

COOL, CALM & COLLECTED, PART 4

by Walter Mantler

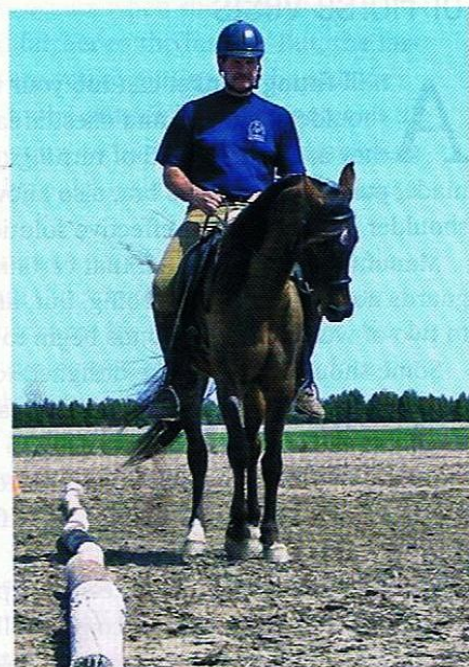
In this article, the fourth in our series, we will be discussing the how's and why's of lateral work. Lateral work begins once we have established a cool, calm horse that is willing to move forward and accept contact. These exercises are used in strengthening the hind end, suppling, collecting and improving the ability to ride your horse straight. Riding your horse straight is an important part of being able to calmly collect your horse and do advanced manouvers down the road. These exercises are useful for developing collection in both english and western horses.

PROGRESSIVE TRAINING CONTINUES

In our previous articles we covered the principles and techniques for developing a cool, calm horse that is willing to go forward into contact. Now that we have our horse understanding and accepting our leg, seat and rein aids we are going to use those aids for strength training, advanced suppling, straightening and collection.

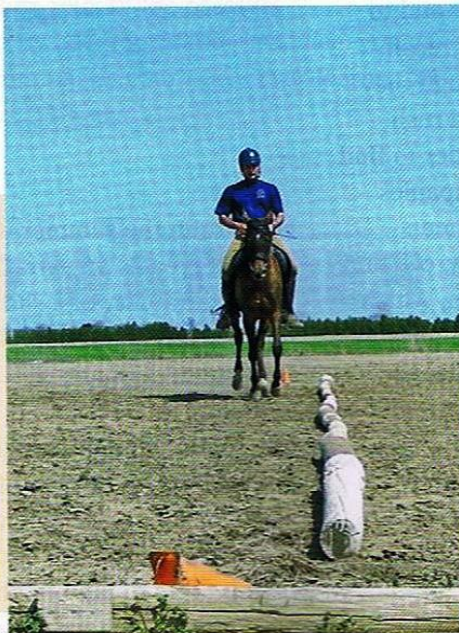
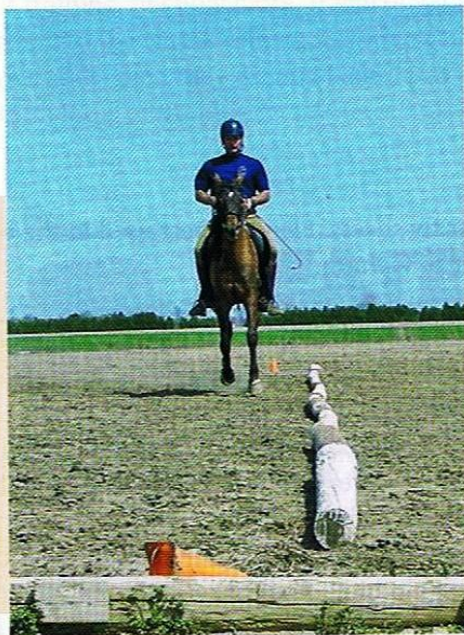
RIDING STRAIGHT?

Riding your horse straight is more than simply going in a straight line from point A to point B. Straightness means that the horse's hind feet follow the same path or track as the front feet (even on a circle or a turn). Another way to think of it is the hind feet should step in the impressions made by the front feet. A straight horse will be balanced, have better overall motion and will have an easier time collecting.



SHOULDER FORE

We begin our lateral work with this exercise as it has the lowest degree of difficulty for both horse and rider. Pay close attention to Flip's feet. With this exercise you will leave four tracks or four rows of hoof prints. The inside (left) hind leg will travel between the tracks made by the two front feet. Also note her bend in relation to the rail. She is in left bend with her front end slightly further off the rail than her hind end. This exercise encourages her to bring her inside (left) hind leg further under her body, resulting in that leg carrying more weight and, therefore, strengthening her hind end. Driving her forward with my inside leg moves her nicely into my outside rein, encouraging her to bend and relax. Repeat this exercise going the other direction in the opposite bend to ensure that both sides of the body are strengthened equally.



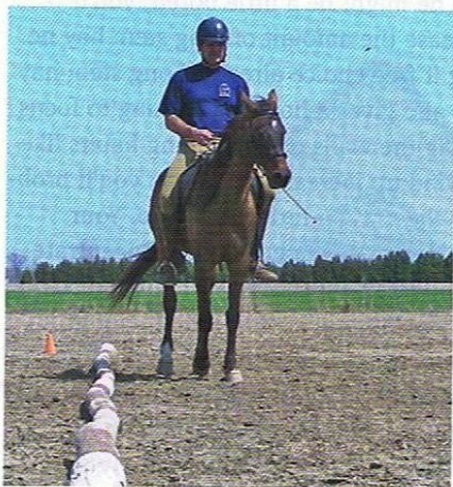
RIDING STRAIGHT

In the photo on the left we see "Flip" our six-year-old Arab mare moving forward and straight at the canter. Note the hind legs directly behind the front legs following the same track.

