Minnesota 4-H Horsemanship and Horse Training Manual

Minnesota Extension Service
University of Minnesota
Center For Youth Development
This manual is intended for use by all 4-H Horse Project members, from beginner to experienced, and for all phases of the project. The hope is that it will cover some areas of horsemanship and training not included in the other 4-H material available. It should be used in conjunction with the National 4-H booklets, Horses and Horsemanship and Horse Science. For additional information refer to books such as The Horse (Evans, et al) and Horses and Horsemanship (Ensminger), and the Horse Training Program Videos-Parts 1 & 2 (available in the Minnesota 4-H Horse Program Library.

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Chapter One

Understanding Your Horse

Understanding the reasons why a horse behaves as it does goes a long way to becoming a better horseman and to improving your horse’s ability to perform the actions you ask of him. Behavior patterns convey messages to other horses and to the handlers.

BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

Protective Behavior--This includes all the ways horses react to predators and the environment. Horses naturally respond in flight or running away when threatened. To the horse something on its back is a predator trying to kill him. So he reacts by bucking. The horse also responds to the weather by seeking shelter, turning his tail toward the wind, standing in the sun to warm up, or seeking a breezy hilltop.

Ingestive Behavior--This is how a horse responds to food and water. Because of the horse’s digestive system, he must take in small amounts of food at a time and eat frequently. The horse is naturally a grazing animal, preferring open areas and young tender grasses.

Eliminative Behavior--The horse tends to deposit its urine and feces in certain areas and graze in other areas. He also prefers not to urinate or defecate while walking. Almost all horses will defecate when approaching a trailer or immediately on entering it.

Sexual Behavior--This involves courtship and mating and affects stallions, mares and geldings. The mare’s behavior and personality change during estrus (heat). Geldings may still be possessive of mares as a stallion would. Keep the sexes separate if possible.

Care-Giving/Seeking Behavior--This is usually the behavior between the mare and foal. An example is imprinting, where the foal at birth identifies with its mother. The mother wants to stay close to the foal and whinnies when separated. Another type of Care Behavior occurs among other horses, such as standing head to tail to fight off flies or scratch each other on neck or back.

Combat Behavior (Agonistic)--Associated with fighting, aggression, submission, and attempts to escape. This is also related to the “pecking order” in a group of horses, where one is dominant over others in the group. Some examples are kicking, biting, and striking.

Gregarious Behavior (Mimicry)--Tendency to copy or mimic another member of the herd. Examples are following the herd in the pasture, being hard to catch, learning cribbing or wood chewing from the horse in the next stall.

Investigative Behavior--This involves the way horses inspect their environment, especially new surroundings or objects. They look at, smell, touch, listen, and sometimes run away. These reactions must be considered when training or when riding in new areas.

MAJOR SENSES

Hearing. The eyes and ears almost always work together and therefore provide an excellent indicator of where a horse is looking. If the ears point straight ahead, the horse is looking straight ahead. A wildly active ear can indicate blindness.
**Touch.** The areas in which the horse is most sensitive are the nose, eyes, ears, legs, flank, withers, and the frog. Touch is the most important sense in riding and training. The rider touches through the horse’s mouth, neck, and ribs as they cue the horse. He can communicate his directions or cues as well as his emotions—tension or calmness, excitement, and doubt or loss of confidence.

**Sight.** Be aware of where and how a horse sees. Many horses with shying, head tossing, and general confidence problems can be cured by education through vision. Try to see yourself as the horse sees you. This will help you avoid any training inconsistencies.

The amount of forward vision is related to the degree of trainability. A horse with “pig eyes” (small eyes set too far to side of horse) or a Roman-nosed horse (face is convex, rather than straight or dished) cannot see in front of him as well.

The horse has monocular vision, which means that he can see separate objects with each eye at the same time. This increases his side vision, but makes it harder for him to judge depth.

When the horse looks at one object, farther than four feet away, with both eyes he is using binocular vision.

The headset of the horse also determines what he is able to see in front of him. His conformation influences this headset.

*The high-headed horse cannot see the ground, which makes it dangerous to ride*

**Smell.** The horse uses smell to identify each other, to recognize humans, to detect a mare in heat, and to avoid certain feeds or feed additives.

**COMMUNICATION**

**Vocal Signals**

**Snort**—A warning signal to alert a group of horses to danger.

**Neigh or Whinny**—Distress call, expressing concern, anxiety, terror, being alone.

**Nicker**—A greeting for other horses, animal friends, the barn or people.

**Squeal**—This means anger, usually when fighting

**Stallion Call**—A challenge, warning, or mating call that is loud and shrill.

**Mare Talk**—Soft nickers to the foal.
**Visual Signals**

**Ears and Eyes**—These can indicate what the mood of the horse is. An angry horse lays its ears back flat. A sleepy horse’s ears are relaxed back and its eyes are partly closed. An interested horse’s ears are pricked forward. A watchful horse has one eye and ear forward and the other back. A horse may have his ears back with his attention focused on the rider or something behind him.

![Full Attention Ahead](image1)

![Angry Horse](image2)

![Sleepy, Attention](image3)

![Attention](image4)

![Split Attention—One On Rider, One On What’s Ahead](image5)

**Tail**—This can also indicate the mood of the horse. A tail held high indicates the horse is feeling good. When tucked between the legs, the horse is afraid or ready to kick. Tail switching indicates irritation.

**Nostrils**—When the horse is excited or frightened, the nostrils are flared out.

**Lips**—A raised upper lip may indicate displeasure at a bad taste or odor, or pain in the digestive tract. A stallion will curl his upper lip with the head high and extended when determining if a mare is in estrus.
Ideally each horse should have its own saddle, bridle, halter and lead rope. Tack (any equipment used for riding or driving) should be selected to suit the purpose and to fit the horse and rider. The requirements noted below are for the Minnesota 4-H Horse Project and may vary in other states or for specific breeds.

**Bridles**

The function of the bridle is to hold the bit in place in the horse’s mouth and to provide a line of communication between the rider and horse. The three basic parts of a bridle are the headstall, the bits, and the reins.

The throatlatch keeps the headstall from slipping over the ears. It should be adjusted so that you can put your hand between the strap and the throat. The curb strap or chain should be adjusted to allow two fingers between the strap and chin. Curb chains must lay flat and be at least 1/2 inch wide. The cheekpieces should be adjusted so the bit rests properly in the mouth with a slight wrinkle at the corners of the mouth. To give optimal control with the lightest touch, you will need to vary the adjustment, depending on the requirements of each individual horse.

**Western style bridles** do not have a cavesson and will be held in place either by a browband (throatlatch needed) or by a split ear crownpiece (throatlatch optional). In performance classes a curb bit must be used. A bosal or snaffle bit may be used on a junior horse. (See the Minnesota 4-H Rule Book for exact ruling)

When using a curb bit, the reins may be split reins or romal reins. When using a snaffle bit the reins must be split. A bosal must be used in conjunction with the mecate. Roping reins may be used only in game events.

**English style bridles** have a browband and cavesson noseband and one or two sets of reins. For **Hunt Seat** the hunt bridle must have a noseband (cavesson). Both the browband and noseband are to be plain leather. Acceptable bits are a snaffle, pelham, or kimberwick bit.

For **Saddle Seat** the 4-H’er may choose either a full bridle (Weymouth) with curb and bradoon bits and two sets of reins OR a bridle with a pelham bit and two sets of reins. Either style must have a colored browband and cavesson. The snaffle reins are 1/2” wide and may be laced. They must not be hunt reins, which are...
Snaffle Bit--It has two rings connected by a straight or a jointed mouthpiece. The reins connect directly to the mouthpiece at the rings with no shank. The action is on the corners and bars of the mouth. Pressure on the reins is transferred directly to the bit. It should rest on the bars of the mouth, causing a slight wrinkle at the corner of the mouth. It is the least severe of the bits and is often used to break or train horses. The bit of a larger diameter is less severe than one of a smaller diameter. It comes in several styles, including the D-ring, O-ring, Egg-butt, Half-cheek, and Full-cheek.

Curb Bit--This has a mouthpiece with shanks. The bit works on leverage from the shanks. The length of the shank determines how much pressure is put on the mouth of the horse. The longer shank is more severe. A straight shank is more severe than a curved shank of the same length.

The mouthpiece puts pressure on the tongue, bars, and roof of the mouth. The center of the mouthpiece may be straight as in the bar in the mullen mouth bit, or curved upward with a port. The ports can be low, medium, or high. The ports may also have a spoon-like attachment above (Spade bit) or a roller underneath. The curb strap or chain presses under the chin and the headstall presses on the poll. Curb bits come in a wide variety of styles, each with a different effect on the horse.

Curb bits are used alone in western-style riding and with the bradoon snaffle in the Weymouth (Full) bridle.

**Bosal Hackamore**--A bitless bridle that uses pressure on the jaw, nose, and poll. The headstall is held in place by a noseband knotted under the jaw and includes one set of reins. It is often used in training or as a transition to the bit.

**Bits**

The purpose of a bit is to control the horse, get the desirable head set, to aid in balancing the horse, and is a means of communication between rider’s hands and the horse’s mouth.

All bits must be the proper size for the horse’s mouth and be adjusted properly to rest correctly in the mouth. When selecting a bit, you should consider the use of the horse, the response desired and the horse’s individual traits and conformation.

Pressure points exerted by bits and/or headstalls include poll, bars, tongue, roof of mouth, corners of mouth, nose, lower jaw, and chin. Since the rider controls the amount of pressure, in part, his or her technique will also influence the response.

**D-Ring Snaffle Bit**
**Pelham Bit**—This is a curb bit with an area at the mouthpiece for attaching a second set of reins. The snaffle rein attaches at the mouthpiece and the curb rein attaches at the end of the shank. This gives the rider the advantage of both snaffle (direct contact and reining) and curb (for flexing at the poll). The combined action allows the rider to place the head for the best balance possible.

The bit is used in English style riding and as a transition from the snaffle to curb.

**Weymouth**—This is a light curb bit used in conjunction with a bradoon snaffle in the Full (Weymouth) bridle. This is a full bridle with a cavesson, two bits and two sets of reins. Its advantage over a bridle with a Pelham bit is that the rider is able to work the bits independently for flexing at the poll and achieving correct head position. It is the most widely used bridle in saddle seat classes.

**Bradoon Snaffle**—A thin snaffle with small rings used in conjunction with the Weymouth curb bit in the Full (Weymouth) bridle.

**Kimberwick**—In this bit the headstall attaches to the purchase (the part of the bit from the mouthpiece upward to headstall connection) rather than the ring. The mouthpieces vary. Many kimberwicks have a slotted ring where the rein is attached. The lower slot increases the leverage and the upper slot will decrease the leverage. A curb chain must be used. This bit is permissible in hunter classes.

**Tom Thumb**—This is not a true snaffle because it has shanks attached to the broken mouthpiece.
This gives it a curb action with leverage. The bit has a nutcracker effect and sends confusing signals to the horse.

**Mechanical Hackamore Bit**—This is not really a bit, but has a noseband with shanks attached to the sides. Pressure is put on the nose and chin groove without affecting the mouth. It is used on Western horses and is permissible only in gymkhana (game) classes.

![Mechanical Hackamore Bit](image)

**Acceptable Curb Straps and Chains**
(Leather strap, woven strap, double chain, and flat chain)

**Saddles**

Saddles should be chosen to fit both the horse and the rider. One saddle will not fit every horse because of the differences in the size of the horse, the shape and height of the withers, the length of the back, the slope of the shoulders, the spring of the ribs and the amount of muscling. A poor fitting saddle can cause sores on the horse and may roll when the horse is mounted or dismounted. Always try out a saddle before buying to make sure that it fits both horse and rider.

**Western or Stock Saddle**

This is primarily a work saddle, originally designed for comfort for all-day riding and for roping cattle. There are several main types. Each will affect the rider’s seat and leg position.

**Types**

**Barrel Racing**—lightweight with a small, narrow horn; high cantle and fork to help rider stay balanced.

**Cutting**—low, flat seat; fenders that swing freely back and forth; horn is narrow.

**Roping**—lower fork and shallow seat; fenders wider; horn very stout, wrapped with leather or rubber.

**Pleasure or trail**—focus on rider’s comfort; large padded seat.

**Reining**—short seat with little bulk in front; horn small and low.

**Show**—lots of silver and ornate tooling; some have a suede seat; built up in front; allows more contact between horse and rider.

**Rigging**

Rigging is the placement of the cinch attachment on the saddle. This is based on the measurement from the base of the cantle to the center of the swell. The rigging affects the fit of the saddle. See the National 4-H publication Horses and Horsemanship for further details.
Fitting The Saddle on The Horse

The fit at the withers is most important. The width of the withers can be measured at a point two inches below the top of the withers. This measurement should correspond to the fork width of the saddle. This will range from 5 1/2” to 7”, with the average being between 6 and 6 3/4”.

The saddle should be placed so it settles in the body depression at the top and behind the shoulder blade. Cinched tight, there should be about 1 1/2” to 2” between the withers and the arc of the fork under the saddle horn. If there is less room, use additional padding or a pad with a cutout portion for the withers. If there is more than 2”, the saddle is too narrow for the horse’s back. Dry spots on the back after a long ride or workout indicate that the saddle is pinching. Additional padding does NOT solve the problem. This saddle should not be used on this horse.

When the saddle and rigging fit properly, there should be some space between the cinch and the horse’s elbow. This allows freedom with the front legs and helps prevent binding, which can cause sores. The cinch should be of the correct length so the rings do not lay directly behind the elbows.

If using a back or flank cinch, always buckle the back cinch last when saddling and unbuckle it first when unsaddling. It should be loose enough so your hand can fit between the cinch and the horse’s barrel, when mounted. For safety, there should be a connecting strap between the front and back cinches.

Fitting The Saddle With the Rider

Measuring For Seat Size

The saddle should also fit the rider. The seat size is measured from the fork to the cantle (distance A on diagram). Typical sizes are pony (12-13”), youth (14-14 1/2”), adult (15”), and large adult (16”).

Cinches may be made of neoprene, string, leather, or fleece. Cinches are used on Western or Stock saddles and have a D or O ring for attaching to the cinch strap.

