

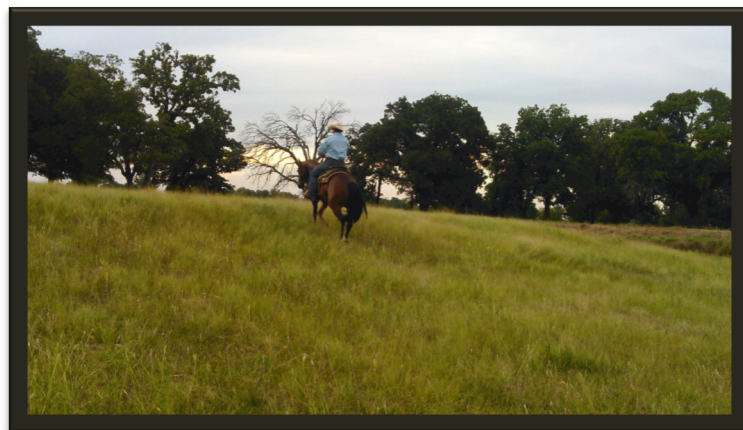
GETTING THE MOST OF 'A RIDE OUT'

Good horsemanship and techniques often come from necessity. In times past anyone who had a horse used it for a purpose or several purposes, as their life or at least their livelihood depended upon--all of which would usually involve traveling long distances. One of the main reasons horses were domesticated is for travel; travel to water, or other resources, as well as to livestock and even, war. If we look into the past, warriors and cowboys are known for having the most well trained horses; this is because they traveled many miles with their mounts and spent nearly 24 hours a day with them.

So, when we have a horse we use for one discipline we need to make sure we incorporate as much cross training as possible so that our horse does not anticipate the specific demands of our particular sport. Here I would like to explain how I make the most out of riding my horses on the trail or through the pasture and how it will relate to arena work to create a more balanced mount.

First, I want to be able to walk or long trot my horse freely and relaxed over varied terrain where they are responsible for their footfalls. I do not want to have to pick up my hands or hold my horse; I want to set them on a trail and have them maintain a nice relaxed long trot. If you normally ride with a longer stirrup you will want to raise them for most of these exercises, similar to that of a cross-country rider, so that you can efficiently post with your horse. To achieve this I'll start out on the trail or through the pasture at a walk for a quarter mile or so and then ask for a long trot. If the horse wants to move out I will allow them to move into a long trot on a loose or totally draped rein. If the horse picks up the lope or gallop I will bend them back to a trot or direct them into a circle and then continue on the path. Cover as much varied terrain as possible. Continue to long trot until your horse offers to walk—this may take awhile. Allow your horse to walk, even if they slow up because of a hill or even if they see something that is worrying them and become cautious, not simply from

sheer exhaustion. This will give your horse responsibility and cause them to think for themselves.



I usually bring a colt out and go through this process by the fourth or fifth ride and it only takes a few trips out for the horse to learn to rate themselves and take in their surroundings. Once the horse starts to walk, allow them to walk back to the barn or camp. Our goal is for us to be able to ask our horse to long trot relaxed out through the pasture or trail and for us to determine the speed. The process may take several weeks for an older horse that has developed speed issues or has not been out of an arena much. If you can, pack a lunch and take a long trip out.

Secondly, find a stand of trees to direct your horse around. Weave through the trees, at a trot, in a random

Matthew...continued



series of figure-eights on a loose rein; don't allow your horse to pick up on a pattern except to follow your hands and legs. Also, take any chance to direct them over a log, something small enough that they don't have to jump but have to think about preparing their feet to traverse the log. Again, we want to create a horse that thinks for itself in a way that helps us out.

Lastly, find a hill with a slight grade. For this exercise we will start out trotting a large circle on the graded land, at least ten meters, on a loose rein. Your horse will want to speed up as they come to the downhill portion of the circle; allow them to do so. They will want to slow up on the uphill portion of the circle but at this point speed them back up. Stay on the circle until your horse offers to stop when they start on the downhill portion of the circle. Your horse will become uncomfortable continually rushing downhill and turning on a circle and will seek relief, in the form of stopping. When your horse stops, allow them plenty of time to stand and soak in what they have done on their own. Repeat this exercise at least four or five times in each direction.

Next, perform this exercise using a figure-eight pattern on the hillside. Now, instead of allowing your horse to stop on the downhill section, urge them forward slightly. Continue this until your horse performs the figure-eight at approximately the same speed going uphill and downhill. The exact speed is not important and will vary with each horse; however you should feel that the horse is moving forward relaxed while thinking back to you, and not trying to get away from your seat. Once things are going well on the circles and figure-eights, direct your horse straight down the hill. If you have done your work properly your horse will stop or slow up once directed straight down the hill; however it is a test, because going straight down the hill is where a horse will most likely not rate themselves properly.

Once these exercises can be performed with consistency at the walk and trot you can progress to the lope and then you should progress to a shortened rein while asking for collection. Do not be afraid to go back and restart these exercises, even on a loose rein, at anytime.



These exercises outside of the arena are not only helpful for competition but essential for your horse's foundation. As your horse takes in continually changing sights and sounds he will be prepared to adapt to other new situations. Riding out in this manner will make your horse responsible for his own feet and create a horse that carries itself correctly without being pulled or spurred on excessively. One of the greatest benefits is that your horse will learn to stay square through their hips and shoulders which is important for any sport. Once your horse understands this responsibility it makes it much easier to ask them to step up to a higher level of carriage. This type of training ultimately creates less stress and will result in horses staying more mentally, emotionally and physically sound.

As with any new exercise program make sure you modify it for your horse's and your own fitness level. Also, use any leg protection and support that you feel is necessary.

Most importantly, have fun!

Matthew

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

