

INITIATING IN THE ART OF HORSE LONGEING IN EQUESTRIAN SPORTS

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Abstract

The equestrian art gradually evolved over time, as the human beings began to pay increasingly more attention to its interaction with this noble animal which is the horse. Longeing is the way of communication between humans and horses in a way that horses understand and therefore is better to never underestimate the importance of appropriate work on longe line. Longeing represents teaching a language that your horse understands, is the development of an appropriate relationship, establishing the leader, basis of communication. Ground training exercises are a mixture of gymnastics, discipline, mental development and dance, the essential links to all future training and riding. If longeing a young horse prepare him for the work under saddle, longeing an advanced horse carefully supple-up and fitness him, while the rider work on long line aims to improve his seats and balance in the saddle.

Key words: dressage, longeing, horse, behavior, training

1. INTRODUCTION

The equestrian art gradually evolved over time, as the human requirements are changing too, becoming more complex and requiring increased attention on the interaction between the two of them.

Therefore, the question arose, "How can I make myself understood by the horse?". And the answer can be only one: communicating in a way that both partners understand it.

The horse is like a very sensitive instrument. Just as a violin harmony of music comes from a delicate and precise balance between the bow, the string and the musician's fingers, which must have enough muscle tone to control the bow and the strings, but, at the same time, be relaxed enough to follow the rapid passages, the same should be the connection between the rider and the horse through the aids. [7]

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understand, is the developing of an appropriate relationship, establishing the leader, basis of communication. Ground training exercises are a mixture of gymnastics, discipline, mental development and dance, the essential links to all the future training and riding. [2]

2. EQUIPMENT AND AUXILIARY AIDS

Longeing a horse correctly is a great art, because it allows the trainer to see if the movements and rhythm are correct. Letting a horse run around in circle has nothing to do with longe work, being merely exercising the horse.

Involvement in this activity and achieving results at an appropriate level requires the use of suitable equipment which involves:

1. *Longe Line.*

The longe line should be at least 7 m long and made from a material comfortable to hold and without stoppers so a too strong or too tight contact with the horse is not encouraged.

It should be arranged in neat loops so that it can be easily shortened or lengthened to any extent and at any time.

The Cavesson.

The longeing cavesson should be as light as possible, large enough, well padded,

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adjusted not to embarrass the outside eye while working on the circle, placed high enough not to interfere with breathing and tight enough not to slip or rub and cause violent shocks to the muzzle. [1]

It can be used for walking, longeing or collecting and balancing the horse through lateral movements at hand. Its influence on the horse's nose allows disciplining him during training.

The longe line will be attached either to the side ring that the trainer is or to the middle ring, as desired. The second possibility is used especially for young horses to avoid undesirable behavior on their part or unwanted action on their mouth, so desensitization of the mouth is avoided.



Fig. 1 The Cavesson

2. The Bridle.

Depending on the school it is recommended for young horses to get used with the bridle before longeing with it (using until then a cavesson, or a bit cavesson) or as the German school recommends catching the longe directly on the bit. [3]

Regardless of the school, it is preferred a three parts bit (especially if it's a very sensitive horse), but can be used also a two-piece normal bit. More important is that the mouthpiece has an average thickness, fits well into the mouth of the horse and doesn't provoke resistance.

In working on long line a great importance is the use of the bit particularly in the moment of introduction of the side rein, for preparing the horse to halt. They accustom the horse to the feeling that he will have in his mouth when will have contact with the rider's hand.

3. Side Reins and Draw Reins.

The side reins are more restrictive than the draw reins being used to teach the horse to keep his head in the desired position. By producing tension in the neck muscles when the horse tries to raise or lower the head, will make him to bring his head in the desired position. Since the horse feels more comfortable with relaxed neck muscles in the future he will prefer to keep the same position of the head and neck. [3]

However, to achieve the desired effect, the trainer has to prepare the horse physically and mentally for introducing of these reins, avoiding rejection and resulting in acceptance without tension.

For particularly fine and sensitive horses draw reins are usually better because they are less restricting than the firm side reins, adjusting training to individual and priorities. They work on the same principle, but, unlike the side reins that improve flexibility they work to develop neck muscles by requiring the forward and downward stretching of the head and neck, so-called "down and forward".

4. The Roller and The Saddle.

A roller should have a lot of side rings, which permit attachment of auxiliary reins and lines at different heights according to the needs and the training level of the horse. Thus, with a novice horse the reins will be tight as down as possible and with an advanced horse the trainer will be able to tie the reins to the rings that are placed closer to the future position of the rider's hands.