Saddling

(Refer to Chapter 4 for additional details)

When saddling, use a clean, dry saddle pad or blanket (See section on miscellaneous tack). Its purpose is to (1) protect the horse’s back; (2) Absorb moisture; (3) Protect the saddle; (4) compensate for poorly fitting saddles.

Place the blanket so it lies smoothly, about 2” in front of the saddle. Put both forward of the proper place and slide back into position. Pulling the saddle and blanket forward roughs up the hair and can cause sores. Pull the blanket up into the arc of the fork to allow an air space.

Hunt Seat Saddle

This is a forward seat English-style saddle. It allows the rider to sit closer to the horse, to feel his horse, and to communicate more readily with seat and legs. The width of the saddle head is not as critical as the fork of the Western saddle, but should be considered. The entire panel of the saddle should be in contact with the horse’s back. The saddle should also fit the rider. Seat sizes are measured from the nail head to the cantle. They are youth (14 1/2- 15 1/2”), adult (16-18”), and large adult (18-19”).
Girths--Types of girths include shaped leather, folded leather, neoprene (usually used with a work saddle), string and web. The girth is used with English style saddles and has 2 buckles at each end for attachment to the billets.

Artificial Aids

These are pieces of equipment used to cue the horse. They should be used carefully and never overused or used as punishment.

Spurs--These are worn on the boot. They produce a stronger signal to the horse when giving leg cues. Western style spurs usually have a longer shank tipping downward. They are attached with a spur strap buckled on the outer side of the foot. English spurs have a blunt end, with varying length of shanks. They are usually attached with a narrow leather strap. Slip-on spurs of either type have the disadvantages of falling off and sliding out of the correct position.

Bat--A wide, flat leather aid used primarily in game classes. It must only be used behind the cinch on the horse’s rump.

Crop--A short whip used primarily in English style riding. A short crop with a “popper” at the end is used in hunt seat. A longer crop that is thin, tapered, and without the “popper” is used in saddle seat.

Lunge Whip--A whip about six feet long with a six to eight foot lash used to cue or discipline the horse while lunging.

Other Tack and Training Aids

Halter--A headstall used for leading or tying the horse. It is commonly made from leather, nylon or rope. It should be adjusted so that the noseband sets on the bridge of the nose one to two inches below the end of the cheekbone. It should never be left on a horse in the pasture or in its stall because of the danger of the horse getting caught on some object.
Blanket or pad--This should always be used with the saddle. The main types available are:

Fiber Blanket—Made of cotton and/or synthetic fibers. It is inexpensive and easily washed, but does not absorb moisture well and wears out quickly. Blankets are often used in conjunction with a pad.

Sheepskin Pad (real)—Absorbent, long-lasting, easy to clean, but expensive.

Fleece—Less expensive, easy to clean, but less absorbent and tends to stretch out of shape.

Hairpads—Good shock absorbers, absorb moisture well, breathe, but hard to keep clean, dry slowly, apt to tear at points of strain, and may become lumpy.

Felt Pads—Adequate, but tear easily at points of strain, can’t wash (must dry-clean).

Foam Pads—Easily cleaned, good shock absorbers, inexpensive, but do not absorb moisture or breathe.

Therapeutic pads—Designed for horses that become sore easily.

Lead Rope—A line about six to ten feet long, made of cotton rope, braided or flat nylon or leather. The snap must be strong enough to withstand any pulling a horse might do. It is recommended that a leather lead not be used for tying a horse because it is more likely to break if the horse pulls.

Cavesson—A noseband used in training to aid in keeping a horse’s mouth quieter. It is often used in training all types of horses. It is not permissible in western classes, but is required in hunt and saddle seat classes.

Lunging Cavesson—A headstall with an additional heavy, padded metal noseband with a ring at the top for attaching a line. It is used for exercising or training on the lunge line.

Lunge Line—A 25-30-foot lightweight line with a swivel snap. It is used to exercise or train the horse as it circles.

Running Martingale--This is a Y shaped training device used with the snaffle bit and attaches to the girth or cinch. It then passes through a neck strap that keeps it in place. The reins pass through the two rings at the ends of the Y. Its function is to correct a faulty headset while allowing the horse freedom of movement. It changes the rein pressure on the snaffle bit to a downward/backward pull. This encourages the horse to tuck his nose in and flex at the poll.

The normal position of the reins is to pass through the rings in a straight line from the hands to the bit. Shortening the strap of the martingale will increase the angle of leverage and the downward pull of the reins. When the horse resists the bit and pulls at it, the rider should drive with his seat and legs. When the horse yields to the bit and gives to the pressure, the rider should immediately yield or relax his hold also. This will reward the horse’s yielding and teach him to lower his head. It is advisable to use rein stops to prevent the rings on the martingale from getting hooked on the snaps or buckle of the reins.

Standing Martingale—This is a single strap attached to the girth or cinch on one end and a noseband or bosal at the other. It
restricts the horse from raising his head beyond a certain point. It is a temporary device since it does not teach the horse to lower his head when taken off, he will almost always continue to be high-headed.

**Bitting Rig**

The surcingle is a band around the girth, with rings for driving reins and side reins. The crupper attaches to the surcingle at the top and fits under the tail to hold the surcingle in place. The bitting rig may be used with driving lines or with a lunge line. It is used for bitting, ground driving, and teaching collection.

**Breast Plate (English)**

**LEG PROTECTION**

There are various ways to protect the horse’s legs against injury. Stress or injury can occur when working with young horses, when the horse has a defect in its action (such as interfering), or when the horse is ridden in stressful events such as jumping or games (gymkhana).

**Boots:**

- **Skid Boots**—Protect the backs of the rear fetlocks from injury when making sliding stops and abrupt turns
- **Bell Boots**—Protect the coronet, lower pastern and heels of the front legs.
- **Shipping or Stable Boots**—Foam padded to protect against injury in trailering; provides no support
- **Splint or Shin Boots**—Provide support and protection to inside of legs. Some are designed to provide additional support to the fetlock and tendons on the rear part of the legs.
- **Combination Boots**—Combines two or more types of support on one boot.

**Breast Collar (Western) or Breastplate (English)**

These are used to prevent the saddle from slipping back. The breast collar (Western style) attaches to the D ring on the saddle, goes around the shoulders, with a strap down the front to attach to the cinch. The breast plate (English style) goes around the horse’s neck, with straps going to the D rings on the saddle, and a strap down the front to the girth. When properly adjusted, it should not interfere with the movement of the horse’s shoulders.
Wrap over the ankle, then downward over the pastern. If the bandage sags or gaps in front, give it a half twist. Use another half twist around heel to get it to lie smoothly. Continue wrapping up the leg to the edge of the pad, keeping bandage firm, but not stretching it. Start back down leg, then tie or fasten, using a bowline knot. Knot may be covered with adhesive tape to secure it.

**Bandages/Leg Wraps**

Caution must be used when applying stretchy material as bandages to avoid getting it too tight and cutting off the circulation. Types include:

- **Track Bandages**—Used alone they provide support. They may be used over cotton sheets or quilted pads to protect and medicate wounds, to protect during shipping, to provide extra support.

- **Polo/Fleece Bandage**—Fuzzy, fleecy material for padding and support.

- **Self-adhesive Bandages** — For support, protection, over cotton as a medical wrap, on tails for shipping or breeding.

**Applying Shipping Bandages**

You will need cotton or quilted pad & track bandages

**Caution:** Do not stretch the bandage. Wrapping too tightly can cut off the circulation. Place cotton or quilt pads on the leg. Slip end of bandage under pad to secure it.

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**HORSE PACKING EQUIPMENT**

**Pack Saddles**

- **Sawbuck**—A small, lightweight saddle with two cinches. The most commonly used pack saddle.

- **Decker**—A heavier, larger saddle with one cinch in the center of the saddle.

**Panniers**

Large canvas or leather containers used on pack saddles. Some are made to fit over a stock saddle. When loading the panniers, make sure they are of equal weight with not over one to two pounds difference.
**DRIVING HARNESS**

Driving is an enjoyable way to use your horse. There are many types of harnesses and hitches. These include racing, heavy harness, and fine or show harness.

**CARE OF TACK**

Tack should be cleaned after each use. At the minimum, the bottom of the saddle, the inside of the bridle, and the saddle pad or blanket should be cleaned after each ride. The bit should be wiped with a damp cloth to remove saliva and debris after each use. A thorough cleaning of all tack should be done weekly.

**Reasons to Clean Tack:**
- Leather & metal will last longer
- Leather will be softer & more pliable
- Less sores from dirty, stiff leather or rusty moldy bit
- Minor defects will be noticed early
- Less breakage
- Looks better

**Equipment Needed**
- Saddle Soap
- Sponges
- Bucket of warm water
- Leather Preservative or Neatsfoot Oil
- Metal Polish
- Petroleum Jelly
- Soft cloths

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**Manta**
The pack cover, usually made of waterproof canvas or a rubberized, nylon-reinforced material. It varies in size depending on the size of the load.

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**Sawbuck Saddle**

**Decker Pack Saddle**

(From *Horses* by Evans)

**Panniers With a Western Saddle**

(From *Horses*, by Evans)
Procedure
To clean the saddle, use a dampened sponge to apply saddle soap to all parts, working up a lather. Wipe off with a second sponge and rub dry with a soft cloth. Apply leather preservative or Neatsfoot oil, avoiding excess oil that can stain clothing.

On the headstall, use the same procedure. Clean the metal parts (buckles, etc, EXCLUDING the mouthpiece) with the metal polish, applying with a soft cloth or cheesecloth. Polish with flannel or soft cloth. If bits are not being used for a while, clean, dry and apply a thin coating of petroleum jelly to prevent rusting. Do not use metal polish on bits.

For blankets and Pads, if not washable, hang up to dry, and then brush off sweat and hair.

Other tack—clean as for bridles, except do not use soap or cream on leather boots used on horses. It collects dirt and deteriorates the stitching. Brush to remove dirt, rub in petroleum jelly or a liquid preservative. Apply talcum powder or cornstarch just before using to absorb the moisture and smooth out rough spots.

Storage
Store in a cool, dry place. Cover all tack. The bridle should be hung on a rack so all parts hang freely without sharp bending. The saddle should be placed on a saddle rack.

CLOTHING

The following are the requirements in the Minnesota 4-H Horse Program, as established in the 1995 Minnesota 4-H Horse Rule Book. Please refer to current Rule Book version for updates.

Western Show Attire
The requirements are western boots; western hat; dress or western long-sleeved shirt; western pants or jeans; and belt. A vest, jacket, sweater, tie, scarf, and gloves are optional. Chaps are optional at the discretion of the show committee and may not be permitted in horsemanship classes.

Hunt Seat Attire
The requirements are coat (in dark or conservative color), breeches (buff, gray, rust, beige, or canary), high boots, hunting cap (preferably a hard hat with safety chin strap, in black, dark blue, or brown) and shirt (preferably with ratcatcher and choker or stock and pin). Gloves of leather are recommended
Saddle Seat Attire

A saddle seat suit is a longer coat, jodhpurs, shirt, tie, derby or soft hat and vest (optional). A conservative saddle seat suit, of a solid color with matching jodhpurs, is required for equitation. A formal suit and matching top hat is acceptable only after 6 pm.

A day coat may be worn in pleasure classes at anytime of the day and is not appropriate for equitation. The day coat is a patterned or print material that coordinates with the color of the jodhpurs.

Saddle Seat Attire
Chapter Three

Handling The Horse

AT HALTER

Equipment Needed: Halter and lead rope made of leather, nylon, or rope

The halter should fit the horse properly. If too large, it will slide around on the horse’s head and the handler will not have proper control. If too small it could cause sores. The noseband should lay 1-2 inches below the end of the cheekbone and should be 4 inches longer than the measurement around the horse’s muzzle at that spot. If the noseband is too low, it could damage the bones and tissue of the nose and will not provide maximum control. If it is too high, it can rub on the cheek or restrict jaw movement. Each horse should have its own halter, adjusted to fit him properly.

The lead should have a strong snap. For additional control, some horsemen use a chain at the end of the lead that can be run through one side ring and to the other side ring, either over the nose or under the chin. For a high-headed horse, use the chain OVER the nose. Caution is advised when using a chain because a severe jerk on the lead may cause the horse to over-react by rearing or fighting to get away. It should not be used on young horses. Never tie a horse with a lead having a chain.

Approaching

Always let the horse know where you are. Approach him at an angle from his left and front, never directly in front or behind him. Talk to him and move slowly and quietly. Put your hand on his shoulder or neck.

For a horse in a tie stall, he must be taught to move over before you enter the stall. For a horse in a box stall, he must be taught to turn and face you before you enter.

Stay close to the horse when working around him, especially around his hindquarters. Keep your hand on his dock (upper tail). This helps the horse know you are there. If he tries to kick you, you will not feel the full force of the blow as you would if you were several feet away. The kick will only shove you if you are standing close.
Safe Way To Hold Excess Lead Rope
(See MN 4-H Horse Program Rule Book for acceptable methods for showmanship)

Catching A Loose Horse
Teach your horse to come up to you in the pasture. Every day catch the horse, using a treat or some grain to lure him to you if you have to. Carry a halter with you and put it on him. Pet the horse, lead him a little, etc., and then let him loose. Do not ride him every time you catch him so he does not associate your catching him with work, but with food and a pleasurable experience.

Leading
To lead the horse, walk beside him on his left side, between the shoulder and head, with the lead in your right hand about 6-15” from the halter. The lead should be held in a manner to provide optimal control, so that the handler is able to apply or release pressure as needed. The other end of the lead should be neatly doubled in the left hand. Do not loop the end around your hand. If your horse pulls hard, the loop could close and lock around your hand. Do not allow the lead to fall onto the ground, to prevent your tripping or being entangled in the line.

Always walk beside the horse, never ahead or behind him. Don’t allow him to crowd you or rub his head on you. His head, neck and body should maintain a straight line. Correction and cues should be done by quick snaps on the lead. Pulling isn’t effective because the horse can always out-pull you.

When turning, the horse should turn to the right, away from you, as you walk around the outside. Your horse should be able to pivot smoothly on his hindquarters and back readily.

Tying
The horse should be tied to something solid enough that he cannot break it or move it or be hurt by it. Make sure both the halter and lead rope are strong enough. If he once breaks his halter or lead while tied, he will remember and try harder to break it the next time. Do not use a leather lead or a lead with a chain.

