

COOL, CALM & COLLECTED, PART 1

by Walter Mantler

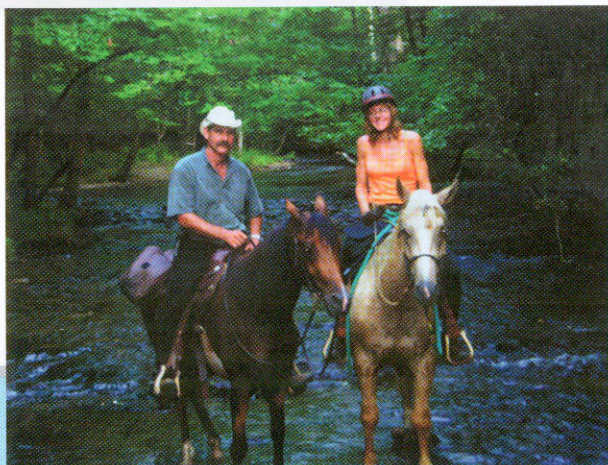
In this series of articles we will be taking you on a tour of the training process leading up to true collection. Part of this process will be developing an understanding of what true collection is through the use of exercises and photos.

We must have “Cool” and “Calm” before we can start introducing collection. It is of utmost importance for horses to remain cool and calm in order for them to remain receptive and achieve optimum results throughout the training process.

WHAT IS TRUE COLLECTION?

True collection is the “gathering” or “collecting” of a horse’s energy that is created in the hind end. The energy generated by the hind end must flow through the horse similar to that of a wave. We must drive the horse forward with our seat and legs into a hand that collects the energy without pulling back. A hand that pulls back destroys the horse’s flow of energy.

Collection must be introduced and developed slowly. We must be able to create energy from the hind end before we can collect it. Before we are able to create the energy we will need to build the strength necessary. This can take years depending on the degree of collection we are striving for. Just as human athletes need to gradually build muscle and endurance for specific sporting events, so must the horse. We should train to the best of the horse’s true ability being careful not to go too far beyond it. There can be a fine line between training too hard and not hard enough.



Walter & Gisela Mantler own and operate Symphony Stables, a training facility in south western Ontario. They have apprenticed directly under Chris Irwin for years and are recognized among his top trainers. They breed, start, train and



In this photo we see our horse “Gem” in a frame that is not collected. He has the appearance of going downhill, his hind legs are strung out too far behind him, his front legs are stiff, and his forehead is slightly behind the vertical. The overall appearance is strung out and flat as opposed to compact (collected), round and energetic.



In this picture we see Gem in a collected frame. A horse that is working its hind end has the appearance of going uphill. You will notice the hind legs reaching well underneath Gem. If you look closely you can clearly see that the muscles in the hind end are definitely in use. His forehead is vertical, 90 degrees in relation to the ground. The overall appearance is that of a compact (collected) round frame.

finish horses for both Western and English disciplines and run a series of horsemanship and personal development clinics throughout the year. To learn more about their techniques and services, visit www.symphonystables.com

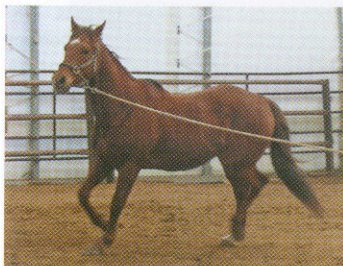
COOL & CALM

The key to a successful training session is having a relaxed, quiet horse that is focused on the handler. On the other side of the equation we, as handlers, need to be relaxed and focused on our horse as well.

The three main ingredients to a relaxed, focused horse are bending, stretching and forward. If one of these is missing, chances are good that we haven't fully achieved the relaxed focus in the horse yet.

The horse's state of mind is directly related to the shape of their body. If we bend, stretch and shape them properly we will have a comfortable relaxed horse that is ready to learn. If your horse is "bent out of shape" he is likely unbalanced, uncomfortable, unfocused and not in the correct frame of mind to learn.

In the example below we have two pictures of a thoroughbred we have been working with. The first picture shows him definitely "bent out of shape" with a high head, hollow back and not focused on his handler. In the second photo, taken months later, we see the same horse; cool, calm, starting to collect himself and yes, focused on his handler. His frame of mind is equal to the frame of his body.

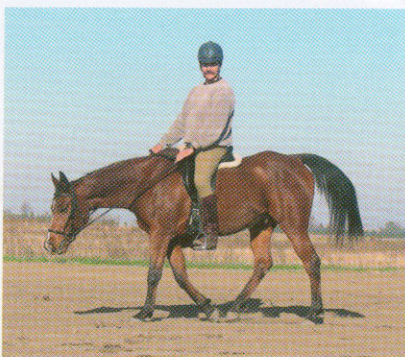


SETTING THE STAGE FOR COOL & CALM

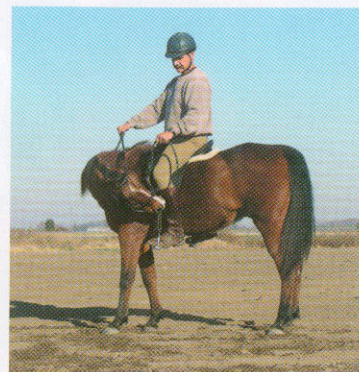
The way we handle our horse before we even get into the saddle sets the stage for our ride. Just think about it – if we have a battle with our horse while grooming, picking out feet, bridling, saddling and mounting, how can we honestly expect the horse to be cool and calm when we climb on its back? Our chances of having a quiet mount improve significantly when attention is given to all the tasks that I've listed above. Take the time to address these issues and it will pay you dividends in the long run.

BENDING & STRETCHING EXERCISES

The exercises below will be used to bend, stretch and relax Gem, our twelve-year-old Arab gelding. Special attention will be paid to keeping his head and neck low to level at all times. A low to level head has proven to have that calming effect that we are looking for, hence the common term so often used to describe sensible calm people or horses: "level headed".



LONG AND LOW A horse that is long and low is in a frame that promotes calmness and has a back that is round. In this exercise I will not only be trying to achieve long and low, I will also be trying to maintain the rhythm of Gem's stride. By maintaining his rhythm with my seat I prevent his body from becoming strung out. First I choose a suitable rhythm for the gait I am in. Now I keep that rhythm in my head, then I maintain that rhythm with my seat. I will need to make continuous adjustments as Gem tries to either speed up or slow down. Rein contact should stay light and consistent. See how relaxed Gem looks while still stepping nicely underneath himself.



OVER BEND FROM THE LEG This exercise will condition Gem to bend from my seat and leg as well as stretch his muscles and spinal column. In this photo, at a standstill, the bend is initiated and maintained by my lower leg and spur, NOT my hand. If you look carefully, my left rein is loose. This exercise will condition Gem to bend around my leg at the walk, trot and canter. While at the walk, trot and canter I will use my outside rein to block the over bending. I will then, in effect, have him plugged into my outside rein. I will have made an important connection between my inside leg and outside rein and be one step closer to riding a truly collected horse.

CONSISTENCY FOR TRUST AND RESPECT

Through proper bending, stretching, use of inside leg and light, consistent contact we have a cool calm horse willing to move forward. We have a calm mind and calm body willing to learn. As we begin to achieve cool and calm consistently our horse's trust and respect grows, and we create a willing partnership. We can now take this partnership and start to introduce exercises that will build strength in the hind end. This strength will help us create the energy required to achieve collection. 🐾

NEXT ISSUE'S LESSON WILL FOCUS ON SUPPLING EXERCISES.



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