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Dressage

March 2010

T O D A Y



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Shortening the Reins

Q What is the best way to shorten the reins without disturbing the horse's mouth?

Lisa Parker
Halifax, Nova Scotia

TRENNA ATKINS

A First, I'd like to address how to hold the reins. Each rein should run between your ring finger and little finger, up and over the fore finger and held in place by the thumb, which presses down to maintain the length. I often see riders incorrectly holding the reins tightly between their ring and little fingers to keep the length they want, but, this causes two problems: The rider lays her arms on the contact (adds weight), and the horse tries to get the reins to lengthen. If the thumb and fore finger keep the length, shortening the reins is a lot easier.

Shorten each rein by using your opposing hand to reach over and pull the rein (in front of the thumb) through, and then re-establish the thumb pressure. The smoother and more controlled you do this, the less resistance you will get from your horse.

Never lean or reach forward and then sit up to shorten them. Don't let go of the reins, then grab them closer to the bit. This makes the horse fight the contact with his neck and head (both of which are stronger than your arms and shoulders). Instead, remain seated and keep riding your horse from behind.

How do you know you've got the right length? If the reins are too short, the horse will lean on you or he won't go forward. He can't move well because you're restricting him. If the reins are too long and you close your fingers, nothing happens, and you can't communicate to his hindquarters. Ideally, if the rein length is correct and you're able

to orchestrate your aids so the horse is in balance, there will be a circuit of the aids going from the hind legs to your hand (over the topline) and from your hand back to the horse's hind legs. Then, the hand can talk to the whole horse's body. That's what we call connection.

My best advice: Practice with a friend who can hold the other end of your reins, and have her tell you how it feels. You may find it quite revealing.

"Green" Barn Benefits

Q What difference does a "green" barn make to a horse? What are the most important elements to consider when designing sustainably?

Diane Barber, Equestrian Designery
Los Angeles, California

JOHN BLACKBURN

A Sustainable or "green" barns make a world of a difference to a horse as well as to its owners. It's not just a status symbol or the latest trend to a horse: It's what makes sense. As an equestrian architect for the past 25 years, I can't help but repeat myself a bit, so bear with me as I restate a driving phrase of my design approach: When you take a horse from the wild into a barn, you're asking for trouble. In the confines of a barn, a horse relies on a person's ability to translate its needs rather than intuitively taking care of itself. For example, if a horse in a barn is hot and needs to cool down, it must rely on its handler to provide and then turn on a fan. If it were outside, that same horse would seek shelter under a tree if it were too hot or alternatively run behind a hill to escape an overly cool breeze.

A barn designed to mimic the natural environment—the best parts of it, anyhow—is the surest path toward healthy and happy horses. Some barns

mimic nature in an unnatural manner. Electric lights and fans will create light and wind, but I highly doubt you'd compare the buzz of a florescent light or the stale air cast from a tiny fan with that of the sun or wind that nature supplies.

What if you could design the barn to be the fan, in a sense? A barn that circulates air without the use of a mechanical system is self-functioning in that it doesn't rely on barn keepers to maintain the environment it naturally supplies. This is an example of passive design—the roots of "green" design—and its techniques allow a barn to practically regulate itself.

Passive design is an inherent part of the barn, like its stalls and aisle. It can involve any intrinsic aspect of the structure that helps lower the carbon footprint without the use of electricity, gas or an artificial energy source. In barns, passive design can deliver almost all of the ventilation and light needed.

Proper ventilation is essential to maintaining healthy horses. In a traditionally designed (a monitored, not self-functioning) barn, air that lacks escape routes becomes trapped rather than ventilated. To "solve" this, a door is opened at a barn-end, which forces air to sweep laterally across the barn. In that manner, the traveling air collects body heat and pathogens from the horses, passing the pathogens horse-by-horse, stall-by-stall. What may seem a small thing—a lack of air circulation—becomes a chain reaction that aids the spread of disease in your horses.

To avoid this, a technique of passive design can encourage the capture of airflow from outside the barn and uses vents to create upward ventilation inside the barn to result in a constant flow of fresh air. Two factors are the key to creating this type of ventilation.

