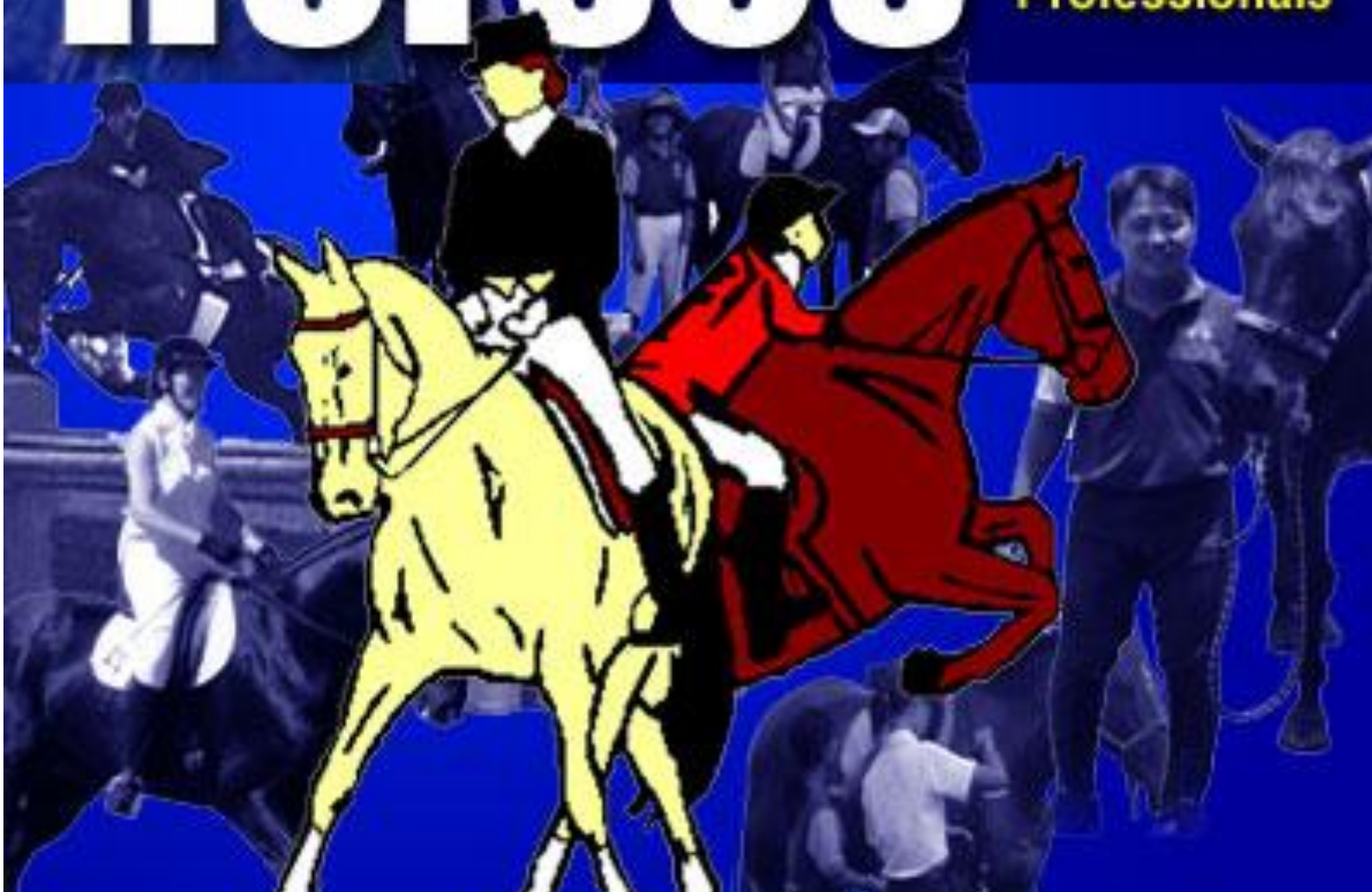


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Student Workbook

R1.10 How To Ride With Confidence

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Introduction

Confidence tends to come with experience. However it is not uncommon for some riders to be more confident and 'invincible' than others. Children are often a good example of confidence and 'invincibility'. For those less confident around or riding horses, for whatever reason there are opportunities to boost confidence levels to achieve what you want from being around or riding horses.

Considerations

A person who has lost confidence around or riding horses can be hesitant to 'get back on the horse' so to speak. Or some people may be happy to be with or ride horses other than the one they lost their confidence with. Everyone's situation will vary and some horses will be more suitable than others for rebuilding or building on confidence levels.

