

# GROUND — EXERCISES — FOR HORSES





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## EXERCISE ONE

## Releasing Pressure and Relax Time

It is very important when doing your ground work, especially with youngsters, that you keep it minimal.

Don't keep going over and over the same thing as your horse will start to get resentful and bored - especially if he got it really well the first time.

Make sure you have your horses attention before you start any exercises and be sure to reward with immediate release after you apply any kind of pressure. Also, stop mid-way through the lesson to give your horse and yourself a break.



*Moonshine standing quietly. Having a break mid-way through training is good for both horse and trainer.*

Remember to keep the pressure when you ask for something clear and very light, only upping the pressure a little at a time if required.





*Moonshine and the trainer are totally relaxed, both absorbing the day's work.*

It is also a good idea checking out how much pressure you use by applying it to yourself and see how it feels. If someone pointed at you, would you move? If not, would you move if someone applied very light pressure to your arm - just touching just the hair - upping the pressure to skin, muscle and then bone?



*Moonshine getting some soak time mid-way through training and getting praised for his hard work, he is really appreciating the time for standing quietly and just being.*

## EXERCISE TWO



## Halter Training

Halter training is one of the most important exercises that you can do with your horse.

I feed my horses breakfast with their rope halters on so that they don't only associate them with work.

Sometimes I go up to the field and slip their halters on, give them a piece of carrot and take the halter off again.

This can also help with difficult to catch horses. I couldn't catch my horse Moonshine, as obviously he was very suspicious of humans after being in a herd so long.

Moonshine is an untouched 7 year old. Magical Mose was more trusting and I managed to halter train him in the field (he is an untouched 5 year old).

Three weeks ago I brought Magical Mose and Moonshine in from the field for a week, so I could halter train Moonshine and do some other touching and grooming exercises with both horses. We removed all the horses from the field apart from Magical Mose, I then haltered Mose and lead him out of the field and of course Moonshine followed, that is how we got him into the stable.

Every time I gave Moonshine his breakfast and tea I put his rope halter on and when I turned him out into the small field, at first he wouldn't be caught.

I would take Mose in first and obviously Moonshine was more than ready to come in too. I put his halter on and gave him a small piece of carrot so he associated the halter and being caught with something nice.

Moonshine has remembered this and comes up to me all the time and is happy for me to put his halter on for breakfast, or otherwise, and now he even comes over just for a stroke, I still always carry the halter, even if I am just going to see them.

I have never tried to catch any of my horses by hiding the rope halter, I always have it on my arm where it is visible and sometimes just go up and stroke them and then walk away.

Do not hide things from a horse as they will become more suspicious of you and can out-run you any-day.

If you have a horse that walks away from you and starts to graze when you walk up to him with a halter, you can flap both arms out to the side to get his attention, making it difficult for them to graze.

Sometimes Moonshine decides not be caught and I flap my arms out to the side, he doesn't graze, he walks off and he may trot up and down and try to hide behind other horses, so I make this difficult for him too.

Then he cottons on and starts to circle me, I just stand in a quiet way and then he stops and faces me. I then take a step back and he takes a step towards me, then I walk up to him and stroke him, that is all I want and then I walk away, sometimes he follows me and sometimes he doesn't, but I have achieved what I wanted.

Be prepared for a long haul, you may have to follow him round for quite a while - and do not do this when you have only got 10 minutes, your horse will know.

If you have got a few hours, an exercise like this will take maybe 10 minutes, if you only have 10 minutes you can almost guarantee it will take you a few hours.

What you are doing with this exercise is making it uncomfortable for him to walk away and graze, so every time you flap your arms out to the side, you are not letting him graze and you are getting his attention back to you, make sure that you are well out of his kick zone.

There are two knot rope halters and four knot rope halters, both are pressure halters and should not be used to tether your horse or travel in, they are purely for working with them on the ground.

I made the mistake of ordering the halters with four knots, but this doesn't matter, because, as with anything, is who is on the other end of the halter and what they are doing that is important. In the wrong hands they can do a lot of damage if used the wrong way, so remember all of this before you set out down the rope halter road. If you are unsure, please seek professional help or guidance from someone who does know about this type of training.

The work you do with the rope halter also prepares the horse for being ridden bit-less in a rope halter bridle and as with any ground work you do with your horse it is strengthening the bond between you.



*The rope halter exercise with Moonshine. Moonshine is now very happy and patient about having his rope halter put on.*

I first rubbed the halter over his neck and shoulder before rubbing his face, I then slipped it on and off his nose before I tied it.

Both Moonshine and Magical Mose were nervous at first when I put the rope over behind their ears and so I did lots of arm raising work and rubbing their ears until they were comfortable with the halters. Now I have no problem with putting the rope tie over behind their ears. Playing with the horses ears is also good for head-shy horses. You can start by just resting your hand behind their ears on their poll, so when they move their ears they are touching you and not the other way round, this is a very sensitive spot for horses. I did this exercise with both of my horses and still do halter trained Magical



Mose in the field. He was very keen to come over for a fuss and so once he knew me, I began to go and see him with the rope halter. I started just by rubbing the halter over his neck and shoulder and then over his face. Then I started slipping it on and off his nose, without tying it, then each time I took my arm further up the side of his face until I was able to pass the rope over the top of his poll and tie it the other side.



