

Exercises: Under Saddle – Untracking the Hindquarters

The very first time I read about untracking the hindquarters, I just could not understand why I should bother to do it, for what purpose? ... One word: EDUCATION!

That exercise is just great for several reasons: pure mechanical reasons obviously, softness and lightness, leadership and to teach your horse to think.

You may compare this exercise to teaching a kid how to draw a circle and a stick, in order to write letters. Later, these will become sentences, that will make pages and books, etc. So, do not miss the basics!



horses tend to move forward: stop and back them up a few steps without releasing your leg pressure, then just do the necessary to keep the soft feel and wait. the soft-feel all the time.

Pretty soon, your horse will relate this leg cue to the first method and try to untrack, then release and reward. Next, as usual, practice the other side and do it again several times on both sides until your horse responds at once to your leg.

Tip: Separate cues.

Make sure you ask for the soft feel first, then add pressure with your leg. Once you have the expected response, release leg pressure but hold the soft feel a couple of seconds before you let it go.

Positions

You should start from a stop, in position 3. There are three methods to untrack the hind legs:

- 1st method – bend the head, then untrack the hind.
- 2nd method – get the soft feel and hold it when you untrack the hind.
- 3rd method – leave the reins loose, just use your legs to untrack the hind.

All three methods have the following in common: your shoulders will slightly be opened not to block your horse's move and pressure will come from your leg that you will place slightly back to the cinch (position is exaggerated in the picture).

Process – 1st method / lateral flexion and leg

These methods are presented in order of difficulty both for the rider and the horse. The first method consists in using the lateral flexion to get to the feet. So, first bend the head of your horse and wait until it stands still and relaxed.

Then position your foot in the back of its flank and... wait! Let your horse look for the solution by itself, let it be a winner out of this exercise. It will try different approaches: stop it when it goes forward, keep pressure with your leg if it backs up or spins around. As soon as you feel the inside hind leg reaching and crossing in front of the outside hind leg, release all pressure (leg and rein) and pet it, reward it for this try.

Then, as usual, it is time to repeat the process on the other side. Once your horse figured it out on both sides, repeat the operation again and again until your horse untracks as soon as your leg reaches behind.

Process – 2nd method / soft feel and leg

Now that your horse is familiar with that move, you can refine it. It requires of course that you have been through the process to teach it the soft feel.

Get that soft feel and put pressure with your leg. Most of the time,

Process – 3rd method / leg only

This method is a natural continuation of the first two. On loose reins, you should just apply pressure with your leg and wait for your horse to understand that you want it crossing the hind legs.

One more time, make sure you keep it centered if it moves forward or backward. For the rest, do not put yourself in its way, leave it time to try and to find. As soon as it untracks, release leg pressure and pet it.

Tip: Less is more...

As soon as your horse responds correctly to the cue, it is time for you to be more subtle. Pressure from your leg should become lighter and position of your heel less in the back of its flank. Do the minimum to get the response.

Q&A

What if my horse does not move at all?

Green horses may have a hard time to figure out that they have to move from your leg. With such horses, make sure you produce motion first. Walk your horse a few steps, bend the head as for the one-rein stop and place your leg behind to cross the legs. Finally, release everything and reward. Later, you can switch to the regular 1st method.

What if my horse keeps spinning around?

Make sure you go to the toilets before you get on your horse, as you may have to stand up there for the day... The real deal is to be patient, to wait for your horse to figure out what you want. Do not force the idea into your horse or you will end up with an empty robot instead of a thinking horse!

What if my horse starts to back up?

Same answer as for the spinning motion. There is a moment when it will stop backing up and try something else.