

David Norbury

Lead Changes

Part 2



We need to keep in mind that our horse already knows how to change leads. They do it every day out in their paddock, so the trick is to get them to change on que.

After we have spent a couple of weeks developing the half pass we are ready to move onto the most exciting part and I might say the easier part of teaching the change. Like any manoeuvre, it is the lead up to the manoeuvre that is difficult. The exercises are where you will find all the resistance that prevents a smooth change right from the start. We know our horse will move off our leg regardless of what lead we might be on. All we need to do now is lope a straight line on the left lead for instance, rotate the horse's neck to the right, then half pass to the right and you will find you have performed your first lead change. After we have achieved the change don't think for a minute the change is over. To back up what we have just taught our horse we need to keep half passing to the right, so he will anticipate moving further than is required to keep him light in his changes. The que we give our horse to change is only ever released when our horse gives in to any resistance. Some horses change and then decide they will start pulling their head in the opposite direction to the change, or perhaps try to increase their speed beyond what we think acceptable. Another form of resistance is to slow down. There are a number of problems that will occur over time, generally however the first 20 to 30 changes are problem free. It's after we have performed 200 plus changes that problems arise, and this is where our training really begins.

The day I decide it's time to change leads on my horse I will perform between four and six changes - this will go on for about one week. The following week on the Monday I will perform the same amount, then from Tuesday through till Friday I will perform six to twelve changes. This all depends on the horse however, and I must say this amount of changes is common on 90% of horses. By the end of eight weeks I am lead changing my horses 20 to 30 times per session. As I head deeper into a horse's training I will average 50 to 60 changes per session, two or three times a week. Riders will find 200 lead changes come around very quickly. Because we have changed so often our horse will begin to develop the "Seven Serious Sins" of lead change and they are:

1. Anticipating lead change
2. Taking the shoulder before the hip in the direction of the change
3. Excessively increasing speed in the change

4. Decreasing speed in the change
5. Kicking out
6. Throwing the head to the opposite direction of change
7. Throwing the head through the change

1. ANTICIPATING LEAD CHANGE

To correct a horse that anticipates, we use the very same tool that has caused the problem - anticipation, however in reverse. Let's look back at what we would do if a horse was anticipating a lope departure. We would use our horse's anticipation to our advantage by continually setting him up for a lope departure, but not loping off. I might set a horse up four times before I lope. After a while he starts to anticipate that you are not going to lope off. We just want him to rotate his hip - this is an "Anti Anticipation Manoeuvre". When we are loping we need to perform that same manoeuvre, however this time it is slightly different, because we don't want the hip to move anywhere. All we need do here is make the horse look in the direction you want to change, and at the same time have inside leg on him just behind the girth to prevent him from moving his hip over and changing leads. Another thing to remember is that we need to decrease the leg pressure when you feel his anticipation beginning to subside. By doing this he will start to think each time he is set up to change leads it does not necessarily mean he is going to change. Here's a fine example of how a horse's training is not entirely about being physical with him. Training requires a great deal of physiological analysis as well.

2. TAKING THE SHOULDER BEFORE THE HIP IN THE DIRECTION OF THE CHANGE

Once again anticipation used in reverse will be the tool for this problem. If we change to the left and he takes his shoulder before his hip we will encourage our horse to change up front and not behind. You may find on a seasoned lead changer that when your horse drops his shoulder this problem does not occur - all you have to do is just give it time because it will happen. To remedy this situation if we are changing to the left is take your horse to the right once the change is completed. This type of correction has a two-fold affect. The first positive here is that each time we change our horse he will anticipate being taken the other way thus holding his shoulders upright. The second affect is the horse's hind end will be followed by the front end giving you the correct type of change.



2.



3.

3 & 4 EXCESSIVELY INCREASING & DECREASING SPEED IN THE CHANGE

If your horse increases speed excessively each time you perform a lead change, then simply stop your horse once the change is completed. You only have to do this a few times and I can guarantee you will have improved the problem enormously. The next problem you may encounter is your horse will lose impulsion through the change. Again do the opposite after he has changed and that is to increase his speed once we have completed the change. You will find if your horse slows through the change you will lose the very item that makes for a smooth change and that is impulsion.