Before I went to tying the halters I made sure that both Moonshine and Magical Mose were comfortable about having their ears touched. Now Magical Mose is happy with the rope halter and with being led.



*This is an example of a very relaxed horse in a two knot rope halter, this horse has all the groundwork exercises done on him, even now he is backed and he is also ridden in a rope halter bridle.*



*This is the rope halter bridle.*

Once you have done all your ground work with the rope halter you are ready to ride bit-less, if that is the option you choose. Remember that even if you are thinking of transferring your horse from a bit to a bit-less bridle you still need to do all the groundwork with a rope halter.

Your mind and body are also powerful tools, use them wisely to work with your horse, not against him. The more time you spend with your horse and the more groundwork you do, the more powerful a bond you will have with your horse.

## EXERCISE THREE



## Rope Work Over The Body and Swinging The Rope

Another de-sensitising exercise.

Before you start any ground work with the rope, it is important that your horse is used to the rope.

You can rub the rope over his body, swing it very gently around his legs and as you progress wiggle and swing it at the front and side of him.

Very gently swinging the rope around the horses legs helps them get used to you touching their legs, if they get the rope tied round their legs or if they get their legs trapped in something, hopefully they won't panic if they are used to stuff being around their legs.

Never underestimate the power of your horse and that he is three times stronger if he panics.

Do not swing the rope violently, remember the swinging of the rope around the legs or anywhere is meant to represent the gentle swishing of a horses tail, not for hitting him with.

I remember a friend of mine years ago had tethered her horse to a metal gate. The horse pulled back and instead of yielding to the pressure and stepping forwards, he kept on pulling back. Sure enough the metal gate gave off its hinges and the horse took off up the lane dragging the metal gate alongside him. Luckily, at the end of the track, a lorry was blocking the way out and the horse had no option other than to grind to a halt. Luckily not too much damage was done, but he was obviously very panicked at dragging the metal gate and having it swinging around his legs only to realise the faster he tried to get away from it, the faster it swung at him.

This de-sensitising exercise is also good for starting to get the horse used to things swinging around him, as that is what you will be doing when you



put a rug or saddle on him - and indeed when you go to get on him.

You can also progress to standing on a mountain block when you groom him or put a rug on him, this once again prepares him for you being above him, which you will be when it comes to riding.

Obviously in the first place, practice swinging the rope when it is not attached to your horse, because it is important you don't hit your horse, he may forgive you, but he won't thank you for hitting him and neither will he know it was an accident on your part.



*Rope over the body exercise. Swinging the rope over Mosey's body and then dragging it away or letting it fall onto the ground is all good de-sensitising work. It helps him get used to putting rugs on and off and indeed prepares him, just in case you fall off.*



*Swinging the rope exercise. Here the trainer is just starting to wiggle and spin the rope in front of Mosey, at first this is done in gentle movements. Later you can progress to really swinging the rope, you can also practice this exercise gently if you are leading with an extra-long leadrope. I usually swing the leadrope and whistle at the same time, it just seems to calm my horses.*

## EXERCISE FOUR



## Leg Stretch

Leg stretches are very good for all sorts of reasons. They go in a very gentle forwards and backwards motion, as well as a circular motion. This exercise should only be done in a very gently way.

Do not exaggerate this movement as you may cause injury to your horse.

First of all this exercise gets your horse used to you handling his legs and from there you are able to pick his feet out.

It is also useful for when the trimmer comes or for anything you may need to do with your horses legs in the future.



*Picking up the leg ready for the exercise.*





*Gently moving the leg back and forth.*



*Gently moving the leg in a circular motion.*



*Gently moving the back leg back and forth.*



*Gently moving the back leg in a circular motion.*

Note how the hind leg is only slightly raised off the ground.  
This is a very gently exercise.



## EXERCISE FIVE



## Full Neck Stretch

Asking your horse for the full neck stretch into his body is a very important exercise: it prepares you with asking for direction with your reins and legs when riding.

Notice how the trainer is using her hand in a position where your leg would be when riding.

You can help your horse with this stretch by asking his head round gently in your direction.

At either side of the horses nose there are two little dents, this is obviously a very sensitive spot and must be treated with respect at all times.

Do NOT pull or drag your horses nose or squeeze it tightly, this is not the name of the game.

When you place your hands on these dents in your horses nose you are gently asking your horses head round in your direction, whilst keeping your hand gently on his side.



*Preparing Floyd for the full neck stretch. Make sure your horse is straight before you ask for this exercise and the aim is for him to keep his feet still and only move his head round to you.*



*Asking Floyd for the full neck stretch. Note how the trainer is placing her hand gently in the position where your leg would be for riding and how Floyd has turned his head to this ask.*



*Helping your horse with the neck stretch. You can put your hand gently on your horses nose where the two dents are and ask him round to you.*



*Trainers hands are gently guiding the nose round.*

## EXERCISE SIX



## Horses Attention – Leading and Changing Direction

Leading your horse and changing direction is also about body language and keeping things quiet, relaxed and loose.

