

Online HorseCollege



Student Workbook

2.R.12 Riding Solutions

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Contents

Introduction	Pg. 4
Nervous Horses	Pg. 5
Pulling Back	Pg. 6 & 7
Shying and Bolting	Pg. 8 & 9
Bucking and Rearing	Pg. 10 & 11
Extension Lesson	Pg. 12
Recommended Reading	Pg. 13
References	Pg. 14

Introduction

Everyone has their own share of riding problems, mishaps and misfortunes and this workbook looks at how to address and determine the cause of riding problems and how to go about finding the solutions.

It is always important to remember that if you encounter a problem which you lack the knowledge and/or experience to address or maybe you are uncomfortable or unsure if you are addressing it properly you should see the advice and experience of a coach or trainer.

Nervous Horses

Every horse has a different personality, paces, likes, dislikes, the list goes on but basically each horse is unique and individual. Some horses are laid back, easy going and fuss-free while others are high maintenance, high spirited and/or nervous.

Nervous horses can be so due to stress or excitement. They may exhibit behaviour like pawing the ground, walking fence lines, sweating, whinnying, fidgeting, even diarrhoea and in the extremes trembling. Nervous horses can be hard to settle and keep focused on the task at hand. Some horses can become nervous and tense in specific situations like floating/travelling but are otherwise calm, cool and collected.

To find a solution to the nervousness of a horse you need to identify what it is that is causing the horse to have this reaction and the list is endless. Causes of nervousness could be from previous bad experiences (while horses have a much smaller brain than people they have a very good memory for bad experiences) such as a horse hit its head coming out of the float once and now it is reluctant to travel or something as simple as a loud noise once frightening the horse and then the horse rehearing a similar noise at a competition. And then there are the highly strung equine individuals who are more sensitive and reactive to the environment around them.

There are steps you can take to reduce nervousness or reduce the chance of the horse becoming nervous.

- Horses are creatures of habit and like routine, some more than others. Establish a daily routine for feeding and rugging etc and stick to it. Even maintain the same habits in preparing the horse for riding. Try and keep these habits when taking the horse out to events.
- Horses that are on high grain diets that are under worked may exhibit nervous, tense or excited behaviour. Monitor the horse's diet and ensure you only feed for the work the horse performs. 'Cool' feeds are available on the market which promote that they will not make horses 'fizzy' (excited).
- There are some feed supplements, additives and herbs which promote to help calm and soothe a nervous horse. It is wise to do your research before buying these products to ensure you know exactly what it is you are giving your horse, they can also be expensive.
- Stretching and loosening exercises on the lunge line and under saddle can assist in relaxing and focusing the nervous horse.



Pulling Back

'Pulling back' is the term used when a horse pulls away backwards from where it is tied up to. Some horses can become chronic in this behaviour to the point where the handler may be reluctant to tie the horse up at all. Horses which pull back can become quite dangerous if the rope, halter, or structure they are tied to does not break (this is why it is wise to always tie a horse up to baling twine with a quick release knot) and will start thrashing around quite violently in panic to the point where they may end up on the ground.

Firstly you should ensure there is nothing around where the horse is tied up that could cause it to become frightened or panic (e.g., plastic bags, fast moving objects).

If you have determined that there is nothing in the area causing the horse to pull back the next step would be to check how your horse responds to pressure at the poll. To test this, apply gentle pressure to the poll by draping the end of a long lead rope over the poll behind the horse's ears with one hand on each end of the rope. If the horse raises its head up into the pressure of the rope this indicates that the horse is responding incorrectly to the pressure on the poll when tied up by pulling harder and harder backwards until the rope/halter/baling twine gives and breaks, when in actual fact it should be the horse 'giving' to the halter.

The correct response to the pressure you create with the rope is for the horse to lower the head, 'giving' to the pressure.

So now you need to see how the horse responds to being asked to step forwards from pressure on the halter. Using the lead rope attached to the halter on the horse apply gentle forwards pressure to entice the horse to step forwards (if the horse doesn't respond then you will need to increase the pressure until it does). The correct response is for the horse to step forwards from the pressure of the halter on the poll. If the horse raises its head and/or starts to step or pull backwards this is an incorrect reaction and could be where the problem of pulling back extends from.



Pulling Back (cont.)

Things to remember:-

- Always tie a horse up to bailing twine that is attached to a post so that if the horse pulls back it will break the twine and not the fence, halter, rope or cause itself injury.
- Some horses may become physically sore at the poll if they frequently pull back which will make the area tender when fitting halters and bridles.
- Ground work exercises which teach the horse to yield to pressure can be helpful in combating problems with pulling back.

Shying and Bolting

Shying is the term given for when a horse gets startled, surprised or scared by something which causes them to jump or run sideways. Despite the horse being a large animal they can do this quite quickly unseating the rider.

A horse may give warning signs that it has seen something which it is unsure of by pricking its ears, lowering and raising its head as it tries to determine the object, slowing down and/or becoming reluctant to go forward. If you are aware of an anticipate the horse is about to shy it is much easier to cope with and stay seated but if the horse shies quickly and suddenly you will need to rely on the security of your seat while you regain control and evaluate the situation.

When a horse becomes worried about something and threatens to shy you need to provide them with encouragement and praise. Punishing the horse for shying is likely to cause further fear of the object as the horse will associate the punishment with the object.