The tie should be placed at the height of the horse’s withers, or slightly above. The length of rope between the knot and the halter should be short enough so he can’t get his feet or legs tangled in it, and long enough so if he falls, his head won’t be hanging. This is generally about 2 or 3 feet.

Horses should be tied far enough apart so they cannot kick or bite each other. When tied to a fence or a picket line, the recommended distance is 20 feet apart. Never use the reins as tie ropes. Put a halter over the bridle if you need to tie your horse. Do not leave your horse unobserved for a long period of time while tied.

Knots
A quick release knot should be used when tying the horse to a fixed object. This knot can be untied quickly, even when the horse is pulling.

A bowline knot should be used when tying a rope around the horse’s neck. This knot is easily untied because it does not draw tight and it does not slip.
Restraint
There are various methods to restrain a horse. An experienced horse person should be consulted if you need to restrain your horse while clipping, working on the feet, etc.

FOOT CARE AND HANDLING

Picking Up the Feet
Have someone hold the horse, keeping him calm. Do not tie the horse, especially in cross ties.

For the front foot (left), hold the lead rope in your left hand (if alone), short enough to keep the horse still. Place your left hand on the horse’s shoulder and face the rear. Run your right hand down his left leg and attempt to pick up the foot. If he resists, push gently against him to shift his weight from the left side, and gently squeeze the tendons on the back side of the cannon. When he lifts the foot, cradle the pastern with your left hand and support it on your left knee. Repeat the procedure, with hands reversed for the right leg.

Crosstying
This is the procedure of tying the horse to a solid object on each side of it and is very useful when working on the horse, such as grooming, clipping, etc. This can be dangerous if the horse is not trained properly. Starting by tying on one side, leaving the other side untied and controlled by the handler. Gradually get the horse used to being tied on both sides. If the horse is a halter puller, this procedure is not recommended. The ties should be long enough to overlap in the center, giving the horse about 6-8 inches of “give”.

Picking Up The Front Foot
For the hind foot (left), stand forward of the hindquarters, holding the lead rope in your left hand (if alone). With your left hand on the point of his hip, slide your right hand down the back side of the cannon bone of the left leg. Cradle the leg with your hand, just above the fetlock and lift it under the horse’s body. When the horse relaxes, move toward the rear, standing close to the horse and being careful not to pull the leg out to the side. Place the foot on your left knee.
During the trip, provide hay. This helps keep
the bowels working. Do not feed concentrates
during the trip.
Frequently give the horse as much water as he
will drink. Some horses refuse to drink water
from a different location because it tastes
different. A tiny bit of molasses may be added
to the water, beginning a week before
transporting, continuing while away from home.
Some have used unsweetened Kool-Aid with
success. Electrolytes may be needed for long
trips.
The horse’s legs may be bandaged to prevent
injury to the ankles and tendons. Use quilted
pads (held in place with track bandages) or
shipping boots. Some horses travel better
without boots or bandages.
Pack tools (hammer, nails, pliers, flashlight, fire
extinguisher, fork, broom), wheel jack & spare
tire, extra halter & lead, first aid supplies and
medications.
Check your trailer brakes, lights, hitch before
each trip. Check the wheel bearings yearly.

**Teaching Your Horse To Load**
The most important thing to remember is to
give the horse plenty of time to get used to the
trailer. Once you have begun the process of
getting him into the trailer, don’t give up until
you have succeeded. If you give up, the horse
learns that resistance works for him. Make sure
your trailer is safe. Open the front escape door.
Do not force him into the trailer. Ask him to
approach it by leading him, allowing him to look
at it and smell. Then step into the trailer
yourself, but allowing him to back off if he
shows signs of fear. Be sure to move over to one
side of the trailer, not standing directly in front
of the horse. Reassure him and ask him to step
in by leading him, again allowing him to back
off if he resists. Keep asking him to step in,
even if he only puts one foot in. Keep calm and
don’t make sudden movements. Don’t jerk or
pull hard on the lead rope. This encourages the
horse to throw his head with the danger of hitting
the top of the trailer.
If he still resists, have an assistant help you
by coming beside the horse, clucking, and trying
to keep him from shifting. A second assistant
can be used to keep the horse straight. If all else fails, try tapping with a whip against the horse’s hind legs. A butt rope can also be used to pull the horse in. Once he is in the trailer, fasten the bar or rope behind the rump immediately. The handler should tie the horse and exit by the escape door. The tie should be short enough so the horse can’t turn around or get his legs tangled in the rope or in the manger. It shouldn’t be so short that he can’t move his head.

There should be hay or a small amount of grain in the front as a reward for him entering. Don’t make him stay very long in the trailer the first few times. Reassure him by talking gently to him, petting him. When ready to unload him UNTIE HIM FIRST, then detach the rope or bar across the rump. Then back him out, walk him around, and ask him to enter the trailer again.

Teach your horse to back out of the trailer one step at a time, waiting for a cue from you for each step. If your horse refuses to back, you may have to attach long lines to the halter and repeatedly pull and release the lines to get him to back straight out.

Training you horse to accept trailering will take time and should be started long before the day you plan on transporting your horse.
In this chapter there are many tools and techniques to improve your horsemanship skills. It is important to remember that your most important tool is your mental preparation and confidence. An alert, yet relaxed rider is better prepared to handle any situation that arises. Learning the techniques and skills gives you the confidence necessary to be prepared and alert as you ride.

The horse should be taught to accept handling, saddling, or mounting from either side.

**SADDLING**

When preparing to saddle your horse, make sure you do not lay the saddle on the ground where the horse could step on it. Set the saddle on a saw horse or stand made for that purpose.

Before saddling, groom your horse thoroughly. Be sure there are no sores on its back or in the cinch area, as this could cause the horse to wring its tail or buck. If there are saddle sores, consider using extra padding or a girth pad, or give the horse time off until the sores heal. Also check your blanket for foreign objects or dirt buildup, and be sure that the blanket is dry.

Place the blanket well forward and pull it back toward the rear of the horse until the front rests at the withers. This pulls the hair backward in the direction it should lay. Never pull a blanket forward, as it will reverse the direction of the hair and cause discomfort.

Make sure there are no wrinkles, and be sure the blanket offers adequate padding for the horse. Some horses require more padding than others and some may require extra padding at their withers to prevent binding the shoulders. Also make sure that the saddle cinch/girth is clean, as dirty cinches can cause saddle sores.

Pick up the saddle so that the fork (pommel) is in your left hand. You will usually saddle the horse from its left side, so lay the cinch, or cinches, over the seat and hook the right stirrup over the saddle horn. This prevents you from tripping and keeps them from hitting the horse's side as the saddle comes down on its back, which could scare the horse and cause it to jump into you. Never approach the horse carrying a saddle with a dragging cinch, as you could step on it and fall under the horse. Also be sure there is nothing between you and the horse that you could trip on as you carry the saddle.

Raise the saddle as high as you can and set it down gently on the horse's back. This helps prevent back soreness and helps assure the horse that the saddling experience is nothing to fear. Throwing the saddle onto the horse's back can cause bruising and may aggravate any existing back problems.

Place the saddle so that at least an inch of blanket lies in front of it. Placing it too far up on the blanket could cause the blanket to work its way backward on the horse as you ride. Do not place the saddle too far forward, which restricts shoulder movement and causes discomfort, or too far back, which can cause kidney damage and sore backs. Move to the opposite side by walking behind the horse, either by keeping a hand on the horse and walking as close as possible, or by keeping a distance of several feet to ensure that you are out of kicking range. Talk to your horse frequently, especially when changing sides or starting something new. This ensures that the horse is aware of your presence and it helps to calm a nervous horse.

Let the cinch and stirrup down, making sure they do not slam down on the horse's side. Never release the cinch and stirrup by pushing them over the saddle from the left side. This could hurt or startle the horse.
Make sure the blanket is even and that the cinch is straight. Then move back to the near side and pull the blanket up into the gullet of the saddle to prevent pressure on the withers and slipping of the blanket. Reach under the horse and grasp the cinch with your left hand, facing the rear of the horse.

If using a martingale or breast collar, you may need to thread the cinch through the end of the martingale or breast collar before fastening the cinch, unless your cinch has a ring to which you can attach them. In this case, tighten the cinch before attaching the martingale or breast collar.

If you use a rear cinch, tighten the front one first. Put the latigo, or cinch strap, through the cinch ring and the rigging ring twice. Then you can either tie a cinch knot to secure the cinch, or you can buckle it if the cinch has a buckle and your latigo has holes for it. Completing the cinch knot before tightening the cinch is much easier because the rigging ring is not pulled tight.

To tie the knot, tighten the cinch just enough to prevent it from hanging underneath the horse's belly. Then pull the latigo out to the side, cross over the top just underneath the rigging ring, and put the latigo up through the rigging ring again. Then place the end of the latigo underneath the loop you made when you crossed over the top.

With the left hand under the buckle to prevent pinching, tighten the cinch slowly, an inch or two at a time. Tightening it too quickly can cause your horse to be "cinchy," or irritable, during saddling. Some horses may even begin biting or rearing when you tighten the cinch if they anticipate discomfort.

Tighten the cinch until it is snug enough to hold the saddle on the horse. You can tighten it more before mounting. Secure the end of the strap through the latigo carrier in front of the fender. Although most straps are not long enough to get stepped on, they should be kept up out of the way so that they do not blow against the horse's legs or belly.

If you have a rear cinch, fasten it so that your hand can fit flat between cinch and horse when the rider is mounted. It should not be excessively tight when the horse is first saddled, nor should it be so loose that a back foot could get caught in it. Rear cinches should have a strap connected to the front cinch to prevent it from getting into the flank area. After the horse is walked to the mounting area, recheck the front cinch. You probably will be able to take it up another hole or two without getting it too tight. For riding, the cinch should be snug under the heart girth, but not excessively tight. You should be able to fit two fingers under the buckle without much difficulty. Check the cinch again after mounting, as some horses will "blow out" their lungs during saddling, only to relax after you mount, suddenly making the cinch too loose.

To unsaddle, simply reverse the above process. Always unfasten the rear cinch first to prevent an accident should the saddle turn while you are unsaddling. Your horse may panic if the saddle turns with the flank cinch fastened. To remove the saddle, lift it slightly before pulling it off. This is more comfortable for the horse and easier on the saddle. As you pull the saddle off, place the cinch and right stirrup over the seat so that they do not hit you in the shins.

If you have had a hard ride, loosen the cinch gradually, allowing the horse to cool down before taking off the saddle. This allows the blood to flow back under the saddle slowly.

**BRIDLING**

Untie your horse before bridling. Working on the horse's left side again, drop the nosepiece of the halter off the nose and refasten the crown strap around the neck. Avoid placing your face too close to the horse's head during bridling and use caution when handling the ears. This helps ensure that you do not get hit in the face should the horse toss its head.
The bridle should be properly adjusted before you ride. Be sure the browband does not hang down in the horse's eyes and that the bit is neither too high nor too low. The bit should rest on the bars of the mouth. It should be high enough that it creates one or two small wrinkles at the corners of the mouth. If there are more than two wrinkles, the bit is probably too high. On the other hand, if the bit hangs so that it comes in contact with the incisor teeth, it is too low.

Also check the curb chain, or curb strap. You should be able to fit three fingers sideways between the horse's chin and the chain, but the chain should be tight enough that it places pressure on the chin when you pull back on the reins. This ensures that you have enough control of your horse.

MOUNTING

Preparation
After saddling, check the cinch or girth for tightness. Check the stirrup straps for correct length. This will vary according to the style of riding.

Western Style:
Stand on the horse’s left (near) side, slightly ahead of the girth, facing the horse’s left hip. Take the reins in your left hand and place your hand on the horse’s neck in front of the withers. Keep the romal or the rein ends on the near side, making sure they don’t touch the ground.
Take the stirrup with your right hand and place your left foot in the stirrup with the ball of your foot on the tread.

Brace your left knee against the horse, hold the saddle horn with your right hand, and spring your right leg up and over the back, keeping it clear of the saddle and the horse, then ease into the saddle. Place your right foot in the right (off side) stirrup. If using a romal, shift it to the right side.

**Dismounting**

**Western Style:**
Gather the reins in your left hand, placing your hand on the horse’s neck above the withers. If using a romal, move it to the left side. Keep reins or romal off the ground. Stand up in the stirrups with your right hand on the pommeal or horn and slide the right foot free of the stirrup. Swing the right leg over the horse’s back, keeping it clear of the saddle and the horse. Step down with the right foot to the ground. Remove the left foot from the stirrup.

For small riders on a large horse, use the procedure for English style dismounting, being careful not to catch your clothing on the saddle horn.

**Mounting English Style**

**English Style:**
Stand at the shoulder of the horse’s left (near) side, facing the rear of the horse. Take the reins in your left hand and place your hand on the horse’s neck in front of the withers. Rein ends should be on the near (left) side. Take the stirrup with your right hand, turning it one quarter turn towards you. Place your left foot in the stirrup with the ball of your foot on the tread.

Hop off the right foot, swing around to face the horse, grasp the cantle of the saddle, and spring upward into a standing position against the horse’s side.

Shift your right hand to the pommeal and swing your right leg over the horse’s back, keeping it straight and clear of the saddle and the horse.

Ease down into the saddle and place your right foot in the right (off side) stirrup.

Pick up the reins in both hands, moving the bight (excess reins) to the off side.

**Dismounting**

**Western Style:**
Gather the reins in your left hand, placing your hand on the horse’s neck above the withers. If using a romal, move it to the left side. Keep reins or romal off the ground. Stand up in the stirrups with your right hand on the pommeal or horn and slide the right foot free of the stirrup. Swing the right leg over the horse’s back, keeping it clear of the saddle and the horse. Step down with the right foot to the ground. Remove the left foot from the stirrup.

For small riders on a large horse, use the procedure for English style dismounting, being careful not to catch your clothing on the saddle horn.