It is helping you to keep control of your horse on the ground, not to invade your space, giving the horse direction and deciding where you want to keep your horse.

I ask my horses, as much as possible, to lead at my elbow during training, but with a good long rope. If you are out on the roads you can walk ahead with confidence, but still see where your horse is out of the corner of your eye. If he jumps back he will not take you by surprise, dragging you with him. And if he jumps forwards he will not crash into you.

All training is about moving feet, the horse moving his feet for you and you not moving your feet for him.

Good groundwork equals a calm, confident and polite horse. When doing ground work always look up and be confident about where you are going, never look down. This also applies to ridden work.

Even if a horse spooks you need to remain calm and confident, look ahead, keep walking and remember to breathe calmly, this is showing your horse that there is absolutely nothing to be worried about and only praise him once he is calm and doing the right thing by walking calmly on.

Whatever you are doing with your horse always remember that these things are a must:

- A calm and confident approach to everything you do.
- A hard hat has saved my life on many an occasions.



- Leather gloves to prevent any rope burns.
- Good sturdy shoes, from past experiences I tend now to wear steel toe capped boots when training horses.

Remember it is also about listening to your horse and sometimes letting him take the lead. A horse's instinct to go the 'right way' is amazing. Once, lost on a ride, at the crossroads I wanted to go left and my horse refused to budge. One of those moments again. The horse already knew I was totally lost. I left it up to him and let him choose all the junctions home and guess what, that is exactly where he took me, home.



*Moonshine leading nicely without invading the trainers space.*



*Moonshine following the lead nicely.  
Notice the trainers arm and leg getting ready to turn.*



*Moonshine leading and following the turn. Look at Moonshines body starting to turn, following the trainers rope. Look how soft the trainer has the rope in her hand, her hand is open, therefore applying no pressure at all, only offering direction.*



*Asking Moonshine to change direction. Note how the trainer is blocking Moonshine from going past her with her right arm, but has her left arm stretched out asking for the new direction.*





*Moonshine turning and going in a new direction. Look how the trainer is leaning with her body, showing the new direction for Moonshine to head in, note how Moonshine is responding with his ears and body, following the trainers ask.*



*Using body language to ask Moonshine to move in a different direction. The trainer is leaning and stepping out to the side, showing Moonshine which direction she would like him to move off in.*





*Magical Mose following the trainers lead. Look how nicely the pony is following the trainer and look how both their feet are placed the same. This pony is a little stiff but his flexion and suppleness will come with time, he has just started this training programme and this is his second time doing these exercises.*

## EXERCISE SEVEN



## Halt and Personal Space

I am sure that there is not too much need to explain why the halt and personal space is so important, but here it goes.

Obviously, if your horse knows how to halt on cue (I normally raise two arms in front of me and ask for halt), whether I am next to my horse, behind him or in front of him, he understands and it is always the same.

It's consistent, it has the same action, feel and tone to match and my horses match the cue with a precise halt, consistent, with the same action, feel and tone to match.

When my horses are walking slightly behind me or at my elbow, or on one occasion when one of them jumped when I put him into a tight space for a lorry to pass and he didn't jump backwards, in front of me, on me, or into the lorry, he just jumped on the spot because I raised my arms in front of me asking for halt.

This told me that my horse understood my halt cue and he responded perfectly, but it also told me that I needed to put in some extra work on narrow spaces with him.

Remember whatever you do with your horse it has to be consistent. You cannot ask and cue for halt one way one day and change it the next.

I am also able to ask my horses for halt and leave them standing loose and unattended.

I also remember on numerous occasions my old retired horse, Bob, just grinding to a halt. I remember asking him forward and he simply refused, I upped the pressure and he still refused to budge. I remember thinking I had taught him the halt too well – but on these occasions he had simply saved the day, from a car travelling far too fast round a bend or a tractor, once again coming round a bend with a wide load making passing impossible.





*Asking Moonshine for halt but not to come into the trainers personal space.*



*Moonshine completing the halt and not coming into the trainers space. Notice how both horse and trainer have relaxed soft body language. This is totally stress free and fun training for both parties.*





*Once again Moonshine has halted perfectly and not in the trainers space. Remember your horse is only as good as the training he receives, pay heed and do a good job with plenty of patience and smiles, no matter how long the ground work takes, you will both benefit in the long run.*



*Moonshine at halt on his own. He has been asked for halt and there he remains.*



*Moonshine at halt on his own. This has proved an important exercise for me in the past when I had to leave my old boy out on a ride in the middle of a lane and run over the field, chasing our terrier who had run off.*

*I caught the terrier - so no harm done - and when I got back, my lovely boy was exactly where I had asked him to halt. He had not so much as moved a muscle or touched a blade of grass.*





*Magical Mosey starting to halt.  
Look at the trainer's body language and how Mosey is responding.*



*Mosey has halted, but not come into the trainer's space.*





*Mosey at halt all pressure released. Look at the trainers release of body language and how she stands soft and quietly, letting Mosey know he has done the right thing.*



*Mosey waiting at halt, but not coming into the trainers space.*

## EXERCISE EIGHT



## Moving Back

Once again asking your horse to move back is asking for movement of his feet and a respect of your personal space. Obviously all the exercises you do on the ground prepare for ridden work.