If the horse is used to a roller, he can also be longed with a saddle, the side reins being attached to the girth on the same height as they were tight on the roller.



Fig. 2 The Roller with side reins

5. *The Longe Whip.*

The longeing whip should be as light as possible and comfortable to hold having on one end a flexible part (preferably leather) long enough that the trainer is able to touch the horse without excessive movement.

The whip is used as an auxiliary aid. It should inspire respect and not fear to the horse.

6. *Gloves.*

Young horses and those that are not used to work on the longe, may pull the longe line through the trainer's hand, causing injury to unprotected hands. For this reason it is recommended that during longeing, the trainer wears gloves.

7. *The Pessoa Harness.*

With the Pessoa harness the horse back muscles are encouraged to work as they would under the weight of the rider. The horse is forced to look at the position of the head and push the hindquarters under its center of gravity as much as possible. Through proper use it leads to a considerable improvement in the horse's balance and helps to achieve collection (the ultimate goal of training), but incorrect use can have disastrous consequences, so it is recommended to be use only by trainers with experience.



Fig. 3 The Pessoa Harness

Besides the above equipment, of vital importance in establishing and developing of an appropriate cooperative relationship with the horse, a trainer should not forget about the appropriate auxiliary aids available when working on the longe line: body language and voice commands.

1. *Body Language.*

Since, in freedom horses communicate mainly through body language rather than by the voice, it's vitally important what the trainer's body language transmits. [5]

The body language can indicate confidence, strength and specific expectations from a horse or it can show uncertainty, fear or inattentiveness. Since horses are basically followers, they are willing to accept guidance as long as the trainer's intentions are clear and he's moving with sure steps, smooth movements and confidence.

The body language includes attitude, posture, size and intensity of the footsteps, direction and intensity of the view and position and movement of the arms, including, but not limited to the following natural aids:

a. Driving foot: - the foot nearest the hindquarters of the horse;

b. Restraining foot: - the foot nearest the head of the horse;

c. Assertive steps: - large, bold strides and lunges;

d. Withdrawal steps: - quiet, smooth steps straight back or away from the horse;

e. Driving arm: - the arm nearest the hindquarters of the horse;

f. Restraining arm: - the arm nearest the head of the horse.

2. *Voice Commands.*

The main voice commands are "stop", "walk", "trot", "canter" and "back".

To be effective, the voice commands must be consistent in tone, inflections, volume and the word used each time. [2]

The tone can be high pitched to encourage the horse to move faster or lower to slow him down or command him to stop.

Inflection refers to the way trainers modulate his voice when he say a word or a phrase. A drawn-out command produces acceleration, while a sharp command produces repression.

In volume, it should be noted that it is not necessary or productive to shout commands at the horse, because the horse has a very well developed sense of hearing. Even in the early stage of training it is preferably to use a subtle gesture that helps to increase

the trainer's authority. A command – initially with the voice - should, if it's not receiving the desired response, be reinforced with an effective driving or restraining aid (whip to drive or pressure from the long line to restrain). The horse will soon understand that politeness – the friendly voice aid – is not to be understood as weakness.

Voice commands will be the link between longeing and riding. Since the body language can't be carry over in the saddle, it would be particularly useful to have a well-established set of voice commands that the horse understands during his first lessons under saddle. This will help the horse to connect the new aid with the old ones as the classical conditioning principle argue. [2]

3. LONGEING A YOUNG HORSE

Knowing and understanding the horse behavior, helped to develop several ways to work with a young horse: some that are faster and more brutal derived from the rodeo methods of taming, others gentle, progressive, going through several stages, starting with work in hand, longeing and establishing a relationship of communication between horse and rider. [5]

If, in the past, it has been considered that the optimal age for starting to work with a young horse is the age of 3 or 4 years, recent studies have shown that work should start sooner, but without tiring the horse. [6]

Longeing addresses horses with the age of two or more years, and is not recommended for horses younger than two years due to pressure exercised on the shoulders. The length of the longeing session can last from 15 minutes (for young horses aged up to 3 years) to 30-45 minutes (for horses aged 3 years and more).

