

Training for Courage By Paul Dufresne

CONTROL THE SHAPE AND CONTROL THE EMOTIONS

The simplest way I can aid people in training their horses is by illustrating how, when you control the shape of the horse, you will eventually start to control the emotions of the horse.

This is critical because controlling the emotions provides you with the key to the intelligence and the physical abilities of the horse. Sometimes we develop skills and then we forget how the practical application of them facilitates the courage and learning ability of the horse. By keeping things clear and understandable, the easier it is to train a horse. So the KISS principle applies not only to them but to us.

What is so cool about this is that even if you don't totally understand how these shapes affect the horse, but you reasonably affect their shape correctly, you will put them into a positive shape that will CAUSE them to start relaxing whether they want to or not as it affects their natural reflex to relax. Turn these into cues and you have a very powerful tool. Apply them quickly when a horse starts to get tense and you diffuse the anxious moment. I have written previous articles on most of these items below so we will only give you a brief description to remind you.

I have listed them in this order as this is often the easiest way to develop positive shape in your horse:

Bend On A Circle: A smaller circle where the horse is bent around you or your leg and there is a continuous arc around you from nose to tail. Pressure on the ribcage to initiate bend is critical. Inside eye looking inside.

Head down: Can be developed any time but is easier to improve after bending on a circle. If the horse resists, apply pressure to the ribcage.

Bend and release the poll on a circle: Once the horse can circle around you in a proper bend, apply a gentle touch to the headgear towards the horse's chest, if the horse resists we apply pressure to ribcage until the horse softens.

Shoulder-in (or haunches-in): Should be used any time the horse gets excited and wants to invert and lose its poll. It is more easily developed out of smaller circles. This was also discussed in the practical application in the February article.

Leg yield: Natural progression from the shoulder-in out of a circle, this move will give a stronger suggestion for the horse to soften. If the horse sticks in your hands on the shoulder-in go to the leg yield.

Body Sweep and Quarter: If a horse gets anxious and an adrenalin surge from the anxiousness is short-circuiting the leg aid for the shoulder-in or leg yield, sweeping your leg or hand from the girth area to the hindquarters will cause the horse to bend inside and then disengage the hindquarters. This disengagement will cause the horse to feel the aid and regain a positive shape. Repeating this often makes it very difficult for a horse to stay anxious and unresponsive to the leg aid and its relaxation reflexes.



Bend on a circle

Half-pass: This is a more complicated shape and only works if the horse has a very good leg yield. This too is stolen one step at a time out of a figure 8. If the horse becomes tense in the movement and binds, it no longer causes the horse to relax.

Standing on a pedestal:

When the horse learns to get onto an obstacle one foot at a time, it will naturally relax its topline when it stands on it. That shape causes them to relax. The horse has no choice -- it is a reflex.



Shoulder in, Padrino

Dime exercise (goat on mountain):

This puts a horse on a reduced base of support with its head down until they stand almost on a dime in the first phase.

Again, like using a pedestal, the horse can't help but relax, never mind giving you control of the feet. Good positive posture precedes athletic engagement.



Leg-yield. Easy with pool prop

Training for Courage, cont'd

Rounding: By teaching the horse to go into a round position and yielding its poll with or without tack, on cue, with word, whip, hand, or cordeo.

Remember positive shape leads to a happy, courageous, athletic horse.



Body Sweep and Quarter Ljibbe on cordeo



Round, Ljibbe on cordeo

Paul Dufresne is a writer, performer, trainer and clinician in Kelowna, BC, who educates in Natural Horsemanship; Classical Arts; Liberty and Circensic Dressage. He teaches people to understand horses, but more importantly how to tap into their relaxation reflexes in ways seldom seen in North America. In doing so, he is able to guide people in creative experiences where the human learns to be an effective, safe leader. The horse learns to be more emotionally secure and will respectfully follow while developing athleticism in a mutually courageous manner by having a deeper understanding of how they affect each other.



Half-pass. Canter half-pass, Padrino



Standing on a pedestal. Quimerico and Ljibbe on box



Dime exercise (3 phases of dime sizing & head down)