You may be amazed to hear that a lot of horses have simply not been taught to back up.

This is also another important exercise in all sorts of ways. You will need this exercise for all sorts of reasons both on the ground and during ridden work. It is always useful when entering a horse's stable or opening gates whilst out riding or on the ground.

If for example your horse jumps ahead of you when being led, simply by asking him back is moving his feet and putting you back in the driving seat again, in a passive way, with everything calm and under control.

This exercise is also good for the prevention of bargy horses. Before I start any kind of work the first exercise I like to make sure they know is backing up - for the simple reason that I am asking them to move their feet and not vice versa. This is a very passive way of being the leader.

Once I was out leading and my horse jumped ahead of me, I stood in front of him making myself really tall and big, puffing myself out with a stern look on my face, this was enough body language for him to take some steps back, there was no pressure applied other than that of my body language.

I then relaxed my body language and we continued calmly on our merry way with my horse at my elbow. There are obviously various levels of pressure and different ways to ask a horse back and these should be adapted depending on what, and who, you are teaching at the time. Remember every horse is different and what works with one may not work with another.



Plan ahead, how do you want your horse to turn out and what is the end result you want?

Mine is always a good bond with a happy, confident, trusting and polite horse - with that you can do whatever you would like to do, and go wherever you would like to go, and overcome any obstacle that may come on to your paths.



*Asking Moonshine to back up. I first taught Moonshine to back up by gently placing my hand on his chest and asking him back.*

The first time I put my hand on his chest he shifted slightly. I recognised the try and I immediately released the pressure and praised him lots, the next time I asked he moved a step back, once again I released the pressure and gave him lots of praise.

Remember your horse only wants to understand and please you - if you have a good steady bond with him he will do absolutely anything with you and for you.

All I have to do now, as shown in the above exercise is to point (as the trainer is doing) and ask him back and that is exactly what he will do, no pressure applied.





*Moonshine has backed up and the ask has been released. Note Moonshine has taken a step back and the trainer is calm and relaxed with soft body language, letting Moonshine know that he has done the right thing.*

You can then ask again for more steps as the training goes on.

I am lucky because I have three chilled and responsive horses, but I guess without the time, quietness, gentleness, consistency, persistence, patience and groundwork this wouldn't be the case.

I know this all works for sure, because when I got my boy Bob, who has since retired, I very quickly realised I was sorting out someone else's mess that had caused a damaged horse.

## EXERCISE NINE



## Lowering The Head

Asking your horse to lower his head to gentle rope pressure is a very good exercise.

You start by gently running your hand down the rope and even squatting down, asking the horse to lower his head and immediately releasing the pressure and praising him when he does so.

This exercise is very useful if the horse gets himself caught on something or accidentally steps on the leadrope and also for asking him towards you.



*Starting to ask Moonshine to lower his head. The trainer is starting to ask Moonshine to lower his head, look at her body language, she is bending over and looking at Moonshine's nose and at the same time with an open hand asking Moonshine to lower his head.*





*Asking Moonshine to lower his head a little more. Note that the trainer has completely bent down to ask Moonshines head down further.*



*Moonshine lowering his head to the slightest feel on the rope.  
Moonshine is following the trainers lead.*





*Moonshine with a really low head and the rope released instantly.*

## EXERCISE TEN



## Yielding One Front Leg at a Time

Asking a horse to step out to the side with one leg at a time assists with opening the horse's chest out. This is important for when you take up the rein and gently open it out, asking the horse to move in a sideways direction.

Once again this exercise is also about moving the horses feet where you would like them to go.



*Moonshine stepping to the side with one front foot. The trainer has opened out her shoulder directing the rope and Moonshine has moved one front leg in response to her ask.*



*Moonshine stepping to the side with one front foot. The trainer has opened out her shoulder directing the rope and Moonshine has moved one front leg in response to her ask.*



The trainer has asked Moonshine to move his opposite leg, which he has done in response to her ask. Doing exercises on both sides helps the horse due to the way their brains function. Even if the horse just shifts his weight you must reward the try.



*Magical Mose moving one front leg. This is the first time that Mosey has done this exercise and he has responded with the same movement as the trainer.*



*Mosey stepping to the side with his other front foot.*

## EXERCISE ELEVEN



## Disengaging The Hindquarters with Touch

This is another exercise on disengaging the hind quarters.

Always rub your horse before and after you do this exercise. Start with a light pointing pressure as shown in the picture, moving your hand backwards and forwards, but not touching the horse.

If the horse does not move or shift his weight, then up the pressure in stages and when I mean pressure the increase is minimal, gradually building.

Start with the light pointing and moving pressure for approximately five seconds, if the horse does not respond, touch the hair (as light as a fly) for five seconds, if still no response then the skin, then the muscle and then the bone.

Always with steady pressure until the horse moves, most horses once they get the hang of what you are asking of them will move when they see your finger.

With my horses I never went further than touching the fur as they responded instantly. As with everything it is 'horses for courses' and some horses will require no pressure as mine do, and for others it will take a little longer and more pressure.

