horse can open his mouth comfortably, but not so loose that he or another horse could catch a foot in it. The throat latch should lie close to his throttle, but not be tight.

Some people are very much against tying a horse at all, while others expect the horse to stand quietly either tied by a single line or crosstied. Most professional stables expect that horses can be crosstied, since with many people taking horses in and out, the idea of having horses left ground tied only is not acceptable.

However, being confined by a rope in an exposed position is threatening to some horses, and they start fighting the ties. This can, of course, be extremely dangerous to both horse and bystanders. There are a number of ways to deal with this problem (see the references in appendix C), but one quick and easy solution is to attach a strand of knitting yarn between the ties and the horse's halter. The fight reflex is triggered when the horse steps back and feels the pull against his head. If he is tied with something that instantly breaks, he never really reaches the panicky stage. Of course, it is necessary for you to be there at all times so he doesn't find out that pulling back is followed by freedom to trot out the door and into the pasture!

Tying the horse by a single line, usually to a trailer or fence, has a couple of caveats.

● Never tie a rope to a board or rail that could possibly be slid out or pulled off. A loose horse with a ten-foot rail attached to his halter is a danger to himself and anyone nearby.

● Adjust the rope so the horse can reach the ground with his muzzle, but not so he can get a leg caught in it. Conversely, you occasionally see horses left tied with a very short rope. I consider this cruel and unnecessary, since it forces the horse to keep his head and neck in one position.

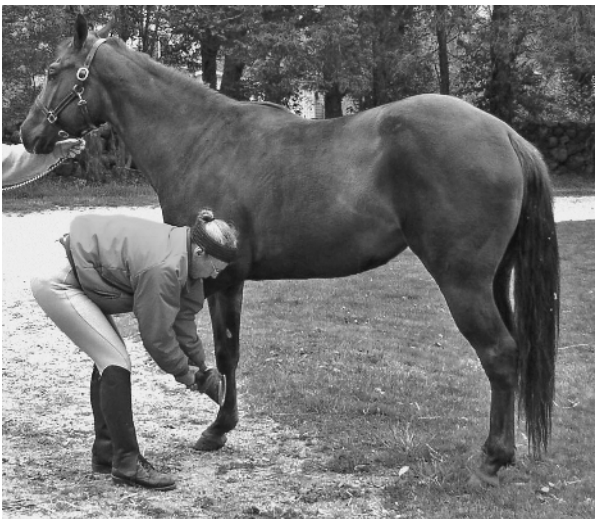
Grooming tools should be chosen to suit the particular horse's sensitivity. Grooming is intended not only to clean the horse, but to get him relaxed and comfortable before the ride. If the tools are too rough for the horse he will be tense and angry, which will carry over into the ride. A clipped Thoroughbred in the winter is going to have a very different reaction to a stiff brush than would a furry Shetland Pony.

As with everything you do, pay attention to how the horse responds to your grooming. If something seems to bother him, try to understand why and help him to be comfortable with it. The last thing you want to do is make him

unhappy and afraid of you every time you get ready to ride. Softer grooming tools, less vigorous application, and time spent teaching him to accept and like being touched and groomed all over will all pay dividends in a more comfortable and trusting mount.

Picking out the horse's feet, which needs to be done regularly, can be a quick, simple task or a tedious and lengthy chore, depending on whether the horse is properly trained. It is well worth spending the necessary time teaching the horse to lift his hoof high enough to make cleaning easy for you, and holding it up rather than expecting *you* to hold *him* up. Most ground training disciplines offer guides to training to horse to do this, but I especially like the Parelli method of pinching the chestnut in front and the cap of the hock behind to get the initial lift. Then you can shape the behavior using a clicker. This simply means that at first you praise and reward the horse just for lifting the foot, then gradually withhold the praise and treat for longer and longer periods until the horse will hold the foot up as high and as long as needed. Using the clicker to mark the behavior you want is more effective, since it is so precise, but with patience you can teach the behavior with your voice alone.

It is important, especially at first, that you have the horse standing square and balanced before you ask him to lift a foot. Many horses have one foot that they have more difficulty holding up, so you will need a bit of patience. Obviously, hurrying or pressuring the horse will only make it more difficult for him to find his balance.



I'm preparing to spiral the hoof down to the ground. A few minutes ago this horse wouldn't hold up her foot at all.

Tidbits & Supplements

You can quite easily cause a well-trained horse to lose all desire to give you his foot if you use painful medications to treat ailments such as thrush. A few sessions of having his foot subjected to acute pain will soon teach the horse exactly the lesson you didn't want him to learn. Always be aware of how the horse is responding. If something is obviously very painful, try to find a friendlier product or treatment. If you have to use a painful treatment, be very generous with praise and treats so the horse understands that you are not *deliberately* causing him pain.

If the horse finds holding his feet up very difficult, the TTeam exercises for the feet are usually helpful. This involves holding the raised foot in both hands and gently circling it and spiraling it down to the ground. You will find that at first as the horse lowers his foot he tenses up, snatches the foot away, and plants it on the ground. By repeating the exercise until you get some improvement, the horse begins to learn how to release the tensions that are causing his problem.

As a rider, you have the option: If you are considerate and caring, you can make the ordinary daily routine of preparing your horse for riding a learning, bonding, and generally pleasurable time. If you think that's a waste of time and too much trouble, then you cannot be surprised if the horse doesn't give you one hundred percent when you ride him. The choice is yours. And the benefits of choosing the first option far outweigh any extra time spent.