

WESTERN HORSEMANSHIP

True horsemanship is the art and science of riding. There are horsemen and there are riders. Every horseman is a rider but not every rider is a horseman.

Horsemanship is the art of riding that helps the horse move freely with its natural grace and balance while carrying the weight of the rider and saddle. The horse must move at the will of the rider.

The horseman's body is in rhythm and balance with the action of the horse, helping the horse move easily, but never interfering by being behind the action.

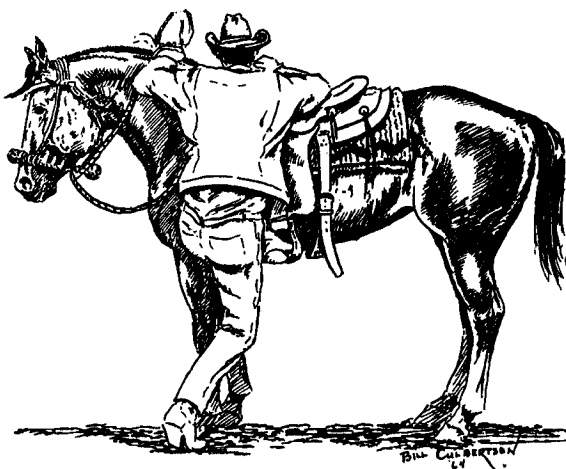
Proper training of the horse is necessary. The horseman must know and use basic principles to ride as a horseman. A horseman will change his style of seat, as seen in racing and cutting horse seats but the basic principles remain the same. The rider has shifted his seat to place his body in balance with the action of the horse. Horsemanship should become a habit that is used every time you handle a horse.

MOUNTING

Proper riding begins with proper mounting. First get your horse under control by adjusting the reins evenly with enough tension to feel the bit and hold the horse steady. Do not get the reins too tight. Hold the reins in your left hand and place this hand on the neck in front of the withers. Grasp the ridge of the neck or a lock of mane.

Twist the near stirrup with your right hand and place your left foot in the stirrup with the ball of your foot resting securely on the tread. Brace your left knee against the horse and move your right hand to grasp the saddle horn. You are now braced against the horse with your two hands and left leg forming a triangle of support.

Two body positions for mounting are acceptable in good horsemanship. Figure 1 shows a safe position for mounting strange or green horses. You stand by the horse's left shoulder facing a quarter turn to the rear.



Your head is turned so you can watch both ends of the horse. You are ahead of the saddle so any move made by the horse will help you swing into the saddle. If the horse moves while you are mounting, stop him before moving out. This teaches the horse to wait until you are ready to move out and may prevent a runaway. The position shown in Figure 2 should be used only on a gentle horse. Stand by the stirrup fender and face squarely across the seat of the saddle. Do not get the habit of standing by the back cinch - you may be kicked. From either of these two positions you push with your right leg and spring up and over the seat of the saddle. Spring up - do not pull yourself up. Shift your weight to your left leg to maintain balance, steady yourself with your hands, and settle easily into the saddle. Your right foot should slip into the off stirrup.

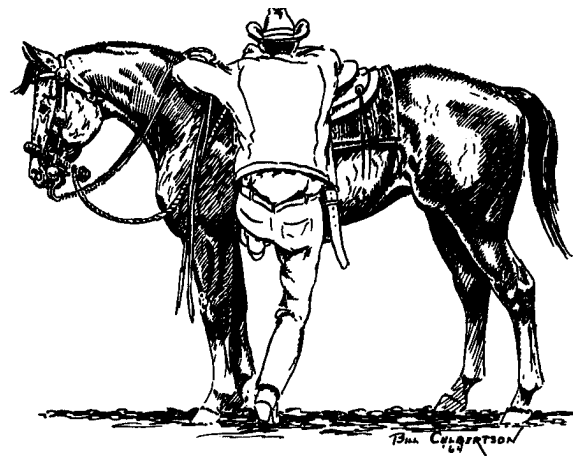
THE BASIC SEAT

You are in the saddle but are you sitting properly?

