

GROUNDWORK

Lungeing



Lungeing is the third exercise that I qualify as fundamental to the horse's education. It sounds reasonable to think that if you are not capable to ask your horse to move forward, to walk, to trot and canter around you from the ground, there is no reason that it will listen to you once you are on the saddle.

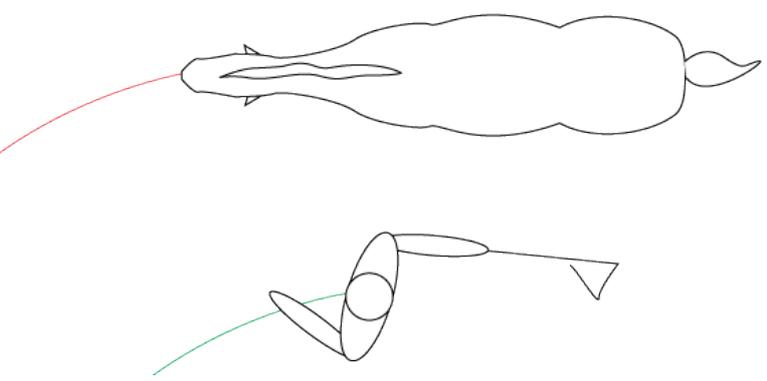
Education principles:
1) horses learn when you release pressure.
2) timing is essential to good horsemanship, recognize the signs of relaxation to make sure you release right on time: blinking eyes, lowering the head and neck, chewing mouth, cocking a hind leg.

That is a great exercise to perform with horses that refuse to trot or canter for instance, or with horses that are used to buck when asked to lope.

The first goal of this exercise is to teach leadership as the first one to move is the loser of this game. Once your horse starts to move around you, that means you have his respect _ although that does not mean it is acquired for a life time. The second objective of lunging a horse at all gaits from the ground is to prepare him to further exercises under the saddle.

Position
Stand right in front of the horse, about one meter far from his head. Hold the rope in the left hand to send the horse to the left, and vice-versa. Keep your flag in the other hand. Once the horse is moving around you, position yourself on a parallel line to his shoulders. The flag should remain neutral unless you need it to put pressure as explained later.

Security
First, keep the horse straight in front of you. Once it moves around you, keep the horse's head tipped slightly inside ALL the time, so the hindquarters are always forced to the outside. If you think the hind end is getting too close to you, just pull on the rope to draw the head, that will push the hindquarters away. Keep in mind that you should look at the whole horse's body all the time.



Process
Raise your left hand on your side and point the direction to the horse. Do not pull on the rope, you should operate through a feeling and never force the horse to do anything. At the beginning, you will probably need to use the flag to increase pressure: raise and wave gently the flag until the horse moves the front feet to the direction you chose. Leave your hand down in a neutral position, then stop and reward.

Repeat the operation until your horse walks a few steps, put your hand to the neutral position, walk with him, release and reward. Later on, you want your horse to keep walking unless you ask otherwise.

Next, point the direction and wait a few seconds to give some time to your horse to think, to understand your cue. Either he starts to walk around you or you should push it with the flag. After a couple of circles, you should repeat the process in the other direction.

Finally, once your horse responds correctly to the cue in both directions, you will start to teach trot and canter. First, operate as usual until the horse walks nicely around you, then raise your hand again and point the same direction until the horse starts to trot. If not, push him with the flag. Pretty soon, he will understand that he should start walking when you raise your hand the first time and speed up to a trot when you raise your hand the second time.

When the horse is trotting, bring him down to a walk by wiggling the rope firmly. Do not stop wiggling until the horse really walks. Repeat this operation until he stops. Once he knows all these steps and responds well to the cues, you can teach the canter as you taught the trot.

Tip: Take the opportunity of this exercise to untrack the horse's hindquarters when you stop him.
Turn slightly to face the horse's hindquarters and move toward this direction. Meanwhile, draw his head and push his hip with the flag until he crosses his hind legs without moving forward.

Q&A
What if my horse starts to crowd me?
That is one of the reasons why you should keep the flag in your hand. If your horse starts to crowd you, or to come too close, tap his shoulder or belly with the flag until he fades away from you. Do not be aggressive when tapping with the flag, but keep in mind that your security comes first, so feel free to be as firm as necessary.
More details and Q&A online...