Nervous riders need a horse which is quiet, slow, reliable and even predictable in their behaviour and attitude. This isn't always possible due to many restraints in peoples and riders lives so if you have lost your confidence riding your own horse then take some time to go back to basics to help rebuild that confidence.

Being in a social, supporting environment (a local riding club, pony club, dressage/jumping club etc) can help to conquer fears because it allows you to see other rider's problems and how they deal with them and offers you a network of people who can provide support and advice.



A rider may need to take time to determine what it is they are actually afraid of. For example are they afraid because their uncle rode a horse once and was bucked off or because their horse was just running around and playing in the paddock? In identifying what it is you are afraid of you will be able to determine how you are going to approach and conquer this fear.

You will need to decide if your fear is rational or irrational. For example a fear of falling off a horse who is known to always buck when first put into canter is probably a rational fear given that the horse has a history of behaving this way. A fear of a helicopter landing in the paddock beside the arena, scaring your horse is likely to be irrational if helicopters don't land and never will land on your property.

Remember that what you fear may not necessarily be the same as what your horse fears. Whilst on a trail ride (hack) your horse may shy at bushes and trees like it is expecting to be attacked by some great horse-eating beast, which may seem irrational to you because you know there are no horse-eating beasts on the trail but to the horse this is a rational fear because it is a prey animal with survival instincts inherited from ancestors. From this example you can see how knowledge of how horses think and react can help to understand their behaviours and actions.



Considerations (cont.)

Young uneducated horses or those horses that have had a bad experience can also lose confidence. Examples of situations where horses may lose confidence are during travel (rough transport, the horse beside them bullying) and jumping (injuries or falls). Riders and handlers will need to go back to the basics and progress in small steps to regain the horse's trust and confidence.

Over-facing (attempting skills before horse and/or rider are physically, emotionally or psychologically ready) is a common cause of lack of or loss of confidence. Over-facing can cause injury, nervousness and loss of interest in the skill or sport. Again it is necessary to return to easier exercises and skills or break the skills down into easier components to reshape confidence.



Exercises

Here are some simple exercises you can perform to improve your suppleness, flexibility, balance and confidence while on a horse. It is important to use a reliable, quiet horse preferably on the lunge but if this isn't possible a handler on the ground to hold the horse.

Reaching forward and back

This can be done with both arms and involves trying to touch the top of the horses' mane between the ears (poll) and the top of the horses' dock (tail). You should keep one hand on the reins and start in halt. Run your hand along the horses' neck from the wither forward so that they don't get a fright when you touch the poll or start from behind the saddle and side your hand backwards to the dock. For assistance you can have someone on the ground hold your horse while you stretch.

For a more challenging exercise try reaching forward and back in walk, trot and canter.

Touching your toes

Whilst mounted on a horse can you touch your toes? Begin at a halt and see if you can touch your left toe with your left hand and right toe with your right hand. If you can not reach your toe then see how far down your leg you can reach (remember not to push through any pain). If you are particularly nervous, start one step easier and try and touch your knees.

Remember to always keep one hand on the reins. To reach your toes you will need to lean forward over your knee (almost like you are going to give the horse a hug around the neck), as you lean forward make sure your leg doesn't swing back because that will make it harder to touch your toes. Your weight should stay in your stirrups.

Once you can confidently and easily touch your toes you can make the exercise harder by trying to touch your toes in walk and trot (and for the die hard adrenaline junkies it is possible to touch your toes in canter!). Another way to make it more difficult is to see if you can touch your left toe with your right hand and vice versa. If this is too difficult start with touching your left knee with your right hand.

Looking for a challenge? Try:

- Touching each toe in 2 point seat
- Removing your feet from the stirrups and touching the toes



Exercises (cont.)

Around the world

This is a good game for kids however a person on the ground will be needed to hold the horse or pony, which will need to be fairly quiet and unlikely to startle.

To start the handler holds the horse and the rider take both feet out of the stirrups. The rider holds the front of the saddle with the right hand and the back of the saddle with the left hand, the rider then passes their right leg over the front of the saddle so they are sitting sideways facing to their left.

Next the rider lifts their left leg up over the hind quarters of the horse (being careful to whack the horse as they do so) so they are now sitting backwards.

The rider's right leg then comes up and over the hind quarters so that the rider now faces out to the right (off side). And finally the left leg lifts over the front of the saddle so that the rider is sitting facing in the correct direction.

This exercise can also be done bareback (no saddle) and some riders may find it easier this way. The handler can support the rider by holding one of the rider's legs while they turn.