Study Figure 3. This is the basic seat position. Sit erect, seat deep in the saddle, with your body balanced and relaxed. Sit "tall in the saddle", do not slump. Note the lines from the point of the shoulder to the heel and from the point of the knee to the toe. The leg maintains light contact with the horse's body through the inside thigh and upper half of the calf. The foot is turned out slightly in a natural position with weight on the ball of the foot and the heel lower than the toe. Your ankle is flexible in this position. Keep your hand and arms relaxed and supple, elbows close to your body. The reins should be held just above and in front of the saddle horn.

In this position you are balanced, comfortable, your weight is where it will help the horse, and you are free to control your horse with aids.

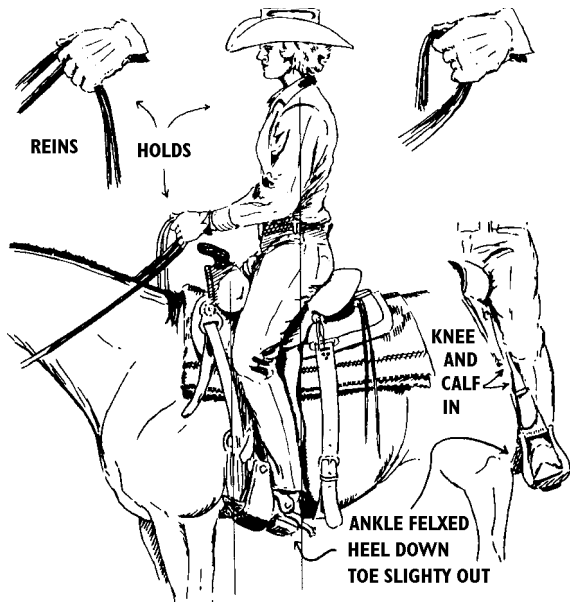
As your horse moves you will lean in the direction of movement to stay in balance. Keep your seat deep in the saddle and lean forward from the hips up. Flex at your waist to stay in rhythm with the horse's motion. If you



stay in balance your body will remain relaxed and supple. If you get out of balance you will stiffen your body and lose the rhythm of motion with your horse.

THE AIDS

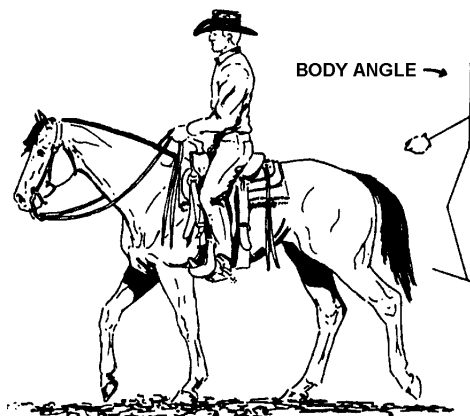
The aids commonly used are your voice, hands, legs, and weight. You use them to tell your horse what you want it to do. Your horse will learn to obey natural aids from habits you follow when riding. Study use of aids and make them your good habits.



Your horse learns from repetition so always use the same aids. Soon you will get response from the slightest signal.

Always speak to your horse in a soft, quiet, but firm voice. Loud talk makes a horse nervous.

Your hands are very important. They should be used to guide and help your horse. Use them lightly or they will become instruments of torture. Body balance is very important to prevent the habit of bracing yourself by



pulling on the reins. Your hands control the horse's forehand through the reins, bit and mouth. Keep your hands and fingers relaxed and flexible for light, soft signals through the reins. Signal your horse by using light pulls and slacking (called "give and take") of the reins with your fingers. Repeat these signals until you get response. Never pull steadily with all your strength - this ruins the mouth. Use training and patience - not force.

True neckreining is the response of your horse to the weight of the neckrein against the neck, not to the pull of the neckrein. Pulling forces the horse's head in the opposite direction you wish to turn.

Legs are used to signal speed and movements of the horse's hindquarters. Pressure is given by squeezing with the calves of your legs and your heels. Use spurs only to touch - not to jab.

Your weight is used as an aid by shifting your body. The horse will shift its body to attempt to balance your weight. The horse will feel the lightest weight shift so train it to respond without getting the habit of "throwing it around" with excessive weight shifts.

