

How Long Should I Ride?

by Josh Lyons & Keith Hosman

article 2.1

A person is able to keep his or her attention span for about twenty minutes before something else enters their head. The coffee pot he left on will come flying into his head. A saddle sore, the bills, the husband, this problem or that problem - all begin jockeying for attention. Which means that the best amount of time to ride a horse is for about twenty minutes. Ride focused for twenty minutes, then give yourself (and therefore the horse) a ten to twenty minute break and ride for twenty minutes again. If you know your training's going to last for twenty minutes, then you can focus and stay working intensely.

During those twenty minutes, you want to make something better. Just look down and ask yourself "What is it? What can I make better?" Find something. You should never be satisfied with what you've got or what you've done. "Satisfied" is another word for "content" which is another word for "quitting." There's always more to do; there's always more to accomplish. So never be satisfied.

Keep raising your expectations. The whole time you're riding, you need to be looking for the moment when you can begin asking for more. Look for something to make better. Not everything, just something. Say you're starting off and you're just kind of moving around. You and your horse are out there simply changing directions. You don't care how it looks; you're just changing directions. After awhile you should begin staying in one direction till you see the nose start to go down, or you feel it start to soften up. Then your training should build on that. Horse training is always asking for something to get better. Either the horse stays going the same speed, or his nose stays bent to the inside, or he softens up... something has got to get better.

A key to making this improvement is for you to keep focused. When you "ride focused" you're being a proactive, rather than reactive rider. You're not reacting to the horse's mistakes, saying in effect "no," "no," "no," "no..." Instead, you're asking for a particular

movement ("hip to the left one step, release, repeat") over and over and over. This puts you in charge. It keeps you from nagging. It gets the horse's attention and improves performance.

Your focus also gives the horse less time to think about the buddy he left behind, the horse-eating plastic bag or the truck driving by. During your twenty minutes you'll just keep coming at the horse like George Foreman on his best day. (Don't forget to give little mini breaks in between each short drill.) The more you give the horse to think about, the less time the horse has to get distracted. If

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by Josh Lyons & John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

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your horse still seems distracted, give him more to do. Say, "Fine, horse, you can turn to the left and still whinny at your buddy over there. But, can you turn to the left, keep your head tucked, your haunches in and move at exactly this speed and STILL whinny at your buddy?" Keep adding things for the horse to do: Pick up speed, slow down, change directions, soften the nose up, drop his ears, raise his ears, change direction, break at the poll, etc. You're looking for that magic point where the horse focuses on you. He hasn't forgotten his pasture buddy - just decided it's too much work to worry about him.

Bottom line: Ride intensely for twenty minutes. Stay focused during that time and look for improvement, no matter how small.

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