

Horses That Pull On The Bit & Head Tossers

by Josh Lyons & Keith Hosman

articles 6.2 & 10.1

Ninety percent of the time "head tossing" and "rooting at the bit" are caused by the person riding the horse. If your horse "roots at the bit," that is, he drops his head and pulls or tugs the reins out of your hands, then he's learned that when he pulls you give. He knows that when he yanks the bit, he'll get a release from bit pressure because your hands will move in kind. The head-tossing horse has learned the same thing.

It doesn't take a horse long to realize that he can move your hand. The opposite would be true if you were to tie him to a tree. He'd pull a couple of times and realize there's no give. He'd quit pulling; there's no point. If your horse yanks at the bit, then pick it back up and be ready the next time. You want to try to catch him before he can yank that bit away by being prepared to hold it steady. When you take ahold of the reins, lock both your fists behind the saddle. That'll give you the leverage you need to hold on the next time he gives it a good yank. Hold until the horse softens and then give the reins back. Until your horse gives you back his head just the way you want him to, you just keep picking them up, asking him to soften again – and again and again.

The same thing will happen if you release too quickly. If you were to give the reins back very quickly (and very often), some horses will begin taking their head back very quickly (the head tossing/slingshot/snapped rubber band effect). If that happens, simply make the horse keep its head in position, waiting a little longer before releasing. Just keeping putting his head back, practice your timing – and release on "politeness" from your horse. Say to your horse "If you're going to take your head back, take it back with manners." If that little voice in your head says your horse is playing you – he just might be.

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An Easy Way To Look At Training

by Josh Lyons & John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

Your horse is like a garden hose. Pressure, or energy, flows through your horse from one end to the other like water through a hose. To stop the water you wouldn't simply crimp the hose in half – and to stop your horse you wouldn't simply pull back on both reins. You won't stop the water and you won't stop the horse. You'll get leaks.

Until you teach your horse to deal with the pressure.

Crimp the hose and you get leaks, pull back on both reins and your horse "gets leaks." He'll leak that energy. Body parts will shoot out to the left, to the right, up or down. He'll jig to the right or left, bolt, shoot backward, buck or rear.

The solution is this: Use training exercises to let a little pressure leak here and there, redirecting that energy to your advantage. For example, in our Hip-Shoulder-Shoulder exercise we begin by walking forward, then pick up a rein and ask one shoulder to stop while the rear end keeps moving. We cause one shoulder to stop, so we make a connection between the rein and stopping the shoulder – but we allow the energy to continue flowing by allowing (or causing) the hips to keep moving. By not bottling the horse up, we've helped keep him calm, yet achieved a training objective. We've shown him how to channel that energy into a turn, a stop or whatever. And for the horse that wasn't stopping, it's become a simple thing to "turn the water off."

For instance: Is your horse getting jiggy with ya? Does he just kind of dance around, looking for trouble? Look for ways to redirect this energy in your every day riding to calm him down. Want to teach a particular movement? Begin thinking of "re-channeling" the movement of your horse through a combination of body parts. Allowing pressure to escape "out your horse's shoulder" back and to the left creates a spin to the left. Allowing half his energy to go out his shoulder to the left and the other half out his hindquarters to the left creates a sidepass. It's easy when you break it down and stick with it. something. Ride.

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