

## HANDY HORSE HINTS BY "PABLO" From 2007 Cherry Chatters

**MARCH** Dear readers,

Yesterday we heard an horrific (but true) story. Two friends of ours were traveling to a horse show with several horses. It was a long trip, but one which they had done before. As usual they stopped halfway to spell the horses and give them a feed etc. When it came time to put them back on, the first person was putting horses in the truck while her friend followed on behind, leading the other two horses. By the way, these people are both extremely experienced and capable horse handlers. Suddenly, something spooked the horses being led. They took off, leaving the handler on the ground. Her friend came to pick her up, but she was dead. Being a very level headed person, she immediately commenced CPR. Wasn't it lucky that she had done a refresher course only 2 weeks before? A bystander phoned for an ambulance and half an hour later, a helicopter and paramedics arrived. They of course kicked in with their equipment and she was whisked off to hospital. For that half an hour that it took for help to arrive, her friend did not stop doing the CPR, even though there was no heartbeat. In fact, she tried so hard that the sternum was broken from the pressure. The good news is that she has survived, apparently without brain damage and is up and around. Two main points come out of this story, one being that if you are around horses, it is recommended that you know how to apply CPR and secondly, no matter how experienced you are it is potentially dangerous to lead two horses at once.



Dear Editor (Pablo?)

We have acquired a horse, formerly a Race Horse & Equestrian competitor who now has developed small lumps on his back making it impossible for regular riding. He is a lovely animal and we have had him for five years, saving him at that time, from his immediate demise.

Formerly he had been ridden every day as a racehorse and then in equestrian events ... he was used to constant attention. Of course we both work full time and that constant attention suddenly was not there. Over the few years we have been his caretaker, we have called the vet many times regarding a lame front left foot. Of course because we are not riding him we have not had him shod. Each time it has been caused by an abscess and with the expense has come frustration. Can you enlighten us ... i.e. how to care for this animal so as to how to prevent this from happening in the future. We wish to prevent this expense along with making his final years as happy as can be expected. Animal lovers!!!

**Dear hoof abscess owner –**

*Thank you for your query. Firstly with the lumps on the back, it is hard to say without knowing what kind of lumps they are. Are they soft or are they hard? Do they come and go? Causes can vary from an allergy to rich green feed or certain types of grasses to an actual skin infection. He may just need an antibacterial wash, however that really is one for your trusty vet.*

*With the hoof abscess, some horses can be more prone to these than others and it looks like your fellow is abscess prone. It can be a seasonal thing, particularly going from dry weather to damp. What you can do to help manage this situation is make sure that you still have his feet trimmed regularly (ie 6 - weeks, depending on the amount of hoof growth) and also clean them out regularly even if he is not being ridden. When the weather gets wetter, try to keep his feet as dry as possible. If he has a yard that gets muddy, put some dolomite in it, or stable him if you can. When you are cleaning out his feet, you can tell if there is any heat in the hoof, which may be a clue to an abscess coming on. If you are lucky, your vet or farrier can sometimes cut the abscess out, depending where it is originating from. I hope this is helpful and well done for caring for your mature horse.*

*Pablo*

Before we go into lungeing tack, let me remind you that lungeing is merely one of the training aids and not the be all and end all of horse training. Imagine the stress forces on the horses lower joints as he travels around on a 15m circle carrying an average weight of 500kg! With this in mind, we want to supple and strengthen him, not break him down, as in riding, lots of transitions will help to minimise wear and tear while increasing his obedience, responsiveness and impulsion.