The first takes advantage of the barn's large roof surface (I recommend a

7:12 slope or greater, otherwise the heat gain could work against you) to catch solar energy that heats at the ceiling. This heat combines with the heat emitting from the horses, which rises if a stall is designed with an open ceiling to allow it. (On a side note, this is one of the reasons I do not recommend haylofts.) Hot air gathers at the ceiling while cool air is drawn in at the floor, creating a vertical air path. Vents located at or near the roof allow the hot air to escape all while creating room for the cooler air to enter through openings low in the stable area. I also advise low wall vents near the floor with dampers or Dutch doors.

The second factor is attributed to the wind that carries over the barn's steep roof, pitched to produce high pressure on one side to balance with the low pressure on the leeward side and inside the barn. Placing the barn with regard to the prevailing summer wind patterns only maximizes the circulation effect.

Natural light is another tool to utilize through passive design in order to decrease your energy dependence as well as help reduce fire hazards. My favorite method to introduce natural light is to install a continuous ridge skylight. The higher the window—or light source—the farther the light can penetrate the barn, making a skylight an enormous contributor to overall barn lighting. If using windows, placement around the eaves of the barn is effective. As a design bonus, higher-placed windows decreases injury risk by keeping glass away from the horses while providing the horses healthy ventilation in the winter by protecting against a direct breeze.

Barns using passive principles of sustainable design can cooperate with the forces of nature rather than compete with them. The sun, wind and materials on the terrain can be used in conjunction with the design to create a barn that reflects its natural environment.

Let's be honest: Barns tend to be energy-users, not energy-givers. Often isolated, their operation may depend on vehicles and roads for accessibility as hay is delivered, muck is removed, etcetera. All of this adds to your carbon footprint, which is a measurement of energy used against energy gained (if applicable). Passive design can help lower your carbon footprint, but active principles of sustainable design help regain ground that is lost due to how a farm typically operates.

Active design often involves things most commonly associated with "green" design, such as solar panels, rainwater collection systems, grey-water systems, local materials, recycling bins and compost piles, to name a few. All are commendable additions to your barn and—with the exception of photovoltaic (solar) panels—budget-friendly. While I'm a big fan of photovoltaic panels, as large barn roofs practically scream for them, rainwater and grey-water collection systems are equally worthy contenders to consider.

There are tons of active design options available and experts to help you along the way. Most active systems require some consultation from an engineer, plumber or manufacturer, depending on which you decide to incorporate and assuming you can do more than just using recycling bins.

So, what are you waiting for? Green for horses equals green for you in the long-term as you save on energy costs.

Motivate a Lazy Horse

Many of us adult amateurs cannot afford quality horses, so we work with what we have. These horses are often hard to get moving really forward. What strategies will help us motivate our lazy horses?

Name withheld by request

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John Blackburn

has more than 30 years of experience in the practice of architecture (blackburnarch.com). His first job was designing a Thoroughbred farm. Since then, he has designed hundreds of equestrian projects—barns, arenas and complete facilities—around the country. He lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife, Jennifer.



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Debbie Hansen

Have a question about dressage? E-mail it to Dressage.Today@EquiNetwork.com or send to Dressage Today, 656 Quince Orchard Rd., Suite 600, Gaithersburg, MD 20878—Ask the Experts is compiled by **Reina Abelshausen**.

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN THEN

A Guideline of Essential Basics

BY REESE KOFFLER-STANFIELD



Victoria Trout

Do you sometimes ask yourself why you've been riding around in circles for years without ever getting to the fun part of dressage—riding canter pirouettes, piaffe or flying changes? I used to ask myself that question until I realized that I had to master the basics to perfection before attempting to tackle the upper-level movements. Once rider and horse have the basics down, everything else is relatively simple. I distinguish between rider and horse basics.

As a rider, the basics include keeping straight lines throughout my body. I ask myself: *Can I draw a straight line between my ear, shoulder, hip and heel? Can I draw another along the elbow-wrist-bit line?* When I'm aware of my own straightness, it's easier to remain balanced and be effective with my aids.

In the saddle, I always have the following five elements (basics for the horse) in mind:

Rhythm: Is my horse moving rhythmically? To be sure, I count 1, 2, 1, 2, etc. at the trot; at the walk, I count 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.; and at the canter, I count 1, 2, 3, etc. In the beginning, I have my students count aloud. Then, I ask them to count to themselves and, once they are used to it, it becomes background music. As I am going along, I must keep my horse's rhythm. Along with keeping an even rhythm, I consider the quality of regularity. Is my horse staying in the rhythm of the gait continuously? I like to think of a metronome rhythmically ticking along.