A little secret: if the horse is having a little trouble understanding what you are asking of him, try this. When you are asking him to yield his hind quarters with pointing and touching, ask his head round to you slightly at the same time.





*Asking Mosey to disengage his hind quarters.*

Using the first part of the pressure exercise with the pointing. Look at the trainer and her body language. Magical Mosey is listening to her (note the ears) and preparing to cross his hind leg over the other one.



*Mosey disengaging his hind quarters.*

*Remember at first this may be just a shift in weight or one step.*





*Asking Magical Mose to disengage his right side hind quarters.*



*Magical Mose disengaging his right side hind quarters beautifully and after only having done this exercise for the first time on the other rein.*





*Moonshine starting to disengage his hind quarters. Look how the trainer is asking, how Moonshine is listening, thinking and starting to move his hind quarters.*



*Giving the horse a rub before and after this exercise is a very important must. You do not want your horse to think that every time you go near him you are going to start waving a finger at him or be applying pressure.*

## EXERCISE TWELVE



## Disengaging The Hindquarters with The Rope

### Yielding the Hindquarters

The power and energy in the horse come from its hindquarters, so our ability to control the hind feet allows us to control the horses speed, impulsion, and direction of movement.

This is vital for our safety, as it gives us control and allows us to either engage the hind legs for collection, or take the horses power away by disengaging them (causing them to cross over).

### Disengaging the Hindquarters

When the horse crosses its hind legs (putting one hind leg in front of and across the other hind leg) this is called disengaging the hindquarters.

The horses weight is distributed more over one front leg, which becomes a pivot point, and the hind quarters, move sideways around that front leg. For a horse to move in this way he must cross one hind foot in front of the other one.

When the horse crosses its hind legs it narrows the base of support and prevents the horse from being able to really 'sit' on his hind legs. Each time a hind leg is crossed, a horse must reach out sideways with his other hind leg to maintain his balance. Disengaging the horses hindquarters therefore takes the horses power away. The energy of the hindquarters is being asked sideways - it causes the hindquarters to cross so his haunches cannot bend fully into a weight bearing position.

If he 'sits' on his hind legs, bending his joints, he is taking more weight over the hindquarters, which make them act like powerfully loaded springs. But he can't do this when his legs are crossing in a sideways movement.



From a control and safety point of view, it is a very important thing for all riders to know how to disengage their horses hind legs.



*Asking Moonshine to disengage his hind quarters the rope is long, the trainer is looking and pointing at the horses rear end as well as making a stride in that direction and with upright body language.*

*Notice how the horse is responding by crossing one back leg over the other and with no pressure whatsoever.*



*Notice how Moonshine is nicely disengaging his hindquarters and look at the trainers more upright body language. Once Moonshines foot has landed all body language will go back to being totally relaxed, as reward for letting him know that he has done absolutely the right thing.*



*Asking Moonshine to disengage his hind quarters from the other side. Again notice how the trainer is asking him, look at her body language, even her finger is pointing at his hind quarters. Everything that the trainer is doing is making it very clear and easy for Moonshine to understand and do the right thing.*



*Moonshine is disengaging his hind quarters nicely and you can tell from his look and ears that he has been listening, watching and responding carefully.*

Moonshine is an untouched, unbroken seven year old that has lived all his life with a herd. I started this natural training programme with him 3 weeks ago and I do not do it every day because he would get bored.

I lead him out and practice all of these exercises whilst we are also out walking



and if I notice he is tired, then he gets time out and we stop for a blade of grass and a rest or in the school I turn him loose after work to roll or munch.

Remember work is important, but equally so is play and fun time.

Sometimes you will go backwards with the training, but if you are relaxed about things, take some time out and take things back a level you will progress faster in the long run, as groundwork is the most important thing you can do for you and your horse.

## EXERCISE THIRTEEN

## Yielding The Whole Body Sideways

Moving your horse's whole body sideways.

Disengaging the hind quarters and asking the horse to step his leg out to the side are all good exercises as it gives you control of the horse's front and back-end.

Control over the head, neck, poll, shoulders, ribcage and hindquarters is what is needed when asking the horse to move his whole body sideways.

This also prepares for the ridden work when your horse is asked to move his whole body sideways away from your leg or side-passing.

It is also a good suppling exercise. Any time you can get your horse to move laterally, you'll encourage him to use the thinking side of his brain. Remember, the secret to earning your horse's respect and getting him to use the thinking side of his brain, is moving his feet forwards, backwards, left and right. This is exactly what you are doing with leading, halting, backing up, moving an individual front foot and disengaging the hind quarters.

If you can ask the horse laterally off of your leg, you'll be able to direct his feet as he's circling, open and shut a gate and teach him flying lead changes. No matter how complicated it looks, a flying lead change is nothing more than the horse side-passing in mid-air.