Firstly it is prudent to protect your horse's legs for lungeing. There are many types and styles of boots/bandages on the market, so I won't go into that, merely to say that it is better to protect his legs. In particular the back legs. When a horse is not used to going on the lunge, he can lack coordination and balance, making it quite likely to knock one leg against the other. A good quality lunge rein is

essential. Preferably not nylon and preferably not too thin. Cotton or cotton blend gives a much better grip and is easier to handle. Some lunge reins even have little leather bands like jumping reins that can be useful too for giving that extra grip. Some reins will have a loop at the end, but it is not safe practice to put that loop around your hand in case of disasters. A good quality heavy duty leather cavesson is an excellent investment. My owner's cavesson is 30 years old and still in good condition. Be very careful when buying a cavesson. Unfortunately most of those on the market today are of inferior quality. Shop around before you buy, compare with friends' gear or borrow if you can. They are not cheap, so it is best to get it right first. A good saddler will make you up a cavesson if necessary. A lunge roller and side reins are also helpful tools. A lunge roller which adjusts from both sides is handy although not essential. It should be of reasonably heavy duty leather and webbing material, and well padded across the centre. The side reins should be of leather with either a rubber ring insert or elastic, to enable a bit of give and take. The rubber rings tend to wear better and also give a better feel than the elastic, which can have too much give and not simulate the rider's hands as accurately. Now the lunge whip should also be of good quality, with a good 'feel' or balance to it. The \$10 ones may be cheap, but they are generally heavy and unwieldy. Far better to spend a bit more and get a better whip. It should feel light in the hand, with a good reach. For yourself, the lunger, it is certainly much safer to lunge using gloves. They not only give a better grip, but will prevent rope burn if things come unstuck. Non flappy clothing, sturdy non slip footwear and a hat complete the picture. As in all your horse gear, everything must fit snugly to prevent chafing and slipping. The cavesson in particular must fit very well. The boots snug, but not tight. The roller should be adjusted as you would for a saddle and should sit in line where the normal girth would go. Always use a saddle cloth under the roller and make sure there are no pressure points near the wither. Even fold the saddle cloth over double if in doubt. Let the horse warm up in walk and a little trot first before attaching the side reins. The side reins should be long enough to encourage the horse to reach for the contact of the bit without pulling his head in. (assuming you are using a bridle). More on this next month.. stay tuned!!

**APRIL** To continue in the gentle art of lungeing...so far we have covered reasons for lungeing and the tack required.

So here we are with our equine all tacked up, checked and ready to go. Where are we going to conduct this little training session? For the benefit of your horse, the footing should be non slip and on a reasonably level surface. The area to be used should also be somewhat confined. This helps the horse to be more attentive to commands and it helps you the handler to maintain control should things get feisty.

Of course a round yard of no less than 15m in diameter is very good. Smaller and it is too difficult for the horse, risking injury, and larger can allow him to speed up unnecessarily (also taking into account the length of the lunge rein and the reach of your whip).

We shall look at both the young horse as well as the older horse who for whatever reason has not been lunged for some time. In both cases, the horses will not be used to traveling in a continuous circle so to begin with, the sessions should be kept short, say 10 to 15 minutes, making sure that you have kept within the horse's limitations and that you have finished on a good note.

Start at the walk, on a smallish circle, with lots of stops and gos. The horse should do both obediently and calmly. (Side reins are not connected at this stage). It is best not to proceed to trot if these simple movements are not in place. In the halt, try to keep the horse out on the circle and move on from there in the walk. If he is allowed to come in when you halt him, he can use that later on at faster paces to just put a stop to the session himself! And funny enough, he can always do that far quicker than you can stop him. So start with the good habits first, so that he doesn't get to practice the bad ones. Make sure that you do these transitions on both reins, probably best to start with his easier rein first, which will help him to relax and therefore be more attentive and receptive to yourself.

As the sessions progress, start with what he knows first, before progressing to the faster gaits. When he does the first trots, also intersperse these with lots of walk transitions, keeping these transitions close together. No side reins yet until he is doing everything in a rhythm, calmly and obediently. If the trot work excites him too much at first, go back to walk and halt. The more established that is, the quicker he will settle before you go back to the trot. Even when he is obedient at the trot, do not keep him trotting around ad infinitum, as it will put a continual strain on all his tendons. If as an experiment, you were to trot around yourself in the round yard for half a dozen circles, then turn around and go the other way, see how tired your legs become and he has four to look after!