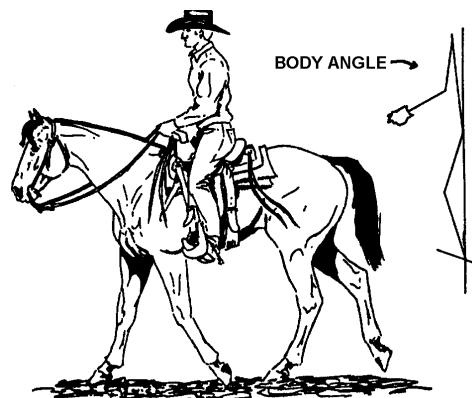
USING AIDS

FORWARD MOTION

"Gather" your horse by settling in the saddle and "taking in" on the reins. Release tension on the reins and squeeze with the calf of your leg. Control your speed by the amount of leg pressure and rein tension. Keep your horse moving "up in the bridle" by the leg pressure. Incline your body forward from the hips to stay in balance and flex at the waist to stay in rhythm.

WALK

The rider first must "gather" the horse by settling in the saddle and "taking in" on the reins. This alerts the horse



for action. Next release the rein tension and apply just enough pressure with the leg and heel to move the horse. The rider's body is inclined forward just slightly to remain balanced, and flexes at the waist with the movement. Maintain enough leg pressure to keep the horse moving "up in the bridle." The reins are slack but not loosely flapping.

SLOW TROT (JOG)

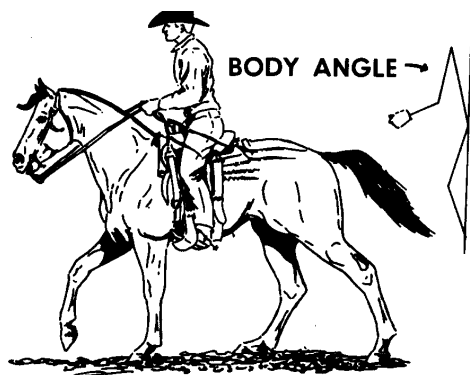
The trot is ridden Western style with the rider's body deep in the saddle, but with weight enough on the ankles to absorb the motion. The body is inclined forward slightly more than at a walk.

More leg pressure is applied to move the horse forward, and just enough tension is maintained on the reins to hold the horse to the desired speed. The rider's arms are close to the body and the fingers flex with the movement of the horse's head as this movement is transmitted through the reins.

The feet and legs are steady and the heel is down, with the ankles flexing to absorb weight.

GALLOP OR LOPE

Train the horse to go into the lope from the walk in the lead the rider wishes to assume. Take up on the reins to collect the horse and then release rein tension enough to allow the horse to assume the gait. Leg pressure is strong enough to move the horse directly to the lope. The heel is used to aid in obtaining the correct lead as explained under the section on leads. The rider sits deep in the saddle with the body inclined forward from the hips. Relaxed hands are very important at this gait to allow for rhythm with the movement of the horse's head. The legs are kept in close contact with the saddle and horse.



STOPPING

Signal for a stop when the horse's rear legs are moving forward under its body. Allow for one or two extra strides. Give a light pull on the reins, shift your weight slightly forward and then to the rear. Keep your body erect and your seat deep in the saddle. Grip with your thighs and force your heel down to let your ankle absorb weight at the stirrup. Keep your hands low and signal with repeated "give and take" on the reins. Do not throw your body back, shove your feet forward, and pull on the reins.

CORRECT LEADS

When a horse gallops its body is turned at an angle or diagonal to the direction of travel and it is moving one fore-leg and one rear leg, both on the same side of the body, ahead of the other two legs. This is called "leading" and is very important for smooth turns. Use of aids, to get your horse into the proper lead, requires practice and patience. The horse must be settled. Working in circles at a slow lope will help.

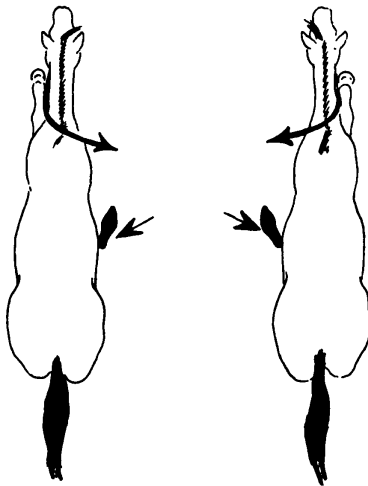
The aids used to obtain the lead you want guide the horse's body into the correct diagonal for the lead.