**Mounting English Style**

**English Style:**
Gather the reins in your left hand and place your hand on the horse’s neck above the withers. Shift your right hand to the pommeal and swing your right leg back over the horse’s back, keeping it straight and clear of the saddle and the horse. Stand up in the stirrups with your right hand on the pommeal and slide your right foot free of the stirrup. Swing your right leg back over the horse’s back, keeping it straight and clear of the saddle and the horse. Shift your right hand to the cantle, brace yourself against the horse’s side,
remove your left foot from the stirrup, and slide
down to the ground. This prevents getting hung
up in the stirrups if your horse should move

THE AIDS

The aids are the means by which the rider
communicates to the horse. The natural aids
are the hands, the seat (weight), the legs, and the
voice. The rider should use a combination of
these aids to bring about the desired response.

The hands control the horse’s forehand. The
seat (weight) is used for forward movement, to
slow speed, and when turning. The legs control
the horse’s hindquarters. The voice is important
for schooling, but should not be used in the show
ring.

Half Halt

This is a combination of aids necessary to
prepare your horse for any change and is a way
of getting his attention. It allows the horse to
balance, to elevate in front, and to engage his
hindquarters. It also teaches him not to push on
the bit, but to respond and give to the bit. It aids
in keeping the horse balanced at each transition
and aids in collecting the gaits.

It is a brief holding of the reins with an
immediate give of the reins as soon as he has
responded. It is performed by applying seat, leg,
and hand aids almost in unison with the hands
being the lightest of the aids.

Technique

- Keep upper body straight.
- Sit deep in the seat, with your seat bones
  forward
- Apply slight pressure with the lower legs
  at the cinch or girth.
- Begin by using soft cues with the hands
  by simply closing the fingers.
- If the horse does not respond, increase
  the hand cue slightly.
- At no time should you pull hard or throw
  your upper body backwards.
- Release is critical to allow the horse to
carry and maintain the proper form.

- The moment the horse responds, release
  the cues slightly.

Artificial Aids

These include whips, crops, bats, martingales,
tie-downs, and spurs. The artificial aids may be
used if the desired results are not obtained
through the use of natural aids. Be sure that the
equipment you use is appropriate to the division
or style of riding.

Holding The Reins

The hands, through the reins, are able to
influence the shape or extent of a movement, the
gait, the rhythm of the gait, the length of stride,
and the amount of forward motion. The action of
the hands should be subtle, without obvious
movement. The position of the hands is
determined by the position of the horse’s head
and the style of riding.

Western Style

Using Romal Reins

Using Split Reins Only

(From From The Center Of The Ring,
Cherry Hill, C1988)

Only one hand can be used to hold the reins,
usually the left. The only exception is when
using a bosal or snaffle bit, when both hands
are to be used. A D-ring, O-ring or egg butt
snaffle is permissible only when showing a
junior horse in a Western class. (see Minnesota
4-H Horse Program Rule Book).

When using split reins, the reins from the
horse’s mouth should enter the hand at the top
and come out at the bottom with the ends (bight)
falling on the same side as the reining hand. One
finger is permitted between the reins.
When using a *romal*, the reins from the horse’s mouth should enter the hand at the bottom and come out the top, falling over the thumb of the reining hand. A finger between the reins is NOT permitted. The romal end must be held in the other hand and be at least 16 inches from the reining hand.

The reining hand should be held near the saddle horn in a flexible, relaxed manner. If using a bosal or a snaffle bit, the hands should be held so that both are visible to the judge at all times.

**English Style – Hunt Seat**

Two hands are to be used. The bit should be a snaffle, kimberwick, or pelham. The hands should be held slightly apart, over and in front of the horse’s withers, with the knuckles thirty degrees inside the vertical. When using a *snaffle* bit, the reins may be held either outside the little finger or between the third and little finger.

When using a *pelham* bit, the snaffle rein should be held outside the little finger with the curb rein between the third and little finger. The bight of the reins usually falls to the off side.

**English Style – Saddle Seat**

Two hands must be used. The bit must be a full bridle with both the snaffle and curb bits or a pelham with two sets of reins. The hands should be held in an easy position, neither vertical or horizontal. The snaffle rein of either the full bridle or a pelham should be held outside the little finger. The curb rein should be held between the third and little finger.

The snaffle rein is the wider rein, and the curb rein is the narrower rein. The bight of the reins should fall to the off side.

**Seat and Position**

**Basic Position — Any Style**

A vertical line should touch ear, hip, and heel. The heels are lower than the toes. There should be a straight line from the elbow to the horse’s mouth. The upper body helps the rider maintain balance in the various changes in speed, direction, and gait. Even the tilt of the head will affect this.

**Seat (Weight)—This consists of the rider’s seat, back, thighs, & weight.** Through the seat, the rider can send signals to the horse to control forward movement, bending, flexing, collection, and extending.

**Legs—The lower legs control the forward movement, movement of the hindquarters, and bending of the body.** The important thing to remember is that the horse should be taught to move AWAY from pressure.
**Foot Position**--The ball of the foot should be centered on the stirrup, with the heel lower than the toe. This will result in better balance, closer contact with the knees and a more flexible ankle.

**Western Style**

The rider should sit erect in the saddle with the knees slightly bent and the weight directly over the balls of the feet. The stirrup length should be adjusted to allow the heels to be lower than the toes. The feet should be in the stirrup so that the balls of the feet rest on the stirrup. Weight should be evenly distributed across the stirrup.

At the jog trot, the rider should sit and not post. At the lope the rider should keep close to the saddle. Keeping the body flexible will allow the rider to adjust to the movement of the horse, but excessive shifting of the rider’s weight is not desirable.

When posting the rider supports himself by his knees against the saddle. He allows himself to be moved upward by the thrust of the horse’s hind leg. When going counter-clockwise, on the “right diagonal”, the rider will rise as the right foreleg moves forward and sits down in the saddle as the right foreleg touches the ground. When going clockwise, on the “left diagonal”, the rider rises when the horse’s left foreleg moves forward and sits when the left foreleg touches the ground.

**Hunt Seat Style**

The rider should sit erect in the saddle with the knees slightly bent and the weight directly over the balls of the feet. The stirrup length will be slightly shorter than for Western style of riding. The feet should be in the stirrup so that the balls of the feet rest on the stirrup iron.

The heels should be lower than the toes. The calves of the legs should be in light contact with the horse and slightly behind the girth.

At the walk, sitting trot, and canter, the body should be slightly in front of the vertical. At the posting trot and the hand gallop, the upper body should be inclined forward.

**Saddle Seat Style**

The rider should sit in the saddle so that his/her weight and center of gravity is in harmony with the horse. The knees should be slightly bent.
The feet should be in the stirrup so that the balls of the feet rest on the stirrup iron.

At the walk there will be a slight motion in the saddle. At the trot, there will be a slight elevation in the saddle, posting, but not with mechanical up and down motion nor swinging forward and backward.

At the canter, the rider should maintain a close seat, moving with the horse. At a running walk the rider does not post, but maintains a smooth, close seat.

**Basic Reining**

Reining is your major means of controlling direction and speed. There are several types of rein effects:

**Two Reins Of Direct Opposition**—Both hands must produce tension evenly with the head and neck kept straight. This rein effect is used for slowing down, halting or backing the horse. (Diagram #1)

**One Rein Of Direct Opposition**—This is normally used for sharp turns and usually slows the speed of the gait. The active hand is carried slightly outward and then increases the tension to the rear. The passive hand must give as much as the active hand has taken in order to produce the true effect. (Diagram #2)

**The Leading Rein**—This does not reduce the speed and is usually used for wide turns. With this rein effect, the active hand is carried outward and in the direction of the turn. The passive hand must give as much as the active hand has taken. (Diagram #3)

**The Rein Of Indirect Opposition in Front of the Withers**—For a right flexion, the right hand is carried to the left in front of and across the withers. This shifts the horse’s weight to his left shoulder. This rein effect is used for a turn on the forehand. (Diagram #4)

**The Rein of Indirect Opposition Behind the Withers**—For a right flexion, the right hand is carried partially to the left, but does not cross the neck. This puts the weight on the left hindquarters and is normally used for a turn on the haunches. (Diagram #5)

**Backing**

The back is a two beat diagonal gait backwards. The horse should be willing, have a quiet mouth, and give to the bit. It should back in a straight line. The rider should always look behind before beginning the back. See Chapters 6 & 7 for teaching the horse to back.

**Leads**

The canter or lope is a three-beat gait in which one hind leg is farther ahead of the other and one foreleg is farther ahead of the other. This is called leading. The leading foreleg supports all the weight of the horse in the portion of the stride (e) just before the suspension phase. A right lead begins with the left hind leg (a), followed by the diagonal right hind and left fore pair (c), then the right foreleg (e), finishing with the suspension phase (f).
Pivots

Teaching the horse to pivot, or turn on the forehand and the haunches improves his suppleness and responsiveness. It is the first step in controlling your horse’s body. The important thing to remember is that the horse must move AWAY from pressure.

In the **turn on the forehand**, the horse turns his body (hindquarters) around one foreleg with no backward or forward steps. Start training on the ground as described in Chapter 5. When the horse is responding well, try working when mounted.

Use the following steps to cue your horse into a right lead from a trot:
Trot your horse in a large circle to the right.
Use a slight leading right rein (see #3 under reining)
Step lightly in the right stirrup moving it slightly ahead.
Apply pressure with your left leg, cueing for a lope.
As soon as the horse lope/canters correctly on the right lead, straighten him out.
For a left lead, circle to the left, use the left rein, and right leg pressure.

**Problems and Suggestions**
If your horse takes the wrong lead, drop to the trot so he does not continue in the wrong lead. Try again. If the horse still doesn’t take the correct lead, trot in a smaller circle, pull the head slightly towards the outside of the circle and give the signal again. Straighten the head as soon as he takes the lead.
If your horse doesn’t lope/canter when asked and has been properly introduced to these aids, use a crop, whip, or spurs to encourage forward movement.
Practice identifying which lead your horse is in. When in the correct lead, the motion will be from the rider’s outside hip to the rider’s inside leg. The inside foot of the rider will tend to swing forward. The shoulder of the horse can be watched, but the rider should not change his body position to do so.

Turning On The Forehand
*(From Riding Logic, W. Museler, 1984)*

To make a **clockwise turn** (horse’s hindquarters move toward the left):
Use two hands on the reins. Learn the degree of tension needed on each rein to bend the horse’s head while steadying his head and forehand. Bend the horse’s head in the direction of the turn, towards the leg you will be cueing with (towards the right) until you are just able to see his eye. Use the other rein to steady the horse. Keep your hands and reins slightly out to the side.
When the front of the horse feels steady and is lightly bracing against the reins, begin cueing with your right leg or heel to start your horse moving his hindquarters away from your leg, towards the left.
Once the horse is taking 2-3 steps to the left and back again, begin working on further steps. This will probably result in him trying to take a step forward or back because the stationary hind leg begins to feel uncomfortable. Use your right leg to allow the hindquarters to gradually rotate.

Reverse for a counterclockwise turn by turning his head toward the left and cueing with your left leg, so the horse will turn his hindquarters toward the right.

As soon as he responds with a step or two, release the pressure and reward him. Repeat the lesson until he is able to balance his body and move 360 degrees around the forehand.

Turning On The Hindquarters
(From Riding Logic, W.Museler, c1984)

In the turn on the hindquarters, the horse turns his body (forehand) around one stationary hind leg with no backward or forward steps. He needs to flex his body with a bend to the right for a right turn or a bend to the left for a left turn. Again teach your horse to do this from the ground. When he is able to perform this well, try when mounted.

To make a clockwise turn (horse’s forehand moves towards the right):

Flex the horse towards the right, so that his whole body is bent in an arc. Put more weight towards the right, place your left leg at the girth/cinch and the right leg slightly behind the girth/cinch.

The left leg will cause the horse to move its forequarters away from pressure while the right leg controls the steps, keeping it to one step at a time. The right rein maintains the horse’s flexion, while pressure on the left rein helps the horse to move its hindquarters to the left.

Do not allow the horse to take any steps forward or back. Maintain the position by rein and leg pressure.

Transitions

A transition is a change from one gait to another. This should be done smoothly and with subtle cues. Ideally, the horse should maintain collection without throwing his head up.

Upward transitions include walk to trot, walk to lope/canter, and trot to lope/canter. In both the Western and English styles of riding, there should not be any intermediary (trotting) steps between the walk to lope.

Downward transitions include lope/canter to walk, lope/canter to trot, and trot to walk. In English (Hunt Seat or Saddle Seat), it is permissible to have two or three intermediary (trotting) steps between the canter and walk.

For information on training your horse to do transitions, see Chapter 6.
Pleasure Trail Riding

Pleasure riding on trails is a great recreation. It is inexpensive, non-competitive, relaxing, and a way to see the countryside. Many horse trails have been established to accommodate the different skill levels of horses and riders.

Trail riding benefits the horse by relaxing him, conditioning him, and relieving boredom and stress. It is important to ride the horses you show on the trail to maintain a more pleasant attitude. Allow him to relax his frame. Do not use the ride as a training session.

The Horse

Criteria for a Good Trail Horse:
Large enough to carry its rider well (about 20-25% of its body weight) without tiring.
It should walk at more than average speed (about four miles per hour) without having to jog or trot.
Safe to ride—does not buck, shy, bolt, run away.
Willing to cross all obstacles.
Surefooted.
Is sound and free from diseases.
Does not kick or bite.
Has a pleasing disposition.
Well-mannered around other horses.
Will stand tied without pulling.
Trained to load into a trailer.

Care of the Horse At the Ride

The horse is your first consideration when you arrive back at the camp.
Keep him comfortable.
Spray for flies.
Keep him out of the hot sun.
Feed and water him—grain and water at least 1 ½ hours before the ride; hay as he wishes.
Large enough to carry its rider well (about 20-25% of its body weight) without tiring.
Check his temperature, pulse, and respiration.
It should walk at more than average speed (about four miles per hour) without having to jog or trot.
Check for dehydration.
Check his shoes.
Use clean, dry equipment
Safe to ride—does not buck, shy, bolt, run away.
Willing to cross all obstacles.
Surefooted.
Is sound and free from diseases.
Does not kick or bite.
Has a pleasing disposition.
Well-mannered around other horses.
Will stand tied without pulling.
Trained to load into a trailer.