*Asking Moonshines body sideways.  
Note how the trainer is walking towards  
Moonshine with the rope at neck level.*





*Moonshine moving his whole body sideways as the trainer takes steps towards him with the rope at neck level.*



*Releasing the pressure after Moonshine has moved sideways. Note the trainers body language after Moonshine has stepped to the side with both feet, she has taken the rope away from Moonshines neck and relaxed, Moonshine in return is relaxed.*



## EXERCISE FOURTEEN

  
Circles

Circles - or even half circles - are important (but I'm not talking about lunging which to my way of thinking is a pointless and boring exercise. If it makes us dizzy, I wonder what it does to the horse?)

Circles, however, are for a reason: they exercises a horse mentally, emotionally and physically.

It also gives your horse responsibility to maintain his gait and direction, while you stand still.

But most of all, they teach you how to send your horse away and bring him back to you, using body language that the horse understands.

Circles or half circles are also important for asking your horse back to you if he has jumped away from a spook.



*Preparing a circle with Moonshine*



*Starting to think  
about asking Moonshine for the circle*





*Opening out your shoulder and parting your legs slightly, asking for a forward motion onto a circle.*



*Moonshine travelling nicely on the circle*





*Starting to prepare for asking Moonshine to halt*



*Asking Moonshine for the halt, see how he is listening with his inner ear and the trainer has non evasive and slightly bent body language*





*Moonshine has halted nicely on the circle so the trainer has stood upright, but with soft body language*



*Asking Moonshine for the circle in the opposite direction, arm is out and shoulder is open and Moonshine moves off in the other direction*





*Moonshine has slowed slightly and the trainer is tilting her body and asking him for more forward movement, notice how Moonshine is listening with his inner ear, the trainer has his full attention*



*Magical Mose quietly on a circle with his inner ear listening to the trainer*





*Asking Magical Mose for the halt on the circle, look how the horse is listening and at the trainers still, non-invasive body language*



*Asking Magical Mose in the opposite direction on a circle*

If you can't get your horse to go around you, it's usually because the pressure is directed on the hind quarters, instead of the forequarters.

Or it could be that the horse just doesn't understand what you want him to do. If this is the case, try the other direction – horses usually favour one rein (usually the left). Find your horses 'easy side' and learn the exercise on that.

Take away points:

Your horse should definitely move away in the direction you are asking him to period, there is no option about turning him round and going in the opposite direction.

You open your shoulder, look and point in the direction you are asking him to go in and make sure you look at where you are standing and how. If you are slightly in front of him you are using blocking body language, which is preventing him from going forwards, you need to stand slightly more towards his hindquarters and insist on the direction you are asking for with upright body language, what is your intention.

I never use a stick for any of my exercises, if you use your rope halter, rope and body language you don't need any other piece of equipment when working with horses on any level, I like to keep things as simple as possible and a rope in your hands and thinking about your body language is enough to deal with and if I work with a stick it is purely as an extension of my arm, but normally with un-touched horses.

You ask your horse to halt by using non-evasive body language, ie asking for halt and slightly folding your body in a quiet way.



## EXERCISE FIFTEEN



## Smaller Independent Circular Movement

This is a very good exercise to do because if your horse spooks or jumps, you can stand still and he will be free to do a small independent circular movement around you ,without jumping on you – or squashing you.

It is also important when you are leading your horse that you have enough slack in the rope (that is why I use 9ft leadropes when I am not using the training rope).

This exercise - and longer leadropes - also give your horse enough room to turn around after coming through a gate when you close it.

I have learnt the 'plenty of slack in the leadrope lesson' after one of my horses became frightened of someone closing a gate loudly behind him and landed on my foot. Luckily, no damage was done as I had steel toe capped boots on, which I always wear around horses.

I then set to work asking my friend to loudly close gate's behind my horse, drop water buckets and stamp and jump up and down behind him, just so that I didn't get trodden on the next time there was a loud or sudden noise behind him.

My daughter was leading her pony out of the gate and grumbling because he stopped mid-way and wasn't turning around. I said, "Mmm, look at where you are holding your leadrope and how tightly. Slack the rope and hold it right at the end and if you give your pony some space, open the gate wider and give him a chance to think what you are asking him to do - your pony will do the move all by himself,"

She did precisely that and the pony came out of the gate and turned around all by himself because he had enough room to do so. It would be like trying to turn an arctic lorry around up a one way street, it wouldn't have enough space to turn.

Do not keep your horse on a tight, short rope, give him space to move and time to think what you are asking him to do and always reward even the smallest try on the horses part.

Remember horses are always willing to please so think about what and how you are asking him to do something and if you are giving him enough space to do it in.

The loud noise behind your horse exercise is also a de-sensitising exercise. If your horse is spooked from behind, this exercise will hopefully teach him to move in a small independent circular movement around you, instead of jumping on you.

You can also get someone to come past and toot their car horn, obviously wait until they are far enough behind you to start with, do not have them beep their horn right behind the horse at first, as this is almost guaranteed to send him and you into orbit. Once your horse is comfortable being beeped at from a distance, you can gradually bring the beep nearer.

Also remember that a horses hearing is far more superior than ours.

My friend was asking her horse to move onto the road and the horse refused point blank, she applied more pressure and still the horse refused. The horse had heard this big lorry coming up the road, long before us and had refused to put them both into its direct path with no space either side. How smart is that? Once the lorry had passed the rider asked her horse gently onto the road and the horse stepped out no problem.