The first lessons on the longe line with a young horse is recommended to be made in a round pen with a diameter of 20 meters, but if this is not available, the session can be kept in a corner of the arena, using the two sides of it to control the horse. Sometimes it's good to first have an assistant that lead the horse at hand on the circle described by the longe line until the horse become accustomed and understand what is wanted of him. [1]

As was mentioned above, using a subtle gesture is preferable from the very beginning, to help increase the trainer's authority. Voice command shall, if it's not receiving the desired response should be reinforced with an aid of coercion. The horse will understand that politeness is not to be understood as weakness.

It should be noted that voice and whip aids should not be given simultaneously when longeing. Instead, the voice will be used shortly before the movement of the whip or pressure of the longe line, the horse learning that the voice is just the beginning of all possible actions, and some of these actions could have unpleasant effects. This will cause the horse to respect the voice aid promptly without waiting for further action from the trainer.

The horse must have the impression that the trainer can always apply the aids with more force if he chooses. Creating this impression can only be achieved if the trainer always starts with the smallest application of force and builds from there.

Studies have shown that punishment is often associated with fear and frustration, decreasing the learning ability of the horse. For this reason, throughout the session, the trainer must create the impression that the whip is not something that inspires fear but rather an extension of his hand, a hand that inspires respect to the horse. [4]

In the initial phase of longeing it is best to let the horse choose the gait in which he relax the best (regardless if is walk or trot), but the trainer's goal should be to always begin with the walk and keep the horse at this gait as long he desires. The horse will start trotting at trainer's command and not when he is in the mood.

Introduction of canter will be done later, when the horse responds well to walk and trot commands, taking care not to pull the horses head inwards (over the inside foreleg) and insist that the transition to be done in a corner (the two sides of the arena limits the action of the outside foreleg, forcing the horse to stride forward the inside foreleg). The goal is to make the horse to go out of a quiet trot directly into the canter, without

extending the trot, so the aid to canter should be applied sharply and clearly.

Depending on the intended purpose the trainer must never lose sight of the fact that the expression and attitude are more important than the mechanics. In working the horse on the longe line the goal is to develop gaits that are pure and unhurried but in the same time have plenty of energy from the hindquarters. If the trainer allows the horse to rush or work with an uneven or impure rhythm, these problems will be carried over to the work under saddle. [3]

Influencing the tempo of the horses gaits on the longe line is one of the most difficult aspects of longeing because the trainer must encourage the horse energy and action by using his body language and the whip, while at the same time containing him with the action of his body and the longe line.



Fig. 4 The horse don't engage the hindquarters (up) / the horse engage the hindquarters (down)

The obedience, the impulsion and the purity of the gaits are the most important aspects of early longeing. Only after the horse has learned to be cooperative and move

forward with energy and a steady rhythm the trainer can attempt to introduce the bridle and the side reins.

4. ADDING SIDE REINS

When the horse accepts the bridle, the roller and the saddle, work with side or draw reins can begin.

At first it is preferable to start without side reins to allow the horse to relax and supple up, followed later by attaching them not very low and long enough to give him time to get used to them gradually and not inspire fear. In the following sessions, as the horse progresses, side reins can be shortened and raise gradually until they are horizontal, placing the horse's head in the correct position.

Very few horses are absolutely straight throughout their whole back, from head to tail. Most of them are concave on the left side and convex on the right side. To avoid future problems in the back and legs the horse's spine should be gradually straightened up during training, so that the horse is flexed in such a way that he actually goes forward in a straight line because this is the purpose of using side reins and draw reins. It should be noted, however, that positioning and flexing the horse in such a way that the side that was previously concave becomes convex and reverse should be done gradually and carefully without force, so that he does not become afraid and try to fight against the side reins.

5. LONGEING AN ADVANCED HORSE

Longeing allows working a horse in sustain gaits without undue strain, consuming his energy, when he cannot be straddle or in the absence of his rider. It is used also for training obedience for unsubordinated horses through a sustained workout without damaging them.

If longeing a young horse prepares him for the work under saddle, longeing an advanced horse carefully supple-up and fitness him. In this case the trainer should pay more attention to clean transitions.

CONCLUSIONS

It is natural, at first, to assume that longeing is just another way of "training" the

horse. This is why there is a tendency to think that there is a point where it ends, but communication never stops, in fact it must be developed constantly.

Participation in competitions at the highest level, dressage or show jumping, always starts with a young horse and that which is not done correctly at the start cannot be done again. Every mistake at this stage is carried throughout the training and will make its presence felt later.

The requirements of an advanced horse are trust, understanding, cooperation and partnership, and to obtain them is necessary to work from the start to earn this trust and partnership in harmony.

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