

Meredith Hodges's New Series Looks at Communication

In her new series, "Equus Revisited: A Complete Approach to Athletic Conditioning," Meredith Hodges stresses the importance of good, clear communication between you and your equine. Following are excerpts from this all new two-DVD program and full-color manual that touch on this crucial component of training.

As your equine partner learns how to keep his posture with equal balance over all four feet and move in rhythm and cadence, you must also get a sense of your body and how it affects your equine's balance and ability to respond to you, even when you're not riding him...

...With a solid foundation of proper care, maintenance and groundwork, you and your equine are on the road to a long and successful partnership. When your equine is comfortable, his mind will relax and become more receptive to training. As trust and confidence grow and rhythm, cadence, coordination and balance improve, the connection between you and your equine will only deepen. His trust and sense of security will open the doors to communication between you and prepare him for more intimate communication through the bit...

... As the bit puts pressure on the soft tissue, it translates through to the bone. Severely conformed bits or people who use bits severely can do considerable damage to an equine's mouth. Think of the bit as an attention getting device. That doesn't mean that it should be painful, just that there's something there that normally isn't, and we're using it to communicate with the animal...

... Whether you are using a snaffle bit or a curb bit, driving or riding, when you pull back, the indication is clear for the equine to stop or back and when you release, for him to go forward. The corners of the mouth are the most sensitive to vibration, and he will respond to less and less pressure as he learns what you want through repetition...

... Ground driving is a wonderful preparation for the rein cues you'll give while driving and riding. Again we want to break things down into small, doable steps...

... It's important to learn how to hold the reins and develop communication between your hands and the equine's mouth. You want to pull just hard enough to get a response. Pull too hard and you'll get an over-reaction...

... Think of holding your reins like a thread that can break if you pull too hard, or too much. This will help you to find the right tension for your connection to the mouth. You'll learn to give and take to avoid resistance this way, and it will keep your equine from getting too heavy, or leaning on the bridle. If you give yourself plenty of time to practice rein technique at the ground driving stage, then he'll be much lighter in the bridle when you finally get on and ride.

Eventually you'll have taught your own body to be so light that it will take an imperceptible movement to get a response. You'll think, "Wow, I just thought of that and he did it!" That's the kind of cooperation you're working toward.

"Equus Revisited" is designed to complement Meredith's training series Training Mules and Donkeys. For more information about Meredith Hodges, "Equus Revisited" and Training Mules and Donkeys, please visit www.luckythreeranch.com or call 800-816-7566.