Now the horse wasn't being difficult. In fact, she was being very smart in taking care of herself and her rider. I have also had this experience with my horse and now I will always wait and see what is going on before I apply more pressure if he is point blank refusing to do what I'm asking him. Listen to what your horse is telling you, it could indeed save both your lives.

Remember how much space your horse needs and always give him enough slack in the rope to be able to make an independent circular movement around you. Remember this movement when it comes to riding too, as asking your horse in a circular movement will bring him back to you if something has gone wrong.





*Moonshine is starting a small independent circular motion behind the trainer. Note how the trainer is standing still and slightly leaning forward with a long rope. Moonshine still has enough room to circle her without jumping on her or squashing her.*



*Moonshine doing a small independent circular motion. Moonshine is coming around the back of the trainer, the trainer is standing in a more upright position.*



*Moonshine after the small circular motion. Note how the trainer hasn't moved, apart from being in an upright position and Moonshine has stopped perfectly by her side.*



## EXERCISE SIXTEEN



## Over a Groundpole

Going over poles on a long rope is a very beneficial exercise that encourages joint flexion and stride extension. It helps the horse establish balance and coordination, as well as increasing athleticism.

It also aids concentration - thus providing valuable training for horses at all equestrian levels. The exercises can be varied so much and the poles can also be put in a straight line or an arc.

All training must be kept interesting and stimulating for the horse and boredom must never be allowed to set in. Putting poles in a straight line and asking the horse for the centre of the poles in a straight line are also keys for any future dressage or jumping that you may consider doing.

Please note that even though this horse is at the end of a rope, walking a circle, he is not being lunged round and round, in mindless circles.



*Coming up to a ground pole. The trainer is guiding and asking Moonshine to come down and over a ground pole.*



*Moonshine coming over a pole. Although Moonshine is not coming over the centre of the pole he is still going in a straight line and has to bend and stretch his body to go over the pole.*



*Moonshine after the ground pole. Notice how he is still lifting his hind leg fairly high after coming over the pole, coming back on to a circle and paying attention with his ears for the what next. You can then add poles together or arrange different shapes and even go through two long ways.*



## EXERCISE SEVENTEEN



## Over a Small Jump

Jumping benefits many of the disciplines and sets up the horse for accuracy, obedience and self-judgement. A truly great horse must have these skills in order to excel. It is also a good stretching exercise for the whole of the horses body, as well as asking him to lift his feet higher.

Start on the ground teaching the horse to step over a pole on the ground, most horses have no issue or worry going over a pole on the ground. Teaching your horse to jump even a small jump can be beneficial if you happen to encounter a fallen log with no way round whilst out riding.

Set your horse up to succeed and start small and you can slowly move onto higher poles until your horse is jumping 2 foot with ease. You don't need to ask your horse to jump high, that is not necessary for these exercise, as first you are building the horses confidence going over a jump.

You may add height into one of the lessons further down the line, but don't get hung up on always going for height.

In doing the lesson bit by bit there is much to be learnt and the confidence given to the horse to succeed and enjoy all of his training is paramount and remember the horse comes first.



*Showing Moonshine and approaching the jump.*



*Leading Moonshine over the jump.  
This is the first time that Moonshine has been over a jump.*



*Stepping over the small jump. Moonshine is now stepping over the jump on his own.*





*Halt and turn after the jump. Moonshine is being asked to halt and turn to come back over the small jump in the opposite direction.*



*Turning and coming back over the jump.*



*Back over the jump.  
Moonshine has turned and is coming back over the jump in the opposite direction.*



*Moonshine is exploring the small jump.*



## EXERCISE EIGHTEEN



## Narrow Spaces

Doing ground work with narrow spaces is good for all sorts of reasons. It is important they can be put in one without panicking.

This can help with any stable issues of claustrophobia, when it's time to load into a trailer or horse box, out riding if there is only a small gap to squeeze through or wait in for traffic to pass and with all in-hand work.



*Moonshine at halt and preparing to go through a narrow gap.*



*Starting to ask Moonshine through the narrow gap. See how the trainer is asking Moonshine forwards and giving him direction to approach the narrow gap.*



*Moonshine going through the narrow gap. Look at the slack in the rope and no pressure for Moonshine to walk through the narrow gap.*





*Moonshine in the middle of the narrow gap. Look how slack the rope is, but the trainer is still offering direction with the rope. Moonshine is very relaxed about the narrow gap.*



*Asking Moonshine for halt after the narrow gap. Look how the trainer is slightly leaning over to one side, asking Moonshine to slow and halt, he is listening and about to halt.*



*Moonshine at halt after the narrow gap. All pressure has been released and the rope put on the ground, giving Moonshine some time out before the next part of the narrow gap training.*



*The halt and turn after the narrow gap. The trainer has resumed the lesson, asking Moonshine from the halt to turn and come back through the narrow gap.*



## EXERCISE NINETEEN



## Smaller, Longer, Narrower Spaces

We have created a longer and narrower space for Moonshine to walk through.

