

COOL, CALM & COLLECTED, PART 5

by Walter Mantler

In this article, the fifth and final in our series, we will discuss riding a “finished horse” and the importance of “trusting” our horses and then “letting them go”. In this five-part series we have demonstrated the process of creating a cool, calm and collected partnership with our horse right from the early stages of training. It takes years to create a so-called finished horse. The key now to showing and competing successfully with a finished horse is to, first of all, trust that the horse knows its job and then to let the horse go.

Every now and then we really need to take a moment to think about how truly amazing these great creatures are in what they are willing to do for us. They certainly deserve to be trained and ridden with respect using proper training techniques.

LETTING GO

Being able to let your horse go comes as a result of hours upon hours of sensible, progressive training. It is through the proper training/understanding of the use of our seat, legs and posture that we are able to let the horse go when the time comes. Too often, people rely on their hands to create the proper “headset”. If we rely on our hands to create (what some believe to be) a proper headset, chances are slim that we will be able to let our horses go – they will rely on our hands to keep them in that frame. If we rely on our hands to create the frame we are looking for, we don’t have true collection.

THE “TRUST” FACTOR

For years we work with our horses to develop and maintain their trust in us. When the time comes in the training process, we need to reciprocate and trust our equine partners as well. I would like to throw in a quote from my wife Gisela who is an outstanding trainer/coach as well as my eyes on the ground while I’m in the saddle. “Your horse already knows what to do, just trust her and let her go”. If you have done your job developing and training your horses properly, maybe it’s time to trust them and let them go.

I have used two photos of Flip, my six-year-old reining Arab mare, to clearly demonstrate what I have been referring to as “letting go”. The loose western rein helps demonstrate what can be achieved with very light rein contact. In the photo below, Flip canters to the left nicely collected while on a loose rein. In the next photo, Flip performs a sliding stop on a loose rein, also very much on her hind end with a rounded back. Light rein contact allows a horse’s front end to lighten, elevate and extend. Having excessive rein contact restricts the front end of the horse, making it heavy. These rules about contact apply to both Western and English riding.



In this sequence of photos we show Flip being ridden in English tack. It's not always as easy for a bystander to determine how light the contact is when observing someone riding English. In the first photo, we are able to see some slack in the inside rein demonstrating that she is not being held in by my hands. In the second photo, I have since gathered up the slack in the inside rein in order to maintain light contact. Even though we still have contact, it is very light and I am still "letting her go".



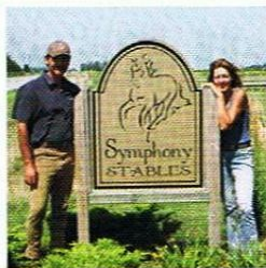
The pictures here show the same horse being ridden both English and Western. I've had English riders tell me, "she really is a nice English horse". I've had reiners tell me, "she really has great legs for the job....awesome mare". Many of the principles and physics behind training and riding a horse are the same, regardless of the discipline you choose. After all, a horse is a horse and will respond to the same stimulus regardless of the tack on its back. If your horse knows what to do, trust the horse and let the horse go.

RIDER NEEDS TO LET GO

Not only do we need to let the horse go, we need to let ourselves go as well. The harder we try, the more we hang on and the tighter everything in our body gets. We end up getting in the way of the horse as opposed to letting the horse do its job. It is usually more effective to, first of all, have the correct knowledge and then apply it correctly through our movements and equitation. When we try too hard with one part of our body it usually ends up distorting another part of our body, sometimes giving us the opposite result of what we are trying to achieve. Once you get to the point where you have been trained properly, relax, trust yourself and let go.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Someone told me that "perfect practice makes perfect" and that is true, but before you can practice perfection you are going to practice without perfection. The main thing is to find the best trainer you can afford – one who will teach you how to ride correctly by the seat of your pants, and one who will put the horse first and foremost. Once you have found the correct trainer, practice and then practice some more. If it takes 100 hours to learn a certain skill and you only practice one hour per week it will take you almost two years to learn that skill. If you practice four hours a week it will take just less than six months to learn that same skill. I encourage you to do the math the next time you evaluate your own progress. 🐾



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