



BODY CONTROL

The Beginning with Matthew Bohman

Gaining control of each part of the horse's body will give us control of their feet and allow us to teach them the basic maneuvers that are required of a horse for any endeavor that you and your horse may take on. Through body control we can teach our horses responsibility for maintaining any number of positions for any discipline so that you may perform at a higher level. *A horse is a horse* no matter the sport we decide to participate in--this means that all disciplines require the same basic foundation and when this foundation is solidly installed, we can help to ensure more sustained success.

Here I will explain how I start to gain control of each body part including the feet. The body parts that I think about gaining control of are the face/jaw, neck, shoulders, ribs, hips and feet. Our ultimate goal is to manipulate the horse's feet and to gain control of the feet they must be moving. My first goal is to get my horse long trotting while relaxed. Many trainers refer to the trot as "The Training Gait", because it has an equal rhythm and is easy to teach a horse in this gait. When a horse trots, their weight and emotions are more evenly distributed as compared to the walk, lope or gallop, where their speed and emotions are either too up or down. With this in mind I do nearly one hundred percent of my training at the trot. This means that at the very least I teach an initial idea at the trot. I cannot change leads at the trot, however it is very important to gain complete control of the necessary body parts required for a lead change while at the trot. Subsequently, to execute a proper lead change that will set your horse up to become a better and better lead changer, you must have complete control of each body part simultaneously.

Once my horse is long trotting out relaxed I will start to direct them left and right. I want to direct their nose by pulling out on the corner of their mouth. I do not want to pull back on their mouth and consequently create a brace in the horse's neck. To do this I point my thumb down toward the horse's neck and, if it helps, point with my pinky finger in the direction I wish to go; next I push my hand out until I make contact with the horse's mouth and effect the feet. I release, and then start over with each foot fall. I then start to direct my horse in large figure-eights and

serpentine or weave through some trees. If your horse is moving out at the trot they will not be likely to lean into the circle. If they do so, simply change directions until your horse can stay on a circle without leaning one way or another. As you change directions you should look for your horse to become more and more relaxed in their jaw and neck by keeping it level or lowering it as you change directions, not raising it.

My next goal is to be able to gain control of the shoulders. To do this I will start at the long trot once again while directing my horse's nose into a circle very slightly, placing my calf and spur when necessary in the horse's girth area thus picking up the ribs--then I use my outside hand to direct the horse to the outside of the circle. By manipulating the face and ribs I create a slight arch in the horse's neck and whole of their body, hence pushing the shoulders and front feet to the outside of the circle. As I set up this position and get the desired result, I release and then set it up again so that the horse learns to maintain this position on their own. While doing this exercise I also continue to change directions. I refer to this as "Swinging the Ribs". At first it may feel uncoordinated and then it will feel as if you are pushing your horse left and right; and eventually it will feel as if you are swinging your horse's body and ribs upward and that they are becoming collected. While doing this exercise make sure to keep your hands fairly wide apart and try to implement a massaging effect with your bit in the horse's mouth by working your wrists back and forth, left and right, which will create a soft and relaxed jaw. Once you and horse start to master this exercise in the snaffle, go ahead and put a cavesson on your horse. Start out with the cavesson quite loose and slowly make it more snug every few days. I never make the cavesson tight around a horse's mouth. The cavesson is simply to make it uncomfortable for your horse to open their mouth. When your horse keeps their mouth closed around the bit or bridle they can feel the cue from the bit much better.

Once the previous exercise is going fairly well, start to draw your hands and arms back towards your hips while going through the same steps and continuing

Continue...

to drive your horse forward. If you have followed the previous directions with success this will cause your horse to give his jaw and face more and start to move on the vertical. Adding this dimension will also cause greater collection and sensitivity throughout the horse's body. Once again make sure to use a pressure release pattern so as to make it your horse's responsibility to maintain this position.

The next exercise I perform in beginning body control is to back my horse up. Backing a horse up starts to get this forward moving, instinctual animal to create a thought process. While going forward a horse doesn't have to put much thought into where their feet are as he relies mostly on instinct. However, when we ask a horse to back up he must slow his brain from reacting to responding. To start to back my horse up I take the slack out of my reins but do not pull back. I push my feet off of the horse, as this will become my cue to back up. I then start to apply pressure with my legs and feet, slightly bumping with my calves or rolling my spur rowel, left and right, into the horse's midsection. I use my reins left and right in unison with my legs. Again, try to use your wrists left and right, massaging your horse's mouth. I do not pull back on my reins--I use them to impede forward motion. This technique will cause your horse to back up on its own. When teaching this to a young horse or a problem horse I may allow them to move forward in a small, uncomfortable circle, while changing directions. As soon as your horse backs up even slightly, release and repeat. Within a few sessions your horse will be running backwards and drawing from their hindquarters. This will also help greatly with collection and create a habit where your horse consistently works from their hindquarters.

These are the basics of body control that are fundamental to any foundation and to gaining greater body control. In the next installment of this article I will cover turn-arounds, sidepassing and hip control while maintaining flexion into the direction of movement.

Remember to have fun and be safe.

Matthew Bohman

Matthew has made his living training horses since he was sixteen years old. After working and learning directly with several well known and respected trainers and horsemen learning cutting, cow horse, roping and reining, Matthew decided to take his experience and years of training young and challenging horses to the next level and is currently starting 2 year olds for NRHA Hall of Famer, Bob Loomis. His willingness to share his knowledge is the driving force behind his new clinic program. He is now available for clinics and lessons as well as a limited number of colt starts and training.

www.MatthewBohman.com

[www.Facebook.com/
MatthewBohmanHorsemanship](http://www.Facebook.com/MatthewBohmanHorsemanship)