Exposing a horse to different objects can be good for desensitising it and building confidence. Objects as simple as plastic flowers can be used to provide strange looking stimuli that will cause you horse no harm if they happen to tread on it. The horse will need to be exposed to the object on a regular basis in a way which doesn't create more fear.

For example if a horse had a fear of plastic bags one could be tied to a post or tree and the horse led past it every day.



If you have time let the horse have a look and investigate the object. If you are encouraging the horse to go up to what it has shied at keep the horse facing the object and when it is standing still or going forward your aids become quiet, if the horse tries to turn away or go backwards you are actively making corrects with your aids.

When a horse does shy you should try to remain sitting deeply in the saddle, looking where you are going. Regain control of the horse by circling or urging the horse to continue forward.

Shying and Bolting (cont.)

Horses perceive the world differently to the way people do. They therefore respond differently to situations in which they feel threatened. Horses are prey animals and their primary instinct is to flee or take flight when scared or in the presence of danger. This is why shying can sometimes lead to bolting. A 'bolting' horse is one which is simply in flight mode i.e., running away. If a horse becomes frightened enough, instinct will take over.

Some horses are more predisposed to bolting than others. Thoroughbreds are bred to gallop and trained to gallop, this is often all they know once they are retired from racing and in times of stress they will often revert back to this training which fuels natural instincts.

A horse which bolts from lack of correct or inadequate education can be trained to be responsive to the rider's aids and therefore more controllable and obliging.

If you are riding a horse which bolts because it has been frightened your main objective will be to regain control. Yelling and screaming is not going to help your situation and pulling violently on both reins probably won't have an effect either (remember this is a scared horse). You need to encourage the horse to slow down, sit tall with your lower leg strong, shorten the reins and keep your hands low. Then you need to turn or circle the horse to encourage a slower pace. You need to take care when doing this as galloping a sharp turn or circle at speed can cause the horse to lose footing.

Then there are the horses that bolt out of naughtiness and excitement. Those that do so out of naughtiness bolt because they have gained some benefit from it (e.g., rider fell off which allowed the horse to return to his paddock buddies). These horses need to be ridden by someone who can curb and correct the behaviour.

Horses which bolt from being excited or fresh can be lunged prior to riding to help remove some of the excess energy.



Bucking and Rearing

A buck is when a horse pushes itself into the air so that all four hooves clear the ground with the head down and back curved. Rearing is when a horse brings its front hooves off the ground so that the front end of its body is in the air held above the back legs.

Horses will buck and rear for different reasons such as excitement, playfulness, tension, fear, naughtiness, rebellion, because they are fresh and if the gear is causing them pain or discomfort. To be able to address the problem of a horse you need to figure out why or what is causing it to behave this way. Is it because the horse is young and just learning to carry a saddle? Or maybe because it does not understand your aids?

There are many, many different scenarios to which a horse may be inclined to buck and rear. To understand why the horse has exhibited this behaviour you need to consider the events before it happened. Some questions that can be asked to help understand the behaviour are:-

- Is this typical behaviour for this horse?
- Is this typical behaviour for this horse in this situation?
- Is the horse wearing the same equipment it usually does?
- Is the equipment in good working order?
- Does the equipment fit the horse?
- Is the equipment fitted properly?
- Is the rider wear and using the same equipment they usually do?
- Is the horse familiar with the aids or exercise you were using?
- Are there any other factors that may have triggered this reaction from the horse?
- Is the horse in good health? (i.e., check for saddle sores, pressure points, rubs, stiffness)

There are actions you can take to help minimise the chance of a horse bucking:-

- Lunging. Warming the horse up on the lunge means it can express any excess energy (especially if the horse has had a few days off) without you on board. It is important to ensure the horse remains in the pace you set and if it starts to buck or rear you encourage it to go forward and continue in the pace you have set as the relationship you have on the ground with the horse will be reflected when you ride.
- Ground Work. Horses which tend to exhibit these behaviours out of naughtiness or rebellion to your aids and directions often benefit from ground work which reasserts you as the leader (you should consult a coach or trainer for specific advice on worthwhile exercises for your individual problem).
- Use safe practices when riding with, towards and away from other riders.



Bucking and Rearing (cont.)

When on a horse that is bucking you should try to (and it will probably be difficult to remember because it will happen quite quickly which is why it pays to work on gaining a strong and secure riding position) keep your shoulders back over your hips (lean back), heel down with your lower leg forward. Then using a wide, opening rein (out towards your knee) try to bring the horse's head around towards your boot or knee so that the horse does a small circle. If you feel confident (and if the horse will understand the aid) use the inside leg to kick the hind quarters out. Your aim is get the horse's hind quarters out from under him so that he cannot push off them to buck and spinning/turning in a small circle will help to accomplish that.

If you are riding a horse and it rears you need to lean forward (grab some mane for security) to a position that is similar to two point. Keep your leg underneath you and use a wide, opening rein to get the horse to circle to put the hind quarters into a position where the horse cannot push off them. It is very important that you do not pull back with the reins on a rearing horse as you will cause it to lose balance and pull it over on top of you.



Extension Lesson

Can you think of a situation where a horse has become nervous?

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What was it about this situation do you think caused this reaction from the horse?

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Have you ever ridden a horse which has shied, bolted, bucked or reared whilst you were riding? If so which?

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What caused this reaction and how did you deal with it?

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Recommended Reading

Websites:-

www.horseandhound.co.uk/best/article.php?aid=... - Bolting

References

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