To obtain the left lead apply pressure with your right leg which signals the horse to move out and to swing the hindquarters into the diagonal. At the same time neckrein very slightly to the right and lean forward to shift your weight very slightly to the left. The proper steps are leg pressure, weight shift and neckrein, but they are all done at almost the same instance.

For the right lead apply pressure with the left leg, lean forward slightly to shift weight to the right, and neckrein slightly to the left.

Study how the neckrein, weight shift, and leg pressure move the horse's body into the correct diagonal for the lead the horse takes.





TURNING

Neckrein to move the horse's forehand in the direction of the turn. Slight pressure with your leg on the side of the horse opposite the direction of turning will hold the hindquarters in position so the horse will pivot on the hindquarters instead of swinging them wide.

SIDE PASSAGE

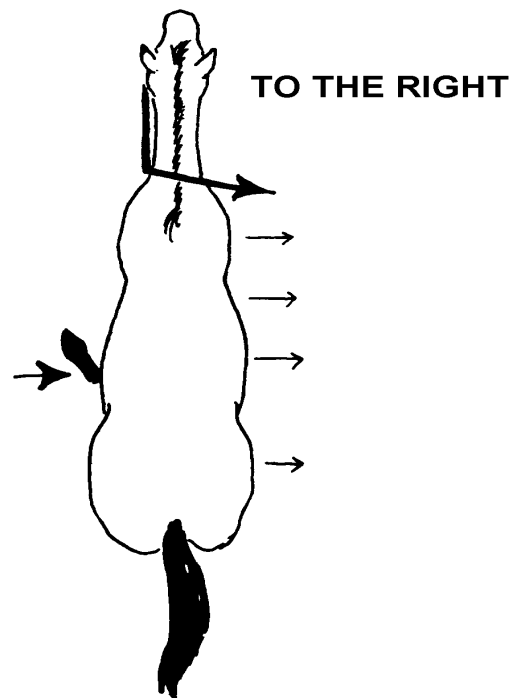
This movement is important for opening gates. Hold your horse in to prevent forward motion. Neckrein in the direction you wish to move the forequarters. Use your outside leg to move the hindquarters.

BACKING

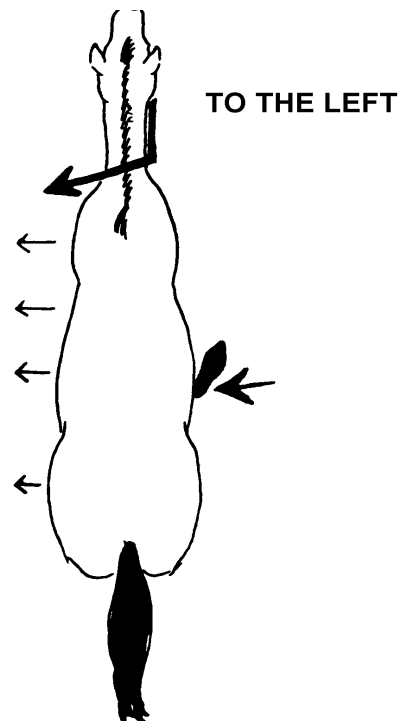
Set erect with your body weight forward. Grip with your thighs. Hold the reins low and pull lightly on the reins - "give and take". Control the direction of backing by pressure of either leg to guide the hindquarters and light rein tension to guide the forequarters.

DISMOUNTING

Take up on your reins to hold the horse in control. Grasp the saddle horn with your right hand, loosen your left foot in the stirrup and shift your weight to your left leg. Brace with your left knee and swing out of the saddle keeping your right leg close to the horse. Don't hit the cantle and horse's rump as you swing down. Keep your right leg close to the horse as you come down so you will be facing slightly forward when your foot touches the ground. When your right foot is securely on the ground, shift your weight to it, push down on your left heel and let your foot slip out of the stirrup.



Horsemanship requires practice and patience. You must know what to do and do the same every time as your horse learns by habit. If you work carefully you will find your horse responding to your signals more quickly and easily each time. When this begins to happen you will then be experiencing the first pleasures of riding like a true horseman.



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