You can accustom your horse to flags, plastic bags, umbrellas and anything you think he may encounter and be spooky about. Once he is used to these objects you can use them at the side of your narrow space. You can also get your horse walking over tarpaulin and put that down in the narrow space. Anyway I will leave all that up to your imagination.



*Creating a longer and narrower gap for Moonshine to walk through.*



*Starting to ask Moonshine through the longer and narrower space.*



*Moonshine heading through the longer narrow space.*





*Moonshine coming out of the longer narrow space.*



*Preparing to ask Moonshine back through the longer narrow space in the opposite direction.*



*Starting to ask for the turn for Moonshine to come back through the longer narrow gap in the opposite direction.*



*Turning back through the longer narrow space in the opposite direction.*





*Moonshine coming back through the longer narrow space in the opposite direction.*



*Asking Moonshine for the halt the other side of the longer narrow space in the opposite direction, once again notice the trainers body language when starting to ask for the halt.*

## EXERCISE TWENTY



## Plastic Bag De-Sensitising Exercise

Most of the ground work exercises are sensitising exercises, this means that your horse will either move over, back-up, step sideways etc from the smallest amount of pressure.

The plastic bag exercise, is however, a de-sensitising exercise. Other examples of de-sensitising exercises would be, for instance, if your horse didn't like you touching a particular spot and always moved, you would keep your hand on that spot whilst he moved and as soon as he stood still you would immediately remove your hand and praise him for doing the right thing - standing still and letting you touch that spot.

What you are doing with the plastic bag - or any spooky object - is a de-sensitising exercise. Putting anything spooky you may encounter whilst out walking or riding and placing it somewhere the horse can get used to it, gets the horse used to it.

I normally leave spooky objects in the field and give the horses a day or two to get used to them and then I start the rope work with them either next to the object, around the object or on the object.

In my youth and ignorance, some 30 years ago, I hadn't done any de-sensitising exercises with my horse. I just got on, rode and hoped for the best.

I did however used to spend a lot of time on the ground with my horse either grooming or just sitting in her stable or the field and going on picnics.

I remember, in my young days, cantering along by the side of some trees with a ditch on my opposite side. Ahead I saw a plastic bag on the floor and thought, "Aha! Here we go!"

I anticipated that my horse would shy, and to the right, because if we went to the left we would surely hit the trees. Well I got it wrong, well, not all of



it... my horse did shy, but guess what, she shied to the left - and because I had anticipated the shy in the wrong direction I still went the way I had anticipated, so my horse and I beautifully parted company and I sailed gracefully through the air landing flat into a ditch of nettles. The ouch of it was quite painful, not the fall, but the nettles.

My horse then came straight over and peered at me as if to say, “Well, what the heck are you doing in that ditch?”

Needless to say, by the time I got myself out of the ditch I was very damp and red from head to toe, but there was nothing for it and I fell about laughing, as is usually my way when something goes ever so slightly wrong. Yep, you guessed it, we finished our ride and I swear my horse laughed louder and longer than I did that day.

You can also rustle a plastic bag in the stable and rub your horse with the bag. I used a carrot bag which obviously has a nice smell. I let them sniff it and then started to rub it over their bodies. I also often wear a plastic cape and groom my horses in it - at first they were frightened of all the rustling, but now they have just become de-sensitised to it.

De-sensitising exercises are also good for things you may encounter later on at shows. If working with your horse on a rope for the first time with these exercises, make sure you have plenty of slack in the rope, as always, then you won't get flattened.

It also prepares for riding, if you do everything safely on the ground you should have no problem when it comes to these objects whilst riding.

As with all work with horses, timing and feel are important, this gauges how much you can ask of your horse in any session. Some horses learn faster than others and some horses are spookier than others. Groundwork sure helps you get to know your horses character well and vice versa.

Tie the plastic bag or place the spooky object where the horse can take a look at it in his



*The plastic bag tied to the fence.*

own time, once he is used to it you can tie or place things in the stable, field shelter or in the school. The ideas are limitless, remember work with the space you have and be imaginative and of course safe.



*Mosey has spotted the plastic bag tied to the fence, this alien object has appeared out of nowhere.*



*Mosey goes to investigate the plastic bag.*



*Mosey goes just a little closer, but not too close, just in case the plastic bag eats him or flaps in the wind.*



*Moonshine goes to investigate the plastic bag.*



*Moonshine goes straight up to the plastic bag, he is obviously not too worried about its strange appearance and if there is food to be had it could be a good idea to have a better look.*



*Moonshine is close, but with a stretched body. See how Moonshine is curious about the plastic bag and is sniffing it, but he still has his body stretched to a maximum just in case he needs to make a quick get-away.*





*Sniffing the plastic bag.  
Floyd is sniffing the plastic bag before  
the trainer starts to rub him with it.*



*Starting to rub Floyd with the  
plastic bag, notice how the plastic bag  
is scrunched up at first.*



*Making the plastic bag bigger  
and rubbing Floyd all over.*



*Rubbing the plastic bag on Floyds head.  
This is often a very sensitive spot  
for horses, note how the trainer keeps her  
eyes averted, therefore making the  
horse feel comfier with what she is doing  
in a sensitive zone.*