Care of the Horse During the Ride

Conditioning is essential. Training teaches a horse how to do a specific job. Conditioning makes him ABLE to do it. It may take three to five weeks to properly condition your horse. Keep your eye on his general health during this process—increase his grain, especially corn, if he is too thin. Provide free access to salt and water.

Begin with a 30 minute ride for the first few days, alternating between a fast walk, a trot, and a lope. Increase this gradually to an hour or more daily at week two. Continue to gradually increase the length of time until you are riding about half a day’s ride on the trail. Trotting and cantering develop muscles, wind capacity, and stamina.

Care of the Horse Before the Ride

Begin with a 30 minute ride for the first few days, alternating between a fast walk, a trot, and a lope. Increase this gradually to an hour or more daily at week two. Continue to gradually increase the length of time until you are riding about half a day’s ride on the trail. Trotting and cantering develop muscles, wind capacity, and stamina.

Care of the Horse After the Ride

Remove the saddle AFTER he has cooled off (this prevents blood rushing into the veins under the saddle and causing puffs or knots)
Wipe his head, neck, and shoulders with a damp cloth.
After he has cooled (1/2 to 1 hour) rinse his back with warm water, then blanket him.
Allow him to nibble some hay.
Allow him small amounts of water as he cools down.
Watch for the horse who wants to lie down in the stream—he will put his head down, sniff the water, bunch up. Pull up his head and use your legs to move him forward.

Never lead your horse across the stream, no matter how much he balks. If he jumps or lunges while you are leading him, he could land on you. If he completely refuses, have another rider lead him across with you remaining in the saddle.

When wading through water, you may place your legs on the pommel to avoid getting your feet wet. When wading through swift water, face your horse upstream. Don’t look at the downstream side (you may lose your equilibrium).

When swimming through water, DO NOT tie the reins (he could catch a foot in the reins). Do not try to neck-rein him, but use a direct rein. Allow him to stretch his head and neck fully forward. If he is having trouble, slip out of the saddle, hanging on to the saddle or his tail. DO NOT get in front of him. Stay back from other horses and riders—a horse tends to climb up on anything his legs touch as they are swimming. If your horse is very hot, allow him to cool down before crossing to avoid muscle cramping.

Location
Considerations for selection the location of a trail ride should be its scenic beauty, facilities, cost, the terrain and footing, and ownership of the land.

Facilities Requirements:
Water
Parking
Camping area
Room for tying horses
Restroom facilities
Areas for food preparation

Terrain and Footing:
Consider the skill level of the riders.
Rocky areas of rounded rocks can cause precarious footing and rockslides. The horse can pick up small stones in his shoes.
Jagged rocks can cause cuts around the coronet, pastern, fetlocks, or sole.
Sand is a nice break from rocky ground, but is tiring to the horse.
Avoid wooden bridges. They may not support the concentrated load on the horse’s hoof.
Always walk up and down hills.

Water Crossings:
If your horse is not used to crossing streams, especially if they are noisy, be prepared for him to rush his first time across by jumping it or lunging through it.

Ownership
Get permission, especially for private lands. Respect the owner by shutting gates, not smoking in dry, grassy areas, staying off cultivated fields, not chasing the livestock, making sure all fires are completely out, and carrying out all your trash.

Ideas for trails—state trails, hunting clubs, private lands, state fire lanes, old railroad grades, federal lands, roads, and ski and snowmobile trails. Many states provide maps of public trails.

Tack, Equipment, and Clothing
These will vary to some degree depending on the location and length of the ride and the season. All tack should be cleaned thoroughly and checked for weak spots BEFORE the ride. It is essential that all tack fit the horse correctly to prevent sores.
Clothing
The rider’s clothing should be comfortable and safe. Long pants are a must to avoid blisters and sunburn. Other required items are boots with a heel, a hat or safety helmet with a tie-down, a raincoat or poncho. If riding in cool weather, several light layers are better than one heavy garment.

For The Horse:
Tack (saddle, bridle, blankets (more than one blanket allows you to alternate them), halter, lead rope
Lariat
Hoof pick
Tie rope—10-12 feet long
Tack repair equipment (leather lacing, leather punch, rivets, extra leather, needle & thread)
Water bucket
Fly spray
First Aid supplies for horse
Shoeing/trimming equipment
Hay, grain, haybag (mesh bag not recommended)
Extra cinch, breast collar/plate, cinch strap, curb strap, reins
Saddle soap and sponge

Miscellaneous Items:
Saddle bag
Canteen
Pocket knife with leather punch
Insect repellent
Matches in waterproof container
Flashlight, extra batteries
Compass
Sleeping bag, waterproof ground cover, tent
Soap, towels, washcloth, toilet tissue
Sunglasses, sunscreen
First Aid kit, medications
Wire cutters, pliers
Food preparation equipment
Food
Forks, shovels, rakes, garbage bags, tools

Courtesy and Safety Rules
- Tie red ribbon to the tail of a kicker.
- Don’t crowd the horse in front of you, or lag behind.
- Keep two horse lengths apart.
- Ride on the right hand side of a road, maintaining single file, even on quiet country roads. If your horse seems afraid of oncoming vehicles, get off and walk him.
- Observe the rules of the roads (stop signs, traffic lights, etc.
- Stay on the trail.
- Don’t try to hold back a branch for the next rider. It will usually end up hitting him. Instead, let it go immediately and the next rider can move it aside himself.
- Pass at a walk or trot, calling out “passing right” or “passing left”.
- Do not use a whip or crop when passing.
- Walk up and down hills.
- Don’t race.
- Do not dash through water, splashing other horses and riders.
- Call out danger spots to other riders.
- All riders should be notified of any change in speed for the group.
- If you water your horse in the stream you are crossing, move upstream (gets you out of the way of other riders and provides unmuddied water for your horse to drink.
- If you want to stop to take a picture, adjust tack, etc., move off the trail so other riders are not blocked. If your horse frets at being stopped alone, have a friend stop with you. If one rider stops, the whole group should stop and wait for him.
- Lead your horse over bad stretches of trail, walking slightly to one side. Don’t lead your horse over a small stream or up a steep bank. He may jump and land on you.
- Tie your horse on breaks. Never leave him loose.
- Don’t litter—carry your trash with you until you find a trash container.
**See current Minnesota 4-H Horse Program Rule Book for class descriptions and rules**

In The Show Ring

Every rider should set goals for the progress of the horse and for himself. Regardless of the level of training of your horse, a plan should be formulated to achieve a higher level of performance. Showing should be viewed as an opportunity for a check of the progress for both horse and rider.

Showing is the final result of good horsemanship. This includes knowledge of:

- Horses and your horse in particular
- Behavior, personalities, conformation, and abilities
- Training techniques
- Care
- Health
- Your skill in equitation.

Every show should be entered with these ideas in mind—to be a good sportsman (win or lose), to do your best, to learn from the experience, and to use it as an evaluation of your progress.

There are no instant success stories here. Success requires hard work. The blue ribbon is not the only goal. Other goals include acquiring good horsemanship skills, improving the performance of your horse, having a feeling of accomplishment, and having fun.

### Ring Generalship

Ring generalship is the term used to describe the rider’s ability to “present” the horse in the ring in a confident, safe, and courteous manner. Placement in the ring is a difficult problem and the rider should learn to use the ring to his/her best advantage.

Many times it is advantageous to ride a little deeper into a corner well ahead of where the judge is watching in order to have a nice clear spot in front of the judge to present your horse.

### Passing

Sometimes it is necessary to pass, and the manner in which the rider maneuvers the horse through others is considered. Riders should always pass on the inside of another horse, toward the center of the ring. This should be done with respect to the other rider, allowing plenty of space so as not to cut off the other rider and horse.

It is preferable that the rider select one “line” through the class and, for the most part, stay on that line throughout the entire class. For example, you are in a large class and you elect to ride 10 feet off the rail. You should try to maintain that general distance and not be on the rail, off the rail, then back on again.

A rider who constantly cuts across the center of the ring is penalized as it shows a lack of control and the inability to keep the horse out to the rail. If this must be done, it should not be done more than once. If done repeatedly, it teaches the horse to cut and come into the center and encourages it to break gait as well.

### Awareness

A rider should be aware of what is going on in front of him as well as behind him. This takes practice to develop, but is helpful in being able to find the “open spot” in which to show the horse.

The rider should also be aware of the judge’s position in the ring while remaining focused straight ahead and concentrating on the performance.

### Showmanship Classes

The object of the showmanship class is to demonstrate your ability to prepare, train, and present your horse so that it appears at its best.
Appearance of Horse. The appearance of the horse includes grooming, conditioning, proper nutrition, and health care so that the horse looks its best. Grooming should be done consistent with the breed guidelines for the horse.

General Guidelines for Grooming:
The coat is clean and brushed
Mane, tail, forelock are clean & free of tangles, and are trimmed correctly for the breed.
Feet trimmed or shod properly
Clipping on body, ears, face, jaws be done according to breed guidelines.

Appearance of Handler. The appearance of the handler includes the correct attire for the style, being neat and clean, not being so elaborate that it detracts from the horse.

Showing the Horse. As the handler shows his horse, he must always be in the proper position, perform the pattern correctly, and give a good overall impression. The horse needs to be trained to respond willingly and quickly, to walk and trot alertly beside handler, to execute the turn on the hindquarters, to halt promptly in balance, and to set up properly and quickly.
The proper position to lead is on the horse’s left side, between the horse’s shoulder and head.

For Western style showmanship the lead shank is held in the right hand with the excess held neatly and safely in the left (see Rule Book). If showing Hunt Seat style with a hunt bridle with a snaffle bit, hold the reins with the right hand. An alternative is to leave the reins over the withers and use a lead shank with a chain running through the rings of the bit in a triangular fashion.

If showing hunt or saddle seat style with a Pelham or Full Bridle, the handler holds the curb reins and the snaffle reins are placed over the horse’s withers.
The hands should be carried naturally, not stiffly. When turning to the right, the right hand with the lead should move under the horse’s head.

Stand toward the front, facing the horse, but never directly in front of it. Always stand to allow the judge a clear view of the horse.

If the horse is posed and the judge moves to one side of your horse, move to the opposite side of the horse’s head smoothly and precisely. Stand so that you can also keep an eye on the judge without peeking over the back or under the neck.

When leading the horse to the judge, position the horse, not yourself, directly in front of the judge. When walking or trotting to or from the judge, make sure you maintain a straight line.

The pattern may be posted prior to the class. Make sure you understand it and are able to perform it before entering your class.

Setting up your horse means to pose it correctly for its breed. Train your horse at home to do this. You may use your hands to train it, but NEVER do so in the show ring. Stock horses are posed with all four feet squarely under it. Hunters may be posed with all four feet square under the horse or with the front feet square, with one hind leg perpendicular to the ground and the other hind leg slightly behind the perpendicular. Saddle Seat horses are posed with the front feet square with the legs perpendicular to the ground and the hind legs may be placed slightly behind the perpendicular.

Do not allow your horse to rest a leg. Correct it immediately.

Patterns
The most common showmanship pattern:

- Enter the ring at a walk with the horse on the handler's right side. Walk on the rail in a counterclockwise direction, or as directed by the ring steward.
- Line up with other exhibitors as directed. Be sure not to crowd others.
- Each exhibitor will individually walk the horse up to the judge, stop and pose it.
- At this time the judge will usually do a close inspection of you and your horse. The Quarter Method is the suggested method of showmanship during inspections (where & how to stand and move). See Rule Book for description.
- When signaled, the exhibitor moves into the leading position, glances back at the judge and then executes a 180 degree turn on the hindquarters, then trots back through the line.
• The exhibitor then executes another 180 degree turn on the hindquarters, returns to the line and sets (poses) up the horse, and moves to the side of the horse opposite the judge.
• The exhibitor continues to keep the horse posed and moves to the opposite side of the horse as needed.

All Showmanship patterns & illustrations are from *From The Center Of The Ring*, Cherry Hill, c1988

![Illustration of a horse and rider]

Judge                Exhibitor

Basic Showmanship Pattern

![Illustration of a horse and rider]

Showmanship Hunt Style

![Illustration of a horse and rider]

Showmanship Saddle Seat Style

**Equitation/Horsemanship Classes**

These classes are judged on the performance of the rider, requiring correct position, proper use of the natural aids (hands, legs, weight, voice), and correct execution of the patterns. The exhibitor should show alertness as well as a relaxed, confident manner.

The horse must be suitable to the style of riding and be able to perform the rail work and individual patterns required.

During the rail work, the rider guides the horse at a walk, trot, and lope/canter in both directions. The individual patterns will include other maneuvers.

**Patterns**

In Horsemanship and Equitation classes, the judge may ask the exhibitor to perform individual patterns. Depending on the judge and the show, these patterns may be used as 50% of the rider’s score or may be used to qualify the rider to perform rail work. In any case pattern work is very important and the various maneuvers should be practiced at home.

Pattern work allows the judge to evaluate a rider’s control, use of aids, precision, and ability to perform various maneuvers, all while maintaining a functionally correct position.
A pattern consists of various elements such as gait changes, stops, turns, straight lines, circles, half circles, and backing. Usually markers are used to indicate where the various maneuvers are to be executed. On occasion a judge may require a pattern without the use of markers.

**Reading a Pattern**
The first thing the rider should do when reading a pattern is notice on which side of the marker each maneuver is to be performed. Being on the wrong side of a marker is a severe penalty and in some cases a disqualification. From there, the rider should take note of which maneuver is to be executed at each marker. Visualizing the maneuvers as you are reading the pattern, drawing it on paper, and running the pattern on foot are very useful tools to help perform a correct and precise pattern. If space permits in the warm-up arena, each maneuver should be practiced before entering the arena.

**Clarification of Pattern**
If the pattern has been posted, a rider should not ask the judge what the pattern is, but may ask for clarification on a part of the pattern PRIOR to the start of ALL pattern work for THAT class.

**Performing the Pattern**
Prior to performing a pattern, riders should line up in the arena as directed. It is generally preferred by judges that each rider be positioned at the first marker ready to begin the pattern as soon as the previous rider is finished. Before starting the pattern, the rider should wait to be acknowledged by the judge.

As the rider begins the pattern the horse should be placed in the correct position at the first marker. All maneuvers should be started and ended with the marker somewhere between the horse’s head and the rider’s leg. That position should remain consistent throughout the pattern. In addition the rider should position the horse far enough away from the markers in order to execute the maneuvers without hitting them or going to the wrong side.

