

Steering Your Horse (Steer the Tail, Part II)

by Josh Lyons & Keith Hosman

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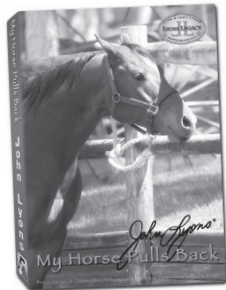
Note: This is a follow-up article to the “Steer the Tail” exercise. Find that first segment online at Horsemanship101.com/Articles.

The “Steer the Tail Exercise”: What You Should Expect
The “Steer the Tail” training exercise will have the effect of awakening your horse to the touch of the rein. Following patient practice, you’ll find your horse calmer, softer and more willing to keep a bend in his body. Plus, you’ll have a way to teach him to turn - not drift - through his circles. For all horses, young and old.

What If?... If you get a slingshot action with the horse’s head, where you pull it back and they give but immediately throw it forward, then move your hands a little slower. Hold on longer, move slower to give back. Make them hold a little longer, until they really soften up, then slowly give it back and change direction.

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Why Am I Doing This Again? Your horse “powers himself” from the hindquarters. Being able to “disengage” the hips allows you to unplug that power or use it to your advantage. You can move the hips to discourage your young horse from bucking or rearing. This training exercise also gives you a terrific way to begin teaching direct reining or reinforce your direct rein if your horse misses a turn: Pick up the rein and say “No, we’re going THAT way.”

Keeping The Following In Mind Will Help You: A horse always has one good side and one bad side. The problem is that it keeps changing. The left side might be good now and the right side is the bad side. You’ll work on that for fifteen minutes – and all of a sudden the right side is the good side and the left side is the bad side. It’ll keep going back and forth. Smile, it’s just part of training.

Common Mistake: Doing a U-Turn instead of insisting that the tail pivot around the shoulders like the hands of a clock. Watch that inside shoulder until it stops – that’s when you’re moving the

hips correctly. Remember to time your release in order to let the horse know that that’s what you’ve been looking for.

Don’t: Ride in a straight line. You shouldn’t take more than two steps in a straight line before turning. Getting a young horse to travel straight is a perfection of going left and right. If I can’t get my horse to travel straight, it’s because he’s either going left or right. If he’s going left when I’m asking him to go straight, that means he’s not responding to my right cue. (That is “turn right.”) So in your training you should work on going left and right. The more you work on left and right, the easier “straight” is.

Do: Sit up. If your nose gets beyond that saddle horn your body will get out of position. If he stops hard or does something, your body will have a tendency to fall forward. If you’re kicking and that horse isn’t moving, you keep bumping and pick up that rein. If you bump and he’s not moving, keep bumping, don’t bump harder, pick up that rein and make him move. That rein is more powerful than your legs are. Put more pressure on that rein and have that hip move over. If a horse locks up and you keep driving him with your legs what is going to happen eventually, if he does go, you’re going to get too much energy. He’s going to lurch forward or bolt or jump on you. What will happen is that you will put too much energy into your horse too fast and you can lose control of him.

Do This Exercise Until: While you’ve never actually “completed” any exercise, you should do this one until you can pick up either rein and the horse immediately responds by planting his inside leg while moving his hip around smoothly. His neck should be relaxed, slightly bent and carried at the proper height.

Number One Training Mistake We See: It is very important that you do not stall out after the horse plants his leg and swings his hips. You might have the tendency to stop and congratulate the horse for doing it right. While it is always important to praise your horse for completing an exercise correctly, **DO NOT STOP WHEN YOU RELEASE THE REIN – PUSH HIM OUT RIGHT AWAY.** If you do not, your horse won’t get lighter, instead his legs will begin to move more and more sluggishly. Think LaBrea Tar Pits.

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