Suppleness: The ability of the horse to use his whole body by being loose in his muscles.

Contact: Does my contact have an elastic quality to it? I always think of contact as shaking someone's hand. It must feel comfortable. If you shake a football player's hand, it's not

necessarily a comfortable experience. If you shake Grandma's hand, it's not necessarily comfortable either. The former might feel incredibly strong and the latter rather awkward. On the other hand, when you shake your husband's hand in a comfortable situation, you're pretty close to the kind of contact you want to have. It's a positive, straightforward feeling.

Forwardness: Can I push my horse forward? Is he in front of my leg? It's simple to find out. Visualize the accelerator in your car. When you pull out into traffic and push the pedal all the way to the floor, you know your car will go fast enough. If, however, you get in a car you're not familiar with, you first have to touch the accelerator a little. If you get no response, you know the accelerator needs to be fixed. When on my horse, if I put on a lot of leg and nothing happens, I need to improve his response. If I use only a little leg and he responds by going considerably more forward, his "accelerator" is working well.

Straightness: Can I ride my horse in a shoulder-fore all around the ring in both direc-

GINA DURAN

A You don't have to have an expensive horse to do dressage well. Before I give you techniques to motivate your horse, however, first look into the following:

1. Have your veterinarian check your horse's health, soundness and overall physical fitness. This includes doing a blood test and making sure there are no back or respiratory problems.

2. Ask yourself some questions to see if you are contributing to the problem. Do you have fear when riding? Are you timid or soft spoken when you ride? Do you ride with tension in your body? Are your legs gripping? Or, are you a rather loose rider with lots of movement in your body? Are you a quick thinker or a

quick-to-react type of personality, or are you a more laid-back, easy-going type?

A fearful rider tends to distrust a forward-going horse and stops him from moving forward without realizing it.

A timid or easy-going rider may ask for forwardness but doesn't really ask with conviction.

A tense rider can easily slow a horse from the tension in her body; horses are very sensitive to this.

Gripping legs do not breathe with the horse's movement. They inadvertently tell him to "stop" or "slow down."

A rider's too-loose body can be "chatty" to the horse. It's like excessive background noise to the horse, preventing him from being able to hear what you are trying to tell him.

A slow-reacting rider generally responds softly and slowly by nature, which doesn't help to motivate the lazier horse. In general, the quick thinker and quick reactor is a great match for the slower type of horse.

Offer your horse more variety in your daily program. If you have access to trails, take him on trail rides if he is safe. This is a fun activity for him and helps to improve his physical fitness. Ask your instructor if there are other riders who might be interested in riding in a group lesson. Horses are herd animals and usually enjoy riding with other horses. Put him behind the other horses. It might help his natural horsey urge to move up in the line (but only if it's safe to do). Engage your horse's natural

tions, at the walk, trot and canter? Typically, a horse travels down the long side with his haunches slightly to the inside, crooked in his body. When you place the horse in shoulder-fore, it helps you to better control his haunches and align his body. I remember times when I came out of the corner fishtailing because I wasn't aware of the importance of straightness.

These are the basics I think of whenever I get on a horse. Sticking to them sets me up for producing greater things.

Reese Koffler-Stanfield is a USDF bronze, silver and gold medalist and Certified Instructor through Fourth Level. A successful Young Rider, she has trained with Conrad Schumacher, Kathy Connelly, Jessica Ranshausen, Ellen Bontje and George Williams. On her current Grand Prix partner, Goubergh's Kasper, she won the Grand Prix Special at the Gold Coast Opener in Florida. She gives clinics nationwide to all levels of riders and lives in Lexington, Kentucky, with her husband, Travis, and dog, Annapurna.

curiosity by playing ball with him if your environment allows it. Once you have addressed your horse's physical and mental health, it's time to get to dressage.