In the photo on the right we see "Flip" moving crooked at the trot. Note the hind legs are not following the track of the front legs. It will be difficult to collect your horse properly when moving forward in this way.

SHOULDER IN

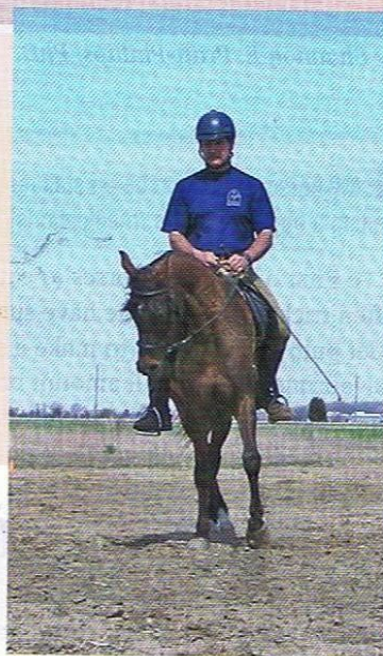
This exercise is pretty much identical to the "Shoulder Fore" exercise only at a steeper angle. With this exercise you will leave only three tracks or three rows of hoof prints. The inside (left) hind leg will travel in the same track as the outside (right) fore. The steeper angle drives the inside hind leg even further under the horse requiring her to bear more weight than in the "Shoulder Fore" exercise. This is just another important example of progressive training.



HALF PASS

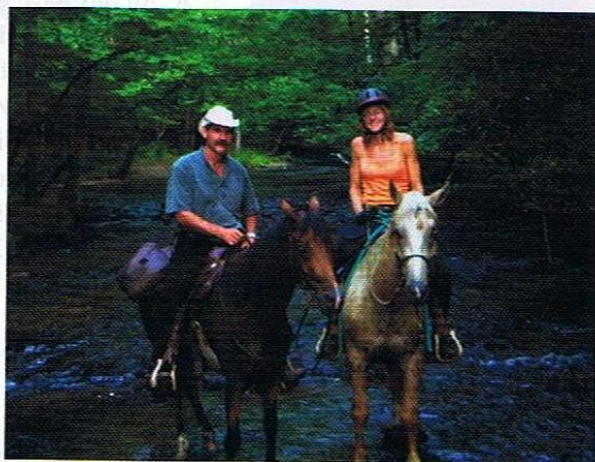
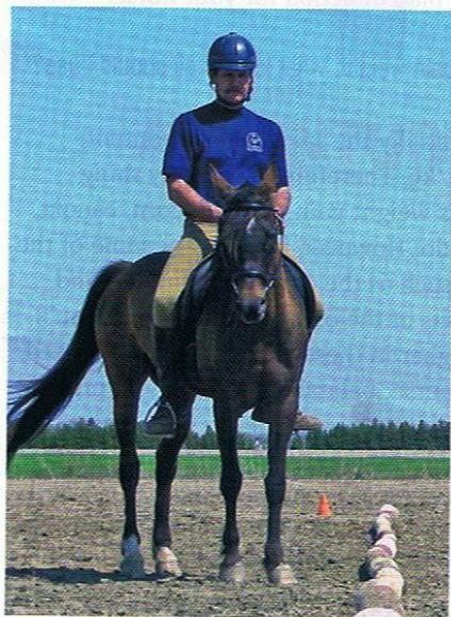
This lateral collecting movement is ridden forward and sideways. Both front and back legs cross over while the horse moves forward. Out of all the exercises in this article, this exercise puts the greatest demand on the inside hind leg strengthening it even more.

In this exercise Flip is bent to the right (the direction of her travel). I use my legs in the same fashion as in the haunches in exercise with the following difference: in order to get the front legs to cross over I recruit the use of my outside (left) knee and upper leg (by turning my seat to the right) while keeping my lower (left) leg back a bit to maintain bend and help drive her hind end over. The forehand should be slightly leading the hind end.



TAKING THE TIME IT TAKES

I can't stress this point enough. Be patient with your horse and yourself. This is a learning process. Get a few good steps and then move on to something else. In the next training session you will get a few more steps, and so on. Remember that these are "strength building" exercises and that it takes time to build strength and muscle. Anyone who has ever done any strength training can attest to this. Build some time for rest and relaxation into your horse's workout – your training will probably progress quicker if you do. You will likely build a better relationship with your horse, as well, if you keep your demands reasonable. 🐾



HAUNCHES IN

This exercise should be introduced after the Shoulder In. Start with a lesser angle than pictured here and slowly progress to a steeper angle. As the name implies, the haunches travel to the inside of the track. In this exercise Flip will clearly make four tracks or sets of hoof prints.

My inside (right) leg is responsible for the bend as well as driving Flip's inside (right) hind leg underneath her. My outside (left) leg is used to increase bend and keep Flip travelling along the track. Be sure to get your bend from your inside leg and be careful not to rely on the inside rein. As we progress through these exercises the weight demand on the inside hind leg increases, strengthening the hind end.

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 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