

# WHOLE HORSEMANSHIP

By Dianne Lindig

## More on Aids & Cues

In last month's article, we discussed the difference between aids and cues, and how a rider's cues should always be coupled with a subtle version of the aids with which they are associated throughout the training process. I explained that a "neck rein" is a cue, not an aid, and that it must be applied in sync with the appropriate aids in order to perform a correctly balanced bending turn. We discussed how a good rider-trainer must return to or strengthen one's aids, rather than exaggerate a cue, in order to improve or refine a movement.

Now let's review these principles as applied to teaching and performing a proper stop and a turn on the haunches. We'll also discuss how aids become more subtle, and cues become more significant as a horse's training progresses.

Let's start with a balanced stop, with only light

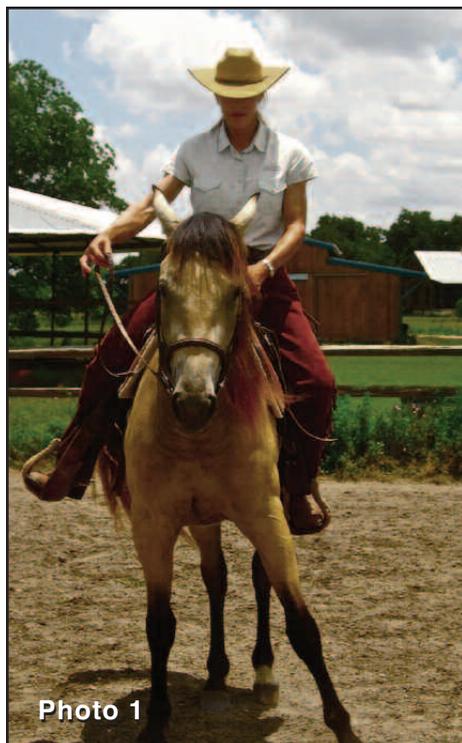


Photo 1

rein contact. A dramatic example is the long, sliding stop that you see at reining competitions. At this level of performance, it appears that no more than the cues of a slight lift of the reins, and a "whoa" are required to accomplish this highly skilled maneuver. But few horses could ever attain this high degree of execution without having first been trained with a progression such as the following, from strong aids, to subtle aids in sync with a cue or cues:

- 1) Pressure from the rider's legs pushes the horse into the bridle.
- 2) Steady, direct pressure from the bit, (typically non-leverage, such as a snaffle), via the reins balances and collects the horse.
- 3) As the rider's pelvis is rolled slightly under the rider's body, the rider's leg pressure is released.
- 4) The horse stops from the pressure still being held on the bit, as the rider says "whoa".
- 5) The rein pressure is released, rewarding the horse for stopping.

As the horse's training progresses, the rider's leg pressure aid can become more subtle, and the direct bit pressure can be reduced to a lift and slight moving back of the reins. (The use of a leverage bit allows this signal to be applied with even more subtlety.) The rolling under of the rider's pelvis and the word "whoa" become significant cues to which the horse responds as it would to the stronger aids with which these signals have formerly been coupled in the horse's training.

If the horse's stop needs correction or improvement, simply "sitting down harder", or yelling "whoa" louder won't do the trick. Instead, the rider-trainer must revisit the original training aids, using stronger leg and direct rein aids to collect and "compress" the horse further into the bridle before releasing the leg pressure to ask for the stop. (The immediate release of the rein aids as a reward for a good response from the horse is also vital).

Now let's look at a similar progression for a turn on the haunches. In Photo 1, I'm using my reins and legs to give direct aids to set Nellie up for and to execute a turn on the haunches to her right. First, I apply slight pressure back with both reins to shift her weight into her haunches, leaving her forehead light and maneuverable. Now, I've opened my right rein, inviting her to step that direction, while holding her head and body straight with my left rein close to the center of her neck. I've made my right side light and relaxed, while my left side is firm and heavy. My right leg is released, and my left leg is applying strong pressure just behind the girth to encourage her to move right, as well as to hold her haunches in place. She has balanced most of her weight, (and mine), on her right hind leg, and is about to cross her left forefoot over her right forefoot. As she steps across, I will give brief, partial releases of my left leg pressure, then reapply it to continue the maneuver. I will continue to hold her steady and to balance her with both reins until I'm ready for her to stop turning.

Over time, Nellie will learn to do a lot of the balancing herself, and she will look more like



Photo 2

Molly does in Photo 2. Here, my reins aids have become very subtle. I barely open my right rein to encourage her to begin stepping that direction, and simply lay my left rein on her neck. I've shifted her weight into her haunches by lifting the reins up and slightly back before starting the turn, then dropped them down and in the center of her neck just after starting the turn with my left leg. Molly stays "between my reins" which are both held in one hand, keeps her neck and body straight and keeps her shoulders upright by referring back to the stronger rein aids that I used in her previous training. The rhythmic pressure with my left leg, just behind the girth, encourages her to step across from her left to her right with her front feet. My right side is still relaxed, and my left side is still firm, but you can see that even these aids are much more subtle than they were with the less skilled Nellie. Molly has balanced her weight on her right hind leg, and has already crossed her front feet over a couple of times. She is pushing off of her left forefoot, and is about to cross it over her right forefoot again.

If I need to quicken or refine Molly's turn on the haunches, I can apply stronger, more rhythmic pressure with my left leg. I will not, however, pull the left rein harder against her neck, as the shortening of this rein will only throw her off balance.

I hope you find this article helpful in improving your horse's stops and turns on the haunches. Remember to strengthen your aids, not exaggerate cues, when refining a movement. Until next month, enjoy the ride!

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*Photos by Emily Thomas*