Engagement—in all its forms—is the trick to motivating a lazy horse. This means engagement of the mind (focus and attention), engagement of the body (suppleness and throughness) and engagement of the hindquarters, specifically. (The hindquarters need to be active, willing to carry more weight and ready to move off). **Here is a great exercise I use to achieve this:**

1. At the trot, just before coming into the corner, I transition to walk.
2. I bend my horse into the corner with my inside leg. I use the inside rein to position him to the inside while feel-

ing for a connection on the outside rein.

3. When I feel an improved connection on the outside rein, I use my outside leg (sometimes both legs) to trot out of the corner.

4. When trotting on, think of trotting your horse out to the contact. There shouldn't be too many walk steps; the procedure must happen rather quickly. The corner serves as a natural wall, helping you with the transition.

When you and your horse are familiar with this exercise, try this **variation**:

1. Just before coming into the corner, ask for walk, but immediately "change your mind" and stay in trot.
2. Just as when riding trot-walk-trot transitions, bend him through the corner and trot out into the contact.
3. After the corner, use the long side or diagonal to send him forward. Feel how, during the first few strides, he will be more engaged. While straight lines usually invite a horse to go more forward, a lazy horse often falls on his forehand halfway down the long side. In this case, ride a 10-meter circle in the middle of the long side or diagonal to rebalance him.

4. Repeat at the next corner.

Alternately using the corners to collect the horse and the long sides to send him forward creates more forwardness.

Also, ride frequent transitions within and between gaits. When riding the transitions, your first goal is to activate your horse, rather than riding perfect transitions. Once he is more forward, start to refine your transitions and focus more on their quality.

Think on the quick side. When trotting and asking for walk, get the walk. But, as soon as you do, think *I want trot right now*. Don't let your horse loll in the transition. When cantering and asking for walk, get the walk. But, as soon as you do, be thinking about your canter aids, and strike immediately back

up to canter. This way, he starts looking for commands and becomes more attentive and focused. Change the program. Try not to stay in one gait or one pattern too long. Keep him wanting and looking for what's to come next.

Parasite Control

Q What is the latest research on parasite resistance? What can I do to protect my horse?

Elizabeth Clement
Washington, D.C.

HOYT CHERAMIE, DVM

A Over the last several years, researchers have noticed that there is an increase in resistance in some of the classes of parasiticides that we have been using to treat parasites in horses. This is a concern as there aren't any new types of dewormers coming out for horses in the near future. If the drugs we have now aren't effective, we eventually will run into problems maintaining healthy horses.

Currently, there are three active-ingredient (chemical) classes that are generally used for parasite control in horses. The first is benzimidazoles. Common drugs in that class are fenbendazole or oxfendazole—Safe-guard®, Panacur® and Anthelcide EQ®.

The second class is tetra-hydropyrimidines. Pyrantel pamoate and pyrantel tartrate are common drugs in this category—Strongid® and Rotectin® P.

The third class is the macrocyclic lactones. They include ivermectin and moxidectin—Zimecterin®, Quest® and Equell™. When this class is combined with praziquantel, the parasiticide is also capable of eliminating tapeworms. Zimecterin® Gold, Quest® Plus and Equimax™ fall in this category.

A 2004 study looking at small strongyle anthelmintic resistance in

horses has shown different degrees of resistance to two of the three classes. In the benzimidazoles group, researchers found 50 to 97 percent resistance. In the pyrantel group, there was about 40 percent resistance. In the macrocyclic lactone group, there was no resistance of the small strongyles. However, recent research has shown that small strongyles begin shedding eggs sooner after treatment with macrocyclic lactones than when the drugs were first released, which has become a concern.

To overcome the development of widespread parasite resistance, we need to reassess the goals of a parasite-control program. While in the past the goal was to eliminate all parasites, the new goal is to maintain the health of horses while simultaneously maintaining the effectiveness of the parasiticides currently available as long as possible. This means that instead of just blindly using parasiticides in a one-size-fits-all fashion, not knowing if they are working on a given farm, we need to make sure that the parasiticide we use is still effective. And because the more you expose a parasite population to a drug, the greater chance it will develop resistance, we need to determine which horses we should treat at which intervals/frequencies. The overall effect will likely reduce the number of times we deworm the majority of horses while maintaining healthy animals.