Straight lines should be straight. Circles should be round with the whole body of the horse bent in the direction of the turn. To keep your circles in the figure 8 correct, the horse should be straight for two and one-half strides to execute the lead change. This equals about 20 feet for most horses. Do not let the center of the circle become x-shaped. This would result in a less collected lead change or front feet first or hind feet first lead change rather than a simultaneous change.

The rider should be aware that the horse will have a tendency to move toward the gate area or other horses. The whole pattern should be performed in a precise, flowing manner without undue hesitation or rushing.

At the completion of the pattern, the rider should acknowledge the judge and proceed to line up as directed.

**Errors in Executing Patterns**
The most common errors include being on the wrong side of the marker, doing the pattern incorrectly, executing poor shapes (such as a circle that is not round), stiffness of rider, over-cueing, and lack of control.

**Western Horsemanship (Stock Seat Equitation)**
The rider is judged on seat (weight), hands, appointments of horse and rider, and suitability of horse to rider. The horse should be cooperative, responsive and trained to perform the patterns required with subtle and imperceptible aids. The rider’s methods of achieving a good performance are to be considered more important than the horse’s performance.

The riders enter the ring at a walk or jog trot as directed. They will be expected to perform the following in both directions, on a reasonably loose rein:

- Flat footed, four-beat walk
- Jog trot (a two beat gait), rider does not post
- Lope in both directions (must be a 3-beat gait)
- Reversal of directions at the walk or trot (done by turning away from the rail)
- Back
• Dismount and mount (optional)

Individual patterns may include:
• Back
• Individual performance on the rail
• Figure 8 at the jog trot
• Lope and stop
• Figure 8 on the correct lead at the lope with simple change of lead
• Ride without stirrups
• Dismount and mount
• Turns on the haunches (quarter, half, or full)
• Questions about equitation, horses, and equipment
• Figure 8 on the correct lead at the lope with flying change of lead
• Lope down center of arena with simple change of lead
• Serpentine course at lope with flying change of lead at each change of direction

Stiffness can occur when the rider tries too hard to assume the correct position. Too much tension on the stirrups or trying to grip with the knees results in a loose seat. A rigid back results in a jolting ride and lack of communication with the horse. Tense shoulder and neck muscles result in tension in the arms and a rigid upper body. A rigid wrist results in poor communication with the horse’s mouth, which in turn can result in anxiety in the horse.

Over-cueing is a common fault with a novice rider. Rein cues should be subtle. Do not use exaggerated shifts of weight. Use spurs sparingly.

Lack of control of the horse will be evident when the horse tries to return to the lineup, makes a lopsided pattern or circle, or fails to stop at designated marker.

**Hunt Seat Equitation**

The rider should have a workmanlike appearance, with seat and hands light & supple, conveying the impression of complete control.

The rider performs the following on the rail in both directions:
• Walk
• Trot (posting)
• Canter
• Extended trot (optional)
• Hand gallop (optional)
• Reverse (at a walk, either towards or away from rail)

Individual patterns may include:
• Halt and/or back
• Hand gallop
• Figure 8 at the trot with change of diagonals
• Change of diagonal down center of arena
• Figure 8 at canter with simple change of lead
• Questions about equitation, horses, and equipment
• Turn on the forehand
• Ride without stirrups, or drop, then pick up stirrup irons
• Figure 8 at canter with flying change of lead
• Change of leads down center of arena with simple change of lead
• Serpentine at trot and/or canter on the correct diagonal or lead
• Series of left and right circles, with correct diagonal or lead changes (flying or simple lead changes)
• Canter on counter lead (opposite of customary lead)

**Saddle Seat Equitation**

The rider should sit comfortably at all gaits, have control without strain on horse or rider, and convey the impression of effective and easy control.
The rider performs the following on the rail in both directions:

- Walk
- Trot (Posting) or appropriate gait
- Canter
- Extended trot (optional)
- Reverse (at a walk, either towards or away from rail)

Individual patterns may include:

- Pick up (address) the reins
- Back (no more than 8 steps). The horse is first stepped up from its parked position, then backed the required number of steps, moved forward to original position, then parked
- Individual performance on rail
- Performance around ring
- In line only, feet disengaged from irons, then engaged
- Change of diagonals down center of arena or on the rail
- Circle at the trot
- Figure 8 at the trot with change of diagonals
- Figure 8 at canter on the correct lead with simple change of leads
- Questions about equitation, horses, equipment
- Serpentine at a trot
- Change of leads down center of arena with a simple change of lead
- Ride without stirrup irons no more than one minute at the trot

**Trail Class**

The trail class is judged on the performance of the horse over obstacles with emphasis on manners, response to the rider, and quality of movement. Credit will be given to horses negotiating the obstacles with style, smoothness, and some degree of speed, providing correctness is not sacrificed. The horse should show attentiveness to the obstacle and be capable of picking its own way through the course when the obstacles warrant it. It should willingly respond to the rider’s cues. The horse will be penalized for unnecessary delay. The judge may impose a time limit per obstacle. Rail work is not required, but the course should be designed to require the horse to perform at the walk, trot, and lope between the obstacles.

The class should include 5-8 obstacles. See the current Minnesota 4-H Horse Program Rule Book for a description of obstacles.

**Obstacles**

When training a horse for the trail class, the most important aspect is to teach the horse to do the maneuvers necessary to negotiate each obstacle. These will include **controlled backing, turn on the forehand, turn on the hindquarters, side-passing, correct transitions, walk, trot, and lope on both leads.** Refer to Chapters 6, 7, and 8 for training the horse to do these maneuvers.

**The Gate**—The rider must open, pass through, and latch the gate. Credit should be given to the rider who can negotiate it in a timely manner while safely maintaining contact with the gate. Maneuvers required are side pass, turn on hindquarters, turn on the forehand, and back.

**The Logs**—A minimum of four WOODEN logs or poles should be used, placed on the ground parallel to each other, curved, or zigzag. The space between the logs for walk-overs should be in increments of 20-24”. Spacing for trot-overs should be 36-42”. Spacing for lope-overs should be 6-7 feet. The horse should move freely without hesitation, without breaking gait, and without nicking the logs.

**Placement of Logs For Trot & Lope Over**

![Placement of Logs For Trot & Lope Over](image)
The Bridge—The bridge should be made of wood, a minimum of 36” wide and 6 feet long. It must be sturdy and safe. The horse should negotiate the bridge alertly, attentively, and without hesitation.

Back-throughs—The horse should back willingly and straight. Maneuvers necessary are the back, turn on the hindquarters, and turn on the forehand. See diagrams below for some variations.

Games (Gymkhana)

Refer to the Minnesota 4-H Horse Program Rule Book for descriptions of each game event.

The foundations of basic training are important in all game classes. All the maneuvers described in this manual apply to game horses as well as pleasure horses. Your horse should be supple, flexible, responsive to leg pressure, and responsive to direct and indirect reining -- before you attempt any gaming.

Training should be done with a snaffle bit, regardless of the horse’s age. Start slowly, teaching your horse to respond to your cues at a slow pace. Use exercises and maneuvers in training.
This way your horse will not learn to anticipate turns, but will learn to wait for your cues.

Don't overwork or fatigue while training. To prevent boredom don't just practice patterns. Never repeat the same pattern over and over again. Instead practice maneuvers. A resentful horse is not a responsive horse.

These techniques work with an older horse that may never have been ridden in games as well as a younger horse. Because of the stress involved in maneuvers at high speeds, you should consider the age and physical and mental maturity of your game horse in relation to what you expect from him.

A variety of exercises can be used to help condition and train your horse for speed events. A horse that can perform these maneuvers well will have a good foundation. Vary the exercises to prevent your horse anticipating what you ask him to perform.

Pattern work should be started when your horse is able to perform the necessary maneuvers for each game event. Begin at the walk, then at a trot. Applying speed only in competition will help prevent a horse from getting sour.

**Exercises**

*Corkscrew*—this will help the horse with leads, help create flexibility and will help to get it working off its hocks. Start with a large circle, loping in the correct lead. Once the horse starts giving to the rider, gradually make the circles smaller, until it has to break into a trot. Keep your body positioned the way you would while making barrel turns, have a little more pressure in the outside stirrup. Use the inside leg to bump the horse if necessary to hold the correct arc, using a little rein pressure. When making the smallest circles at slower gaits, keep pressure on the inside rein until the horse relaxes and gives to the rider.

*Two tracking* (as described in Chapter 8 Training: Advanced Maneuvers) This is the basic forward movement used in barrel racing when approaching a barrel and maintaining a pocket (the turning area between horse and barrel). The horse should be able to carry an arc when traveling in a straight line.

**Backing:** This is as important as moving forward. It teaches the horse to work off his hindquarters and yield to the bit. Make sure when practicing, you vary how many steps you ask the horse to do. Expect your horse to back as far as you want him to. Backing in a controlled arc helps with flexibility.

**Stops and Rollbacks** (See Chapter 8). These help a horse rate *(the maneuver in which a horse shortens or adjust his stride in order to turn) a barrel or obstacle* and teaches him how to collect for a turn and drive away on his hindquarters. This also keeps the front end light. The rollback is used in the Key Race.

**The Cloverleaf Barrel Race**

Maneuvers necessary—Bending & flexing, and flying lead changes.

To train your horse, begin pattern work at a walk. Head to the first barrel in a straight line. Ask for an arc - outside weight, inside pressure (both leg and rein), allowing plenty of room for the pocket. Complete the turn close to the barrel and head straight for the next barrel, retaining proper arc in the turn. Repeat at a trot.

When the horse understands the pocket and turning, begin working on rating the barrels. Practice adjusting stride by starting out at a walk. Approach the barrel, say whoa and pause before walking around it. Trot to the next barrel, say whoa and pause again. Reinforce the whoa by sitting deep in the saddle and using the reins. The horse will soon associate the feel of the sit as a cue and the reins won't be as necessary.

With practice, your timing will signal your horse to shorten its stride and prepare to turn. For an actual stop, use the voice command and apply a little more pressure on the reins. When practicing rating and turning, vary your speed — walk, jog, and lope the pattern, ending with an easy lope.

One practice pattern would be as follows: Begin first barrel as a regular run, continue on to the second barrel, when leaving the third barrel, and guide your horse to the rail on the side of the arena as your first barrel.
Work on the individual components (flying lead changes, flexing). The lead changes should be done midpoint between the poles.

### Key Race

The rollback maneuver is essential for this event.

Begin training at a walk so the horse learns he is expected to go between the poles. Only allow him to do the rollback when asked—don’t allow him to anticipate this. Vary the routine and don’t ask for top speed unless in competition.

Align your horse in a straight line with the key before starting. Rating (the horse shortens his stride in order to execute the rollback) should be done about 7-10 feet before the key entrance. Execute the rollback and come back between the poles. Keep your elbows and feet in close. Keep your eyes focused on the finish line.

### Jumping Figure Eight

Maneuvers necessary are flying lead changes, bending & flexing, and jumping.

To train your horse to jump, first make sure he is flexible and supple and responsive to the aids. Practice having him shorten and lengthen his strides so he will respond to your cues as you begin jumping.

Start with the poles on the ground, walking your horse over them until he’s comfortable and does not hesitate. These can be placed around the arena or in figure eight or serpentine patterns. Progress to trotting over. Do not sit at the trot over poles because it puts too much pressure on the horse’s back. Either be in the rising phase of a posting trot or in a two-point seat.

Next progress to cantering over the poles, getting the horse turning corners and shortening and lengthening his stride. Make sure the horse stays balanced and works off his hindquarters, maintaining a good pace, not too fast or too slow. Keep the horse on an imaginary straight line to the center of the pole, without the horse weaving left or right. Use your legs and hands to maintain that line.

When introducing the raised pole, remember:
- The approach is very important.
- The horse must be balanced.

Proper balance in any speed event is obtained by keeping your feet parallel to the ground, flat in the stirrup with the heel and toe parallel to the horse. The weight should be balanced directly under the rider, near the cinch. Elbows should be close to your side, bringing the rein hand back toward your hip, not dropped to the side, with the rein in the same hand as the direction of the turn.

### Pole Weaving

Maneuvers necessary are bending, flexing and flying lead changes.

Begin training at a walk, increasing to trot & lope. Avoid repeating the pattern over and over.

Continue along the rail until you have reached the end you began on. Make a wide half circle back towards the first barrel to begin again. Make sure to vary your speed and end slow.

Your body position is very important to help your horse around turns. Start with direct inside rein. When coming out of the back of the turn, reduce inside pressure and reapply slight outside pressure shifting your weight to the outside stirrup as you twist up and look directly at the next barrel. Focusing on where you are going next helps position your body and cue your horse properly. As you improve, you should be able to use direct rein all the way around without much outside rein reinforcement.

![A Practice Pattern for Barrel Racing](image)
• Concentrate on the horse, with less attention on the jump itself.
• Let the horse jump with his most natural technique, not interfering by rushing him or grabbing at his mouth.
• Do not throw your body too far forward. This will force the horse to be on his forehand at take-off, rather than on his hindquarters.
• On take-off, the horse stretches his neck downwards a little. Your hands should give the amount of rein necessary.
• When the horse lands, keep your weight out of the saddle for at least one stride until the horse regains his balance.
Chapter 6

Training: Ground Work

Training Basics

- Be patient, work slowly, and don’t ask too much.
- Be consistent, asking in the same way every time.
- Make sure the horse understands what is being asked of him. If necessary, divide the procedure into small steps and work on each one separately.
- Make the training sessions short and quit on a good note, when the horse makes the correct response.
- Intersperse the intense training with relaxation, by grooming, or petting.
- Remember each horse responds differently to training. Be sensitive to what he is telling you in the way he responds.
- If at any time you need help, ask someone experienced to help you. It is better to teach the horse correctly at first than to try to undo a bad habit.
- Remember to ask, then reward or reprimand. Rewards can include petting, release of pressure on lead, reins, etc. Do not use food as a reward. Reprimands can include a sharp jerk on the lead, a tap with a whip or crop, etc.
- Repeat the procedure until he learns it, going back to a previous lesson occasionally to reinforce it.