Windmill

This exercise is fairly easy and straight forward. It involves putting one or both arms out to the side (if both arms are out to the side then a person on the ground will need to hold the horse) and moving them in circles in a clockwise and/or counter clockwise direction. This can be performed at halt and in walk, trot and canter (on the lunge).



Exercises (cont.)

Heels to hips

Straight forward and good for stretching and flexibility the rider bends the knee to bring their heel up to their hip (under their seat) then gently lowers it again. It can be performed with one leg at a time or both legs at the same time in halt, walk, trot and even canter.

Care must be taken as some horses may speed up or worry about the rider's leg moving.

It is important that the rider doesn't sacrifice or change their position to bring the heel up to the hip.

Knee to the pommel of the saddle

Good for testing and building strength the rider lifts the knee to the pommel of the saddle then gently lowers it again. It can be performed with one leg at a time or both legs at the same time in halt, walk, trot and even canter.

Care must be taken as some horses may speed up or worry about the rider's leg moving.

It is important that the rider doesn't sacrifice or change their position to bring the knee up to the pommel.

Riding without stirrups

Riders can do this on or off the lunge and is a good exercise for developing the rider's independent seat (being able to give aids and follow the movement of the horse without losing balance or interfering with the horse), balance, posture, suppleness and strength.

The rider removes their feet from the stirrups, the stirrups can then be folded across the horse in front of the saddle to prevent them from banging on the sides of the horse. If the stirrup buckle is bulky under the leg of the rider the stirrup buckle can be pulled down the leather before folding them across the horse. The rider should still try to maintain their leg position as if they still had their foot in the stirrup.

Riding without stirrups can be done at walk, trot and canter.



Exercises (cont.)

Riding without stirrup and reins

For this exercise the rider will need to be on the lunge. The stirrups are crossed over the horse in front of the saddle and the reins are secured in a fashion so that they cannot slide or twist down the horse's neck. This can be practiced in all three paces on an experienced lunging horse.

Riding bareback

Another good exercise for balance the horse is ridden without the use of a saddle. Depending on the horse's conformation this can be uncomfortable for the rider (e.g., horses with high withers or prominent backbones).

Those riders with good balance can even try jumping small obstacles bareback (you should be able to canter bareback and jump in a saddle before attempting this).



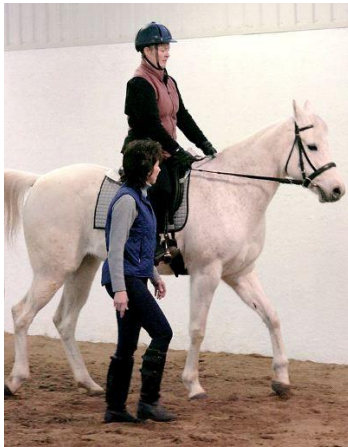
Games

There are loads of games to play on horseback that are fun and will help build your confidence for example egg and spoon, water race (involves a cup of water and trying not to spill it), bending games and obstacles courses.

Troubleshooting & Tips

Whenever you come across a problem which is too advanced for your abilities or knowledge it is best to get a professional to help you. Riding schools and coaches will have suitable, quiet and experienced horses for you to relearn skills, regain confidence and practice on as well as professional sound advice.

Fearful, untrusting and unconfident horses can quickly become dangerous in the hands of someone who lacks the knowledge and skills to be able to deal with it. So for the sake and safety of both horse and rider it is best to find a professional horse trainer to help you and your horse work through problems.



Spend some time doing activities which will help to build communication and trust between you and your horse such as:-

- Grooming. Spending time brushing and giving the horse a thorough grooming will help you to get to know the horse.
- Ground work. Good ground work can help to establish you as a strong leader for your horse to follow which is important for gaining trust and co-operation from your horse. An experienced coach or instructor can help you if you are unfamiliar with the type of exercises you can do on the ground.
- Horse behaviour. Learning about horse behaviour can help to understand why horses react the way they do. Learning can be as simple as watching horses interact in the paddock. Educational book and dvds are also good however steer away from fictional movies or tv as these tend to be dramatised and unrealistically represent horse behaviour.
- Lunging. This is good to warm the horse up, especially if they are a little 'fresh' (had a few days off).

Extension Lesson

What sort of behaviour does your horse typically exhibit around other horses?

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Is there an activity where you lack confidence with your horse?

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Which of the exercises from the workbook do you think you will be confident doing?

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Are there any you will be not confident to try?

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Recommended Reading

Publication:-

The truth about horses

Author:-

Andrew McLean

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