New parasite-control strategies are based on determining which horses are most likely responsible for the majority of parasite transmission (high-egg shedders) and to selectively target those animals. Using fecal egg counts, horses on a farm can be classified in two to three groups as low to high shedders. Only 20 to 30 percent of horses would likely be high shedders. Low to moderate shedders would be treated less often, and high shedders would be treated more often. Fortunately, the vast

majority of horses are considered low to moderate shedders.

We also need to look specifically at the geographic area of the country in which the horse lives and the expected parasite burden and population that horse would have. Then we can determine whether he is in an environment that would allow him to continue the transmission. For example, if a horse is on a straw mat in a stall and a dry lot when turned out, the transmission rate of strongyles is reduced, because the natural environment for parasites is not quite right. Strongyles need to be in a grass area for their eggs to mature into infective larvae, which is picked up when horses graze.

Your veterinarian should be involved in this process on multiple fronts, including the “determination of shedding” category, the testing of which drugs still work on your farm and the recommendations for which drugs and intervals to use based on the variable above. For low shedders, in most cases, the product of choice is a broad-spectrum parasiticide, such as the macrocyclic lactones with the addition of praziquantel, once or twice a year, given in late fall/early winter and perhaps repeated in the spring.

High shedders should be dewormed more frequently to reduce their transmission of eggs to the environment where other horses can pick them up. These horses would likely be dewormed four to six times a year, similar to what we’ve done for most horses in the past.

What does all this mean for the individual horse owner? You need to determine your horse’s level of shedding and transmission by having your veterinarian do a fecal egg-count test, where the number of eggs your horse sheds in a measured amount of stool is determined. Is he a low, moderate or high shedder? Based on this, your horse will be treated with an appropriate dewormer. Two

weeks after your horse has been treated, a fecal-egg-count-reduction test needs to be done. This test tells us if the drug you’ve used is actually working.

This new method of parasite control keeps your horse healthy while at the same time helping to ensure the parasiticides maintain their effectiveness.

DVD REVIEW

Klaus Balkenhol Trilogy From Foal to Grand Prix Horse

*Produced by Roland Blum (blumfilm.de)
3-DVD set, 90 minutes each in English.
Available at HorseBooksEtc.com.*

Reviewed by Mary Daniels

The secret of Klaus Balkenhol’s inimitable success—Olympic gold medalist and former coach of the successful German and U.S. dressage teams—is never to find fault with the horse. And this three-DVD set is a *tour de force* by the tireless videographer and author Roland Blum, who has been producing the singular “Horses of the World” series of which this set is a part.


The original idea came from the late and legendary Egon von Neindorff, also the subject of a Blum documentary. Von Neindorff told Blum that in Balkenhol one could find a true representative of classical riding and training. That sent Blum off on dozens of trips during which he spent hundreds of hours watching Balkenhol in the saddle and on the ground and with a variety of horses and riders. His goal was to open new perspectives and a better understanding of contemporary horse training based on classical methods.

“A Grand Prix horse is made, not born,” says Balkenhol in Part 1. A healthy upbringing and responsible handling of a youngster begins the foundation of a good riding horse.

Even if destined for competitive dressage, Balkenol's young horses are also ridden cross-country and over jumps. His rule is, "Make demands on the horse but never demand too much."

In Part 2, we see how Balkenhol's systematic schooling achieves what he calls "sensitizing the horse," that is, achieving the effects he wants with sensitive signals. The result is a horse that focuses on the rider and his aids.

In Part 3, we see the individual schooling methods by which famous horse-and-rider combinations were brought along. These include his daughter, Anabel, Debbie McDonald and Guenter Seidel. While each combination needs an individual approach, the training methods are always connected to the basics of horsemanship. "Horses are big and strong," says Balkenol, "but they are also extremely social and highly sensitive. Dressage becomes attractive when we recognize these characteristics and combine them, using them to enable rather than inhibit. If a performance exudes ease, then riding becomes an art." That seems to encapsulate what dressage should be about. What I always found amazing about the Balkenhol story of success was that he went to the Olympics on an ordinary police horse and achieved what would be inconceivable for most riders then and now.

Fortunately, we have DVDs like these from which to learn, even if we live in the most remote part of the country. If you don't get valuable insights and guidance from these films, you just are not paying attention. 

FIND BOOKS & DVDs

at HorseBooksEtc.com. Find more answers to dressage training questions at DressageToday.com.



