

Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder, Part 1: Solve Every Problem

by Josh Lyons & Keith Hosman

articles 9.1 & 11.1, page 1 of 2

Recommendation: Before this exercise practice another called “Three Step Stop.” After this exercise practice “The Clock Work Exercise” (which teaches diagonals)

Before you begin Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder, practice “Three Step Stop.” That exercise would have begun to teach your horse to not carry so much weight on the front half of his body. So instead of leaning or dropping the balance of his weight onto his shoulders, (when he stops for instance) he would have learned to stay more maneuverable by carrying more weight more evenly throughout his body with his back end doing more of it’s fair share. He’ll begin traveling with his shoulders “raised” as opposed to “dropped.” (You experienced a dropped shoulder the last time you leaned into a turn and you felt like sliding off. You probably blamed the fit of the saddle or figured your cinch was too loose.)

Practice Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder to gain more control over your horse’s shoulders (so your knee won’t hit a tree, so he won’t “dive into his turns,” etc.), to teach your horse to back with far less resistance – and to take a giant step toward teaching your horse to carry itself in a more collected fashion. (“Collection” equates to turning without leaning, turning now instead of later, etc.)

But this exercise, Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder, has become a “classic” exercise for one very big reason: It gives you control of your horse’s stop. Every horse-related problem you can think of comes down to “going and stopping.” “I can’t get my horse to cross the creek.” “I can’t get my horse to go in the arena.” “I can’t get my horse to go away from another horse.” And people get hurt when they can’t stop their horse: “I can’t get my horse to stop bucking, stop rearing, or stop kicking.” We spend most of our training time, (as in this exercise) dealing with, and practicing, “going and stopping” because that’s where you need the most control.

If you pick up two reins to stop your horse, he might stop – but without the correct training he’s going to get heavier and heavier on that bit. And that means his stop is going to get worse and worse. If you remember nothing else from this lesson, remember this: If it takes your horse two seconds to stop then back up, you can multiply that by eight to figure how long it’ll take your horse to stop when he’s running and his emotions are high. Your horse can travel a long way in those 16 seconds – maybe far enough to get you bucked off or seriously hurt. To keep you safe, you want to teach your horse to go from a walk to backing up with zero hesitation. And that’s what this exercise gives you.

First you teach the horse to “start to stop” by getting a single part of him to quit moving. Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder first teaches the horse to stop a single shoulder and swing his back end around. His power comes from the rear, so swinging those hips puts his “engine” into neutral causing that single shoulder to stop. When you’re able to consistently stop that single shoulder you can begin teaching the horse the concept of “stopping and backing.”

Horses That Kick On The Trail

by Josh Lyons & John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

Have you ever seen a red ribbon tied to a horse’s tail? What does that ribbon mean? It means “Stay away from me. My horse will kick your horse.”

Does that make you mad? Maybe it should. You’ve gone to a lot of time and trouble to train your horse, to teach it that it is never okay to act up or kick somebody else’s horse – but the guy next to you with the ribbon skipped the whole process. The days you worked on gaining control over your horse, he spent going to the movies. You put in the hard work it takes to build a safe horse; they skipped the process entirely.

How about I take a rope and throw it at that red ribbon? Their horse might kick and it might buck. And it might make the rider turn around and say “What the devil did you do that for?” And I might just answer “I’m telling your horse’s butt to stay away from the end of my rope.”

But here’s the bottom line: While the guy with the ribbon should have trained his horse better before hitting the trail, you should train your own horse to deal with other, poorly trained horses. If their horse can run backwards kicking at your horse, then you need the control it takes to duck out of the way. Teach your horse to focus on you, to stay out of fights and to behave itself by being steadfast in your training.

It is our responsibility to train our horses and make them safe under all circumstances. If your horse jumps at the sight of a tractor, don’t get mad at the farmer. Spend more time training your horse.

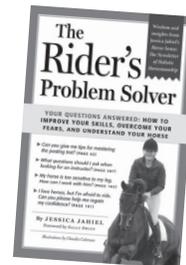
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“Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder has become a ‘classic’ exercise for one very big reason.”

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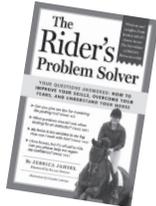
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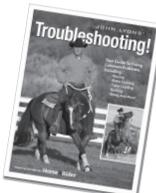
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Getting control over a single shoulder will go a long way to controlling your horse – but that’s not going to be good enough. To understand why, think of your horse as a car: Like a car, your horse has four sets of brakes, one on each foot. Practicing Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder on the left side gives you brakes on the left front foot (that single shoulder mentioned above). But... do you want to drive a car with three out of four brakes out? Is that the car you’d take down a scary trail or let your kid drive? What’s going to happen when you apply just that single brake? At best your horse the car is not going to stop evenly; he’ll veer and you may have an accident on your hands. You need to build all four sets of brakes – and you need an exercise like Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder to isolate horse body parts to build each brake individually.

To really drive this point home, allow us one more analogy: Have you ever seen a train stop? It stops from the front end. Like that train, when your horse stops, all his energy piles into the front end, pushing the front – causing you to “stop” (notice the quotes) about four blocks later if you haven’t got control over all four feet. Stopping in four blocks isn’t any good if the cliff is coming up in one.

Practicing Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder will give you a way to tell each shoulder to stop. And, if one of his hindquarters should continue driving forward or veer off to one side (during your stop), you’ll have the ability to pick up a rein and say “Hey, move your rear to the left, back behind you; quit driving forward.” By the same token, you’ll have a way to fix those front brakes (shoulders) should they begin to slip (read: not stop) by isolating and fixing one shoulder at a time.

We’re trying to gain control of particular parts of the horse’s body. This exercise isn’t about teaching a “stop.” That’s too broad. If your horse doesn’t stop correctly, you want to fix the part that “stops the worst.” Because when you ask the horse to do something, it’s never the whole horse that messes up. There will be a part of the horse that you need to single out and fix. You simply have to have a way to break it down and talk to each body part individually because if you can’t tell a specific part how to move, there’s no way to control the whole horse.

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PROVIDED BY

**KEITH
HOSMAN**

John & Josh Lyons Certified Horseman

PO Box 31, Utopia, TX 78884
213-923-1215 • kh@horsemanship101.com
www.horsemanship101.com

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