Halter Breaking

Halter breaking your horse is one of the most important parts of training because it sets the pattern for later behavior. Start handling your foal or horse at the earliest possible moment, ideally when he is a newborn.

At this stage get him used to being handled by touching and rubbing him everywhere on his body—his head, mouth, nose, ears, back, tail, legs, feet, stomach, etc. This is called imprinting and will be remembered by him later in training. It also promotes trust.

By 10 to 14 days of age begin the halter training. If the mare is calm, catch the foal along side of her. A larger foal may be put alone in a small pen. With a helper, corner him and put on the halter. Use a well-fitting halter. Calm him down by petting and brushing him. If there are areas of his body, especially the legs and belly, that he does not like having touched, be sure to keep working with those areas. Don’t give up because he resists or he will learn a pattern of resistance. Get him used to having his tail moved up and around. Don’t expect much more for the first lesson. Repeat for 2 or three days.

Have an assistant hold the horse rather than tie him. For safety, he should stand to one side rather than in front of the horse. This person should be experienced and be able to control the horse in a firm aggressive manner. If the horse is allowed to continue with resistant behavior, such as nipping or fighting the lead, without being corrected, it will develop a pattern of resisting. Correction must be done IMMEDIATELY, firmly, and with patience. Kicking can be dealt with by continuing to touch and rub the legs until he becomes used to this. Make sure you are prepared to move quickly.

When the foal is accepting the halter readily, you may begin teaching him to be tied and to lead. Tie the foal next to the mare in the stall for about 15 minutes, grooming him and petting him. Then with someone leading the mare, lead the foal along side.
To teach the foal to lead without using the mare, pull him gently and slowly to one side. As soon as he takes one or two steps, release the pull and pet him. Repeat the process for the other side. Work only for a few minutes at a time. It is important to work slowly and calmly.

If the foal still resists being lead, try using a butt rope. Make a large loop and place it over his back and around the hindquarters. As you tug on the lead rope to lead the foal, pull on the loop around his hindquarters at the same time. As he begins to respond, gradually use the butt rope less.

Continue with daily lessons of 15-20 minutes until the foal leads promptly at the walk and trot. This is a good time to start teaching voice commands such as “walk”, “trot”, and “whoa”.

To teach the horse to trot, it is helpful to have someone a safe distance behind the horse to cluck to him. If he still resists trotting on the lead, try snapping the ground behind him with a lunging whip. It is common for the horse to trot a few steps, then stop. Use the end of your lead rope or a whip to tap the horse on the hindquarters until he learns to trot with you until you give him the command to walk or stop. It is best to do this along a solid wall or fence so the horse doesn’t learn that he can move away from you.

During the daily sessions, begin working with his feet. Have an assistant hold him. Start with the front feet first. Pick up each foot and if he resists, stay close, gently cradle the foot and stay with him until he stops. If he continues to move, gently pull him in a circle with the lead, still holding the foot, until he stops. Then release the pressure on the lead, continuing to cradle the foot. When he relaxes, gently set the foot down. Repeat the process until he accepts it willingly, then begin working with the hind feet.

These same procedures should be followed with an older horse. You will be able to progress faster, but can expect more problems because of the larger size. It is important when working with an older horse to have an assistant available to hold him firmly.

Problems & Suggestions For Halter Breaking

When tied, the foal falls to the ground—Make sure the halter is adjusted and the rope is not around his neck. Allow him time to decide to get up when he gets tired of lying down.

The foal is stubborn, rears, kicks out or falls to ground—Get help from an experienced adult to help control the foal.

The horse is too large to handle—Try using a larger second horse to pony him (follow the second horse, keeping him to the side, not rear of the horse). Have an experienced person ride the second horse. Use a strong halter and lead rope, wrapping the lead around the saddle horn, but not tying it. The lead rope should be short enough so it can’t get tangled around the horses.

Teach the horse to respect your space. Don’t let him crowd you, nuzzle, push, rub on, or bite you.

The Whoa, Back, and Pivot

The Whoa. The Whoa command is the basic foundation of training and must be taught before more advanced maneuvers can be attempted. A horse MUST ALWAYS stop whenever asked. This must be ingrained into his head before you can move on to other lessons.

Using the command “Whoa”, teach your horse to stand still without moving. Start with only a minute and don’t worry if he isn’t standing with all his feet squarely under him. Increase the time gradually. If he doesn’t stand still, back him and repeat. When he has learned to stand still, being moving away from him and around him, making sure he remains stationary. This will prepare him for showmanship, ground tying, etc.

After your horse has learned to stand still, begin teaching him to stand with all four feet squarely under him. Start with the hind feet. Get him to place the right hind foot, then lead him forward or back a half step so that the left hind foot is even with the right hind foot. As soon as the hind feet are even, reward the horse with a pat on the neck & a friendly voice. Don’t worry about the front feet. Just continue working on the placement of the hind feet for a
The inside right hind leg is the pivot foot and should remain stationary. Stand in the normal position for leading. With the lead in your left hand, use your right hand to push his shoulder away from you. The left hand, using the lead, controls the forward and backward movement and keeps the head straight forward. As soon as he has taken one step to the right, release the pressure, pat him and let him relax. Repeat and gradually expect more steps until he is pivoting 360 degrees. At this point the lead should be transferred to the right hand and the horse should be taught to move away from the handler’s Body.

To pivot to the left the right foreleg crosses over the left. When beginning to teach the pivot to the left, move to the horse’s right side until he learns the procedure.

**Backing** When your horse is walking and trotting in a responsive manner, you may begin to teach him to back. Stand facing the near side of the horse’s head, but not directly in front of him. With the lead rope in your left hand, pull and release the rope firmly towards the rear. At the same time, say “back” and with the thumb or your right hand, push the horse just inside his shoulder joint, where his neck and chest join. If he doesn’t back, pull a little harder on the lead rope. He may respond to a very light tap on the chest with a light, stiff whip held in your right hand.

Reward him immediately by releasing the pressure when he responds with even one step backward. If he takes a step back on two or three tries, quit for the day.

Repeat the lesson for several days, until he will back several steps easily. Don’t try to back him away from other horses or the barn—he will instinctively want to stay close for security. Try backing him out of the corner of the corral.

It is very important to reward him with a pat on the neck and a soft word. End the session as soon as he does what you want.

**Pivoting On Hindquarters.** Once your horse leads and backs readily, teach him to pivot. To correctly begin a pivot to the right, the shoulder must move to the right and the horse must cross its left foreleg over the right.

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Use an enclosed area to work, such as a round pen or corral. Attach the lunge line to the inside ring of the halter or cavesson. Hold the lunge line in the hand on the same side as the horse’s direction (left hand for a left circle or counterclockwise direction; right hand for a right circle or clockwise direction). The excess line should be held in the other hand. This excess should NEVER be wrapped around the trainer’s hand or body and should not be allowed to touch the ground. The lunge whip is also held in the other hand (with the excess line) and is used to encourage the horse’s forward motion by tapping the ground behind him. Stand in the center of the circle, slightly toward the rear so a straight line is maintained from the handler to the horse’s inside hip. This also encourages the horse’s forward motion.

Lead the horse in small circles, gradually lengthening the lead. The trainer uses a lunging whip, held in the other hand, to urge the horse forward and to make the circle larger by tapping lightly on his shoulder with the butt end. Don’t worry at first about which gait your horse chooses. Just keep him moving forward. If you try controlling his speed, he will become confused with stopping. When he seems to know what you want of him, begin teaching him to walk, by giving sharp tugs on the line, saying “walk”. Eventually you should be able to remain in the center of the circle, facing the horse’s hip.

The horse should learn to stop on the “whoa” command and stay on the perimeter of the circle. Give a firm command of “whoa” and tug on the lead. Make sure he stays on the outside of the circle, facing forward, using the whip to stop him if he tries to come to you. In later lessons he should be commanded to come to the handler, but not until commanded. Don’t let him anticipate your commands. Make him stay on the perimeter for a varied length of time. Occasionally don’t bring him to you, but continue on with the lunging.

Maintain contact with the horse without allowing him to pull, but avoiding a loose line. The line should not be tight, allowing corrections or signals to be done by short pulls and releases on the line. To prevent getting tangled, do not let it get around your feet or let the horse step over it.

If the horse drags hard on the lead as he goes around, pull on the lunge line until you feel the horse give, then immediately release the pressure. Eventually he will learn to move on the line without dragging.

Teach the horse to walk promptly and rapidly in both directions. Use the whip to urge him if necessary. The horse should also trot in both directions. This helps him develop muscles evenly on both sides.

Make sure your horse is obedient to your commands before starting with cantering on the lunge line. Cantering is an excellent way for your horse to learn good form and balance and be on the correct lead without the weight of the rider. If he has a weaker lead, work more in that direction. Young horses (weanlings should not be lunged) should be kept at a walk and trot, not cantering at this age. Use a larger circle at a trot or canter to prevent tendon or joint strain.

Keep the lessons short—10 minutes a day to start with and up to 15 to 20 minutes, stopping on a positive note when the horse is performing well. The younger the horse, the less time should be spent on the lunge line.
**Bitting**

An O-ring or D-ring snaffle bit is the best bit to use in initial training. Quietly and carefully slip the bridle on your horse, being careful that the bit does not bang against his teeth. Be careful also around his eyes and ears.

Hold the bridle by the crownpiece in your right hand. Holding the bit with your left hand, put your thumb into the corner of his mouth at the interdental space, where there are no teeth, to get him to open his mouth. Be patient and allow the horse to open his mouth. Don’t force him. Slowly slip the bit into his mouth and ease the bridle into place at the poll. Make sure the bit fits his mouth properly and the bridle is adjusted correctly so that there are one to two wrinkles at the corner of his mouth.

![Ground Driving Using Bitting Rig](image)

**Ground Driving Using a Bitting Rig**

**Getting The Horse Used to The Equipment**

The first step is to get him used to the surcingle and crupper. Place the surcingle over his back and buckle loosely under his belly. Walk him a little to get him used to this. Get him accustomed to something under his tail by lifting his tail and moving it around. This should be done during your gentling process.

Have an assistant hold the horse, using a halter and lead. A chain may be used over the nose if necessary to control the horse. The assistant should be firm with the horse, disciplining him if necessary with sharp tugs on the lead. Attach the crupper and place under the tail. It should fit snugly right under the tail. Again lead him around.

Attach side reins from the halter to the surcingle. These will teach the horse to work with his nose tucked in, his poll flexed, and his hindquarters under him. Make sure they are loose at first. Over a period of several days gradually shorten them.

**Ground Driving (Long Lining)**

The next step is to teach your horse to respond to cues through the bit. Ground driving is a training technique using 2 long lines, long enough so you can hold them behind him without being within kicking distance. The horse is taught to move with you behind him, which is more similar to having you on his back. He gets used to carrying something on his back and to have the girth or surcingle on. He learns to turn in response to pulls, to collect and to flex at the poll.

Leave the bridle, with no reins, on your horse in his stall for an hour or two at a time for several days to allow him to get used to it. DO NOT leave him unattended for this time.

**Preparation--Lunging with Driving Lines**

Attach the driving lines to the halter. Get your horse used to the feel of the lines around his legs and body. Move the lines over and about his body and legs until he no longer is afraid of them. Run the lines through the lowest rings on the surcingle. Don’t attach them to the snaffle bit rings at this point.
Have an assistant lead the horse in a circle using a lunge line. You should be using the driving lines, standing towards the center of the arena to the side of the horse. The outside driving line will go behind the horse, just above the hocks so it won’t become tangled in his legs. Let the horse move in a circle around you as in lunging. Even if the horse becomes excited at this, make sure you maintain control with the lunge line. If the horse stops, encourage him to move forward, using your voice and gentle taps with the lines. Continue lunging with this procedure for as many days as necessary. When the horse is relaxed and accepting of this, attach the driving lines to the bit.

**Ground Driving**

Have your assistant lead the horse with a lead (and chain, if necessary). You will be behind the horse with the driving reins. Stand far enough back so you will not be kicked, and allow the excess reins to drag behind you on the ground. Maintain contact with the horse’s head, not allowing the reins to become loose. At first the assistant will be turning the horse. Make sure you inform him of the direction he should move. At the same time you will be cueing the horse to turn by shortening the inside line and lengthening the outside. You will be cueing him to stop.

The assistant should gradually move away from the horse as you gradually take over more control. Having you behind him is a new experience for the horse, so be patient. If he doesn’t move, have the assistant lead him again. Or you can encourage him to move by tapping with the lines, being careful not to jerk on his mouth, or by using voice commands or clucking.

If you have trouble controlling the horse or he wants to shift, use two assistants, one on each side. When he starts to move, he may want to come to you. Prevent this by pulling on the outside rein and staying directly behind him. Drive him around the corral, turning him by pulling gently on the lines. When he has gone around the corral for three or four times, reverse him. He may react as he did in the other direction until he is accustomed to it. After a few times, reward him by quitting for the day. Don’t work him very long; stop before he gets tired.

As you continue to work with ground driving, do lots of turns in both directions. Work on figure 8 patterns. Use the inside line to turn him and the outside line to keep his hindquarters in place and not swinging out.

**Bending and Flexing**

It is important to teach your horse to bend and flex before you mount him. Start by asking him to bend his head and neck. This is done with the horse standing and the driving lines attached. Pull on one line, lengthening the other until his nose almost touches his side. Do not allow him to shift or move forward. Release and bend the other direction. This overcomes resistance and gets the horse flexible.

At this point teach the horse to back in the driving lines. Use soft, even tugs with both lines and give the verbal command “back”. When the horse begins to step backward, release the pressure. Keep repeating this process until he willingly backs 5-10 feet. If you have difficulty getting him to back, have your assistant work with the horse along with you.

**Ground Driving Using A Saddle**

Use the same procedures as for ground driving with a bitting rig—getting the horse used to the equipment, bending and flexing, backing, longeing with the driving lines, and then driving. When you use a saddle, tie the stirrups under the horse’s belly. The driving lines will pass through the stirrups. One disadvantage of using a saddle is that it can lead to too low a head carriage. Another disadvantage is that the saddle could be damaged and the horse could be hurt if the horse should go over backwards.
**Saddling**

(Refer to Chapter 4 for saddling procedures).