That's all for this month everyone, more on side reins and the faster gaits next month.

**MAY** To recap, we have a safe lungeing area, our horse is tacked up and he has been lunged quietly at walk and some trot, including many transitions inbetween, all without side reins.

Remember, especially with a younger horse or one with previous bad habits, that it is important that the lunge stays in the middle of the circle, pivoting in more or less the same spot. If you imagine the shape of a slice of cake taken from a round cake, then the lunge would stand at the 'pointy' bit while the horse makes the curved arc, the lunge rein one side of the piece and the whip the other. As the horse starts off, the lunge keeps slightly to the rear of the movement to encourage the horse to go forward. It also puts the lunge in a better position should the horse suddenly stop and turn in/misbehave. If he does, he must immediately be sent forward. Moving slightly to the front of the movement will help to slow down or stop the horse, along with the appropriate verbal and rein commands. The reason why you keep to a central position is so that you will be able to know that the horse is really travelling in a true circle and if he isn't you will see that he will make 'straights' and turns when he finds it too difficult to do a continuous circle. If this is happening, keep to the slower gaits of walk and trot with plenty of transitions until he improves.

When using side reins, do not attach them at the walk, but warm the horse up first at walk and some trot. If you are lunging to the left, do up the side rein on the right first, then move to the left, do up the left and you are ready to send the horse off straight away. This is done just in case when the horse first feels the contact of reins at the halt, he may feel 'trapped' and try to rear. By doing the rein up on the side nearest you last, you are in the best position to send him forward as quickly as possible. At first, the side reins should be quite loose and not pulling the horse's head in. If he is standing at the halt, the reins should make a slight loop from bit to saddle/roller. As he progresses the side reins can be shortened to take up a contact. By this stage you will be able to not just lunge on a circle, but can move the circle along in the arena, so that you are including some straight line work as well, looking for variation within the pace, as well actually varying the paces themselves. Remember to work each side equally and finish on a good note each time.

Now to the canter. Do not do the first canters with side reins attached. The horse should be obedient to both your verbal and physical commands and lunging in a relaxed and balanced manner. He should be able to do lengthening and shortening in trot quite well by now. Have him going forward in a good working trot. Use the verbal command as well as the whip until he responds. It may only be a couple of steps, but that is OK. Apply both commands again until his response improves. This may take many sessions, depending on the horse. If on the other hand he goes 'troppo' and is worried by the canter, you will have to take him back to the slower paces and transitions to get his confidence back before you try again. The main thing is that you finish on a positive note otherwise you will undo all the good work previously done. When he is cantering confidently on command on both reins, side reins can be introduced, but loosish, so that he is not restricted. Continue in the canter the same as trot, with variations and plenty of transitions. Still keep your sessions no more than 20 minutes and finish positively.

When you have developed a really good rapport with your horse, this can be done without the lunge rein. Not advisable at a show though! Good luck, I hope I haven't missed out too much

## **JUNE – VALE PABLO**

The time has come to say goodbye.

I have really enjoyed doing the articles in the Chatter but it is time now to hand over the reins to a younger equine. Farewell my friends.

It was with heavy heart that we made the decision to have Pabs put down. For some time he had been going downhill – losing condition and losing his eyesight. He was getting the best of feed and all round daily care, but after several consultations with our vet, a general overhaul and blood tests and due to the ever increasing risk of colic, we made that so hard decision.

He taught many people to ride, he was generous of spirit, sensitive but obedient as long as he knew what you wanted. Once you put your faith and confidence in him he was a brilliant teacher. We adored him and will always have a special place in our hearts for him. He was simply the best.

Pablo's column will be continued with a younger version – 3 years old in fact, so stay tuned for the next instalments! Of course the younger replacement will no doubt be in consultation with Pablo to make sure that he gets things right!