As a young horse, he should be taught not to fear objects placed anywhere on his body. This is called sacking out, the process of rubbing a sack or soft cloths on the horse to get him used to them. After he accepts a sack, a rope, etc. readily, introduce him to the saddle blanket. Let him look at it and smell it. Rub him with it as you did with the sack, and then place it on his back. Make sure he is comfortable with your putting it on and taking it off.

Next introduce him to the saddle by letting him look at it and smell it. Move quietly and slowly so he learns that it is nothing to fear. Place the saddle blanket in place and set the saddle gently in place, making sure that the stirrups do not hit him in the sides. Cinch it up only moderately tight, but tight enough that it does not slip under his belly. Lead him close to you around the corral at a walk, turning both ways, to get him used to the feel of the saddle on his back. Gradually tighten the cinch and continue to lead him.

Next work him on the lunge line with the saddle on, in both directions, allowing him to get used to the stirrups moving and the squeak of the saddle. Work quietly and slowly, reassuring him if he tries to buck.

Recommended source of information:

Horse Training Program Videos Volume I & II
These are available through the Minnesota 4-H Horse Program Library.
Chapter 7

Training: Early Saddle Work

PRELIMINARY WORK

Mounting

If your horse is not developed enough to carry a passenger, continue working on ground work. Some horses will be ready to do light and minimal saddle work at two years, while some require an extra year of development. It is recommended that you do not show your horse in riding classes when he is still two. Do not push your horse too fast. Injury to his legs could result.

Before mounting, relax your horse by grooming him. Follow up with lunging and ground driving, using a saddle and a snaffle bit. When he is driving well, you are ready to begin with mounting. Have an assistant hold the halter on the horse’s left side, keeping his head up so he can’t buck. Hold the reins in your left hand and place your left foot in the stirrup and put some weight on it. Step back down. Do this several times until he accepts this. If the horse accepts your weight, increase the length of time to several seconds, and then step back down. Gradually put more weight on the horse’s back and finally swing your right leg over slowly, being careful not to drag the leg over his rump. Ease down into the saddle, letting him get used to your weight on his back. During this time, maintain your hold on the reins while the assistant maintains his hold on the halter, reassuring him.

At The Walk

When the horse is accepting you on his back, allow him to walk in a small circle, gradually widening it if he stays relaxed. Reverse and walk him in a circle in the opposite direction. Repeat daily until he is relaxed and responsive to your cues.

Bending and Flexing

When he is relaxed and responsive, attempt to ride him alone. If the horse does not respond to gentle leg pressure, pull his head around to your leg and nudge with your heel against the same side. Make sure you ride with one rein in each hand, keeping the hands low. As soon as the horse moves and is turning in response to your cues, nudge him gently with the other heel. As he starts to walk forward, allow him to wander on his own for a while. Then give him the verbal command “whoa” while pulling back and releasing the reins. The horse should stop without a problem, having done this procedure when being ground driven. Continue this starting and stopping until the horse does this fairly easily. Make sure you quit after 15 or 20 minutes, when the horse is responding well and before he gets tired.

Bending & Flexing To The Right

(From Riding Logic, W.Museler, c1984)

At this point of training begin working on teaching the horse to bend his whole body.
Do circles with the body arced in the direction he is going. Use your leg aids—inside leg at the girth/cinch and the outside leg slightly behind to push him forward. Do not ask for more than a few strides at a time, releasing him to straighten his body. Remember that the horse’s muscles must be gradually stretched and made supple for the horse to do this without discomfort. Do not expect complete bending and flexing of the entire body and neck at this point. This is a gradual process.

At The Trot

After a day or two training at the walk, ask your horse to trot by leg pressure and nudges from your heels. Work at the walk and trot for at least a week, doing lots of turning in both gaits. When reversing, turn him towards the fence at this stage of training.

Backing

When your horse has been trained to walk and trot in a responsive manner, you may ask him to back. He should already be backing easily from the ground. Sit erect in the saddle with your body weight forward and grip with your thighs. Holding the reins low, pull lightly on them with a give and take motion. Control the direction of the back by leg pressure of either leg to guide the hindquarters and light rein pressure to guide the forehand. If he attempts to go forward, increase the rein pressure. As soon as the horse takes a step back, release the pressure of reins and legs and reward him. Repeat until he backs 5-10 feet willingly and in good form.

Lope/Canter

When he is responding well at the walk and trot, you are ready to ask him to lope/canter. Do not attempt this until he is ready. Make sure you have control of his head in case he wants to start to buck. The easiest way is to put him into a trot and then urge him faster. Cueing for the lope is explained earlier in Chapter 4 on “Leads”.

If he charges or tries to bolt, restrain him with intermittent pulls and releases on the reins, giving the command “whoa”. Begin again by urging into a lop e/canter, keeping the circle small to slow him down.

During the next 60 days, all you should be working on is the walk, trot, and l ope/canter. Start each session the same way, giving the cues in the same way each time, and end the session when the horse responds correctly and before he tires.

Problems and Suggestions:

Horse won’t move with leg pressure—Have an assistant walk beside him and lead him. You can also have someone else ride beside you.

Horse won’t move because of stubbornness—Use a switch or quirt behind your leg after you have given the other cues.

Horse rears—Do not pull on the reins, which could result in the horse going over backwards. Give him loose reins, allowing him to go back down, and encouraging him to move forward.

Horse bucks—Be sure the saddle fits properly and does not pinch. If he is just doing a few little “crow-hops” at the early stage of training, don’t worry. He will soon relax and settle down. If he is scared, talk quietly to him. Keep his head up and turned to one side to keep him from bucking. Ground driving him before the riding session helps to settle him down.

Horse bolts (runs off)—Turn the horse in a circle, gradually making the circle smaller until he calms down and is under control.

Stopping While Mounted

Work at stopping at a walk at first. It may help to face him to the fence or building then give him the cues to stop:

- Say “Whoa”
- Signal the horse with a “half-halt (see Chapter 4)
- Sit deeply in the saddle and take the weight off your feet. Do not lean back
- Squeeze briefly with your knees and upper legs to signal the horse to stop.
• Maintain rein contact, but don’t pull back. The action of your legs squeezing him forward will cause him to run into the bit and stop.
• Say “whoa” again. When he stops, reward him by loosening the reins, relaxing your seat, and patting him. If he doesn’t stop, repeat and pull and release gently on the reins, keeping your hands low.

THE GAITS

It is important to breathe regularly to keep you and your horse relaxed when you are riding. Your horse should perform all the gaits required of him in each class with good manners and without resistance.

The Trot

Jog (Jog Trot)

Description of Horse Performing A Good Jog:
• Shorter, rhythmic, square stride
• Free, slow, easy
• Relaxed, steady, soft movement
• Minimal suspension
• Less forward propulsion
• Looser rein
• Definite two-beat gait

Use of Aids When Riding at the Jog:
• Seat bones directly underneath, sitting deep in the saddle
• Rhythm is slow and relaxed
• Support lower back with muscles of the abdomen
• Shoulders are over the hips
• Lower legs hang directly under the body
• Upper body remains quiet
• No side to side motion through the seat

Posting Trot (Hunt Seat)

Description of Horse Performing A Good Trot
• Gait is rhythmical, square, balanced
• Hindquarters engaged
• Head carriage level from poll to withers or slightly higher than withers (depends on breed and conformation)
• Head position should be vertical or slightly in front of vertical

Use of Aids When Riding at the Posting Trot
• Stay on the correct diagonal
• Rise as outside foreleg (nearest wall) moves forward.
• Sit as outside foreleg lands, sitting softly in the saddle without jolting down.
• Do not let your feet swing. Balance on the center of your feet as you rise.

The Walk

Description of Horse Performing A Good Walk
• Back is relaxed
• Tail is slightly raised and swinging
• Head swings slightly up and down, and side to side.
• Hind foot prints should land on or in front of front foot prints.
• No stumbling or dragging of toes.

Use of Aids When Riding at the Walk
• Seat and legs relaxed
• Allow your body to move slightly with the horse’s back and hind legs
• If the horse is walking too fast, use half halts to slow down
• If the horse walking too slow and lacking propulsion from the hindquarters, encourage him with leg pressure.
• Keep reins relaxed to allow forward movement.
Use your thigh muscles to rise. Use your knees as a pivot, but don’t grip with them. Keep hands low and slightly in front or over the withers. To change diagonals, sit two beats, and then begin posting again.

**Posting Trot (Saddle Seat)**

**Description of Horse Performing A Good Trot**
- Rhythmic, square, balanced
- More elevation in neck and head
- More elevation of knees and hocks
- Greater degree of collection

**Use of Aids When Riding at the Posting Trot**
- Rider’s motion in the saddle is a slight elevation
- Rider is in precise rhythm with the horse’s gait
- Hands held slightly higher, in relation to horse’s head carriage

**The Lope (Western)**

**Description of Horse Performing a Good Lope**
- Definite three-beat gait
- Relaxed, smooth, easy, flowing stride
- Moves with propulsion from hindquarters
- Straight
- Head carriage is in a relaxed, natural position, with poll level with withers or slightly above.
- Head position is vertical or slightly in front of vertical

**Use of Aids When Riding at the Lope**
- Sit deep in saddle with seat bones directly underneath
- Upper body is upright and square
- For right lead, right leg is on the cinch, left is slightly behind cinch to maintain propulsion and keep hindquarters straight
- Use direct right rein pressure and right leg pressure to create flexing and bending

**The Canter (English)**

**Hunt Seat Style**

**Description of Horse Performing a Good Canter (Hunt Seat)**
- Smooth, ground covering
- Comfortable
- Straight on both leads
- Definite three-beat gait

**Use of Aids When Riding At the Canter (Hunt Seat)**
- Upper body straight, slightly in front of vertical
- Rib cage lifted and shoulders square
- For right lead, right leg is on girth, left leg slightly behind girth to maintain propulsion and keep hindquarters straight
- Use direct right rein pressure and right leg pressure at the girth to create flexing and bending

**Saddle Seat Style**

**Description of Horse Performing a Good Canter (Saddle Seat)**
- Lofty
- Shorter, unhurried strides
- Moderate elevation and collection with hindquarters under the body
- Head carriage higher
- Straight on both leads

**Use of Aids When Riding at the Canter (Saddle Seat)**
- Upper body inclined slightly forward
- Sit deep in saddle with close set, going with the horse
- For right lead, right leg is on the girth, left leg slightly behind

**Transitions**

Any transition should be preceded by a half halt. This makes the horse alert to the change. For upward transitions follow the half halt by the cue to trot (increase leg pressure). For the cues to lope/canter on the correct lead see Chapter 4.
For downward transitions, sit deep in the saddle and increase the rein pressure. When the proper response is received in any transition, reward the horse by releasing pressure.
Chapter 8

Training: Advanced Maneuvers

Advanced maneuvers take years for a horse to learn. Do not expect too much from your horse, especially if he is young.

**Collection**

The term “collection” is probably misunderstood by many riders. A collected horse moves with its hindquarters under the body, shortening the profile, with more weight on the hindquarters. The forehand is lightened and raised, with flexion of the poll and neck. The back is raised and rounded.

It is important that the horse learn to move forward properly before teaching him to be collected. In the early stages of training, teach the horse to move with his hindquarters up under the body and to be soft & flexible at the poll.

To teach your horse to collect, start with suppling or relaxing exercises. Some examples are:

- Trotting
- Cantering over caveletti
- Quiet bending and flexing work
- Sideways movements

Precede each activity with a half-halt (See Chapter 4). This action tends to move the horse forward into the bit while the steady pressure on the bit through the reins does not allow him to go faster. If this action was maintained, the horse would stop. By using the back and legs, then immediately releasing, the horse will bring his hindquarters under him and be alerted to upcoming signals.

**Lead Changes**

In the Chapter 4 you learned how to go into the correct lead at a lope/canter. When he is able to do this, he is ready to go on to changing the lead while moving. This can be done by coming down to a trot or walk, then restarting in a lope/canter in the other lead. This is called a simple or an interrupted lead change. The lead change can also be done while the horse is loping and is called a flying change of lead.

**Side Pass**

The side pass is the movement of the horse directly sideways, with his legs crossing over in front of the supporting leg. There should be no forward or backward movement. Begin by standing the horse facing the rail or a wall. For a side pass to the right, turn the horse’s head slightly towards the left. Apply pressure with the left leg, keeping the right away from the horse. Since he cannot go forward into the rail and your legs keep him from going back, he should take a step or two to the side. Release the pressure and let him relax. Repeat. For a left side pass, turn the head towards the right and apply pressure with the right leg.

**Two Tracking (Leg Yielding)**

This movement of the horse is both a sideways (lateral) and forward movement at the same time. The horse must still cross his legs sideways over one another as he also goes in a forward direction.
When going to the right, bend the horse’s nose slightly to the left, use your left leg to push him sideways and forward. If the horse refuses to go sideways, increase the leg pressure. If the horse refuses to go forward, loosen the reins.

Extended Trot
(From 101 Arena Exercises: A Guide For Horse And Rider, Cherry Hill, c1995)

The Hand Gallop

Description of the Horse Performing a Good Hand Gallop

- Three-beat gait
- Long, free, strong stride
- Ground covering
- True definite lengthening of stride
- Horse remains controlled, correct, and straight

Use of Aids For Riding at the Hand Gallop

- Increased leg pressure
- Two-point position (knees are the two points)
- Seat out of the saddle, forward but relaxed
- Weight shifted to legs
- Hands moved forward, but not resting on neck
- Upper body slightly forward

Sliding Stop

At a lope or run, the horse breaks at the loin and his hindquarters drop into the ground. As the hindquarters lock up, the forward momentum sends the horse sliding forward. Follow the procedure for stopping, using your weight and legs to keep the hindquarters low and under the horse. It is imperative that the horse remains straight during the slide.
**Rollbacks**

The rollback is the maneuver where the horse is moving at a lope or run and without hesitation does a 180 degree turn, with his weight on the hindquarters and the inside hind foot well up under his body.

The horse must first learn to stop straight and on his hindquarters. Then begin asking him to stop with a slight bend in his body. Use slight inside rein pressure and outside leg pressure.

Next ask him to stop, then use direct rein pressure to turn his nose. As he starts to turn, release the direct rein pressure on his nose, use the outside rein and outside leg pressure to push him off his hocks and out of the turn.
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