5. KICKING OUT

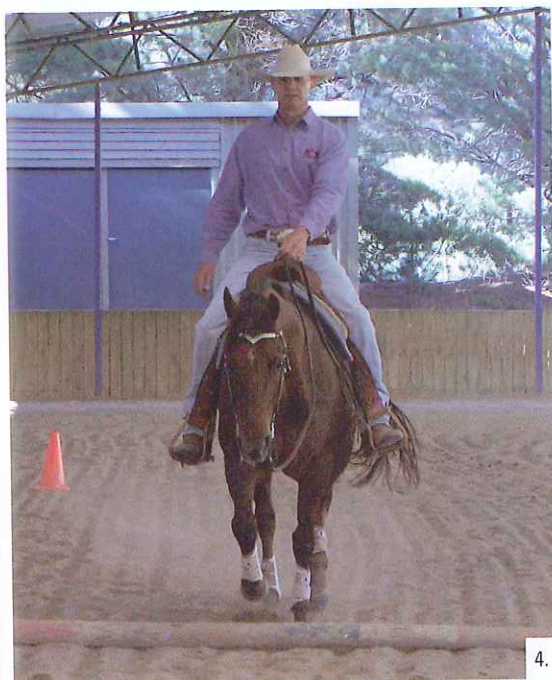
This problem may occur for a couple of reasons. You may find you have asked for the change with too much leg or spur and your horse's reaction is to push into that pressure resulting in an extreme reaction from your horse, being a kick out. Another reason your horse may kick out is that he may be a horse that doesn't like being pushed around. If this occurs then I will pull the horse around in the direction he kicked out and bump him in the flank area. This is saying to the horse don't you dare kick out at my leg. Some horses require this sort of discipline, however if he is always going to argue with you whenever you ask for something more difficult, then he is probably not worth going on with in this event.

1,2 & 3. Here David has asked for the Lead Change just after the first cone, however his horse required two strides before completing the change which occurs between the cones. David would never allow three strides to take place.

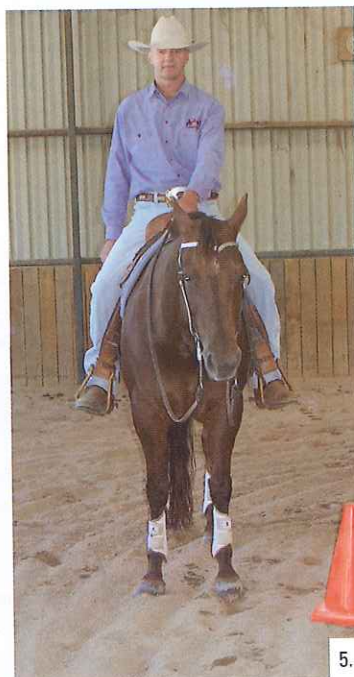
4. David shows how you should cross the centre of the pole in competition.

5. David shows the proximity to the cones when you are going through the serpentine in Pattern No 1. It is imperative you stay this close to give a balanced run.

6. Charay Bound For Glory Lead change is very important to the Reining horse. A bad lead change is detrimental to the overall score.



4.



5.



6.

6. THROWING THE HEAD TO THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION OF CHANGE

If I were to press my hand into the side of a person's body, their first reaction would be to look at where the pressure came from. The same applies with a horse. When you press with your leg to change they look at where the pressure came from. The problem with your horse looking in the other direction is that he will change leading with his shoulder and end up changing up front and not behind. To correct this, all we need do is make sure we have enough pressure to maintain the horse frame all the way through the change. Once again we can compare this to a lope departure - we would never allow our horse to look in the opposite direction when we lope of.

7. THROWING THE HEAD THROUGH THE CHANGE

This is a more difficult problem to fix. It is now we will see how well our exercises and Western Pleasure training has been retained by our horse. When a horse throws his head to change it means that he is using his head and neck to propel the front end in the air, so it is easier for him to do a lead change. You can't blame your horse for wanting to change this way; after all, he's carrying an extra 80 plus kilograms on his back that he has to elevate to perform the change. By having your horse collected you eliminate any lifting of the head. Another eliminant that will produce lifting of the head will be losing impulsion or in other words slowing down, as your horse is changing leads. There is no doubt that a certain amount of pressure may be needed on the reins during the change to prevent the horse speeding up beyond the speed required for the manoeuvre, and this is where our exercises come into play. When we pull on those reins to prevent him speeding up we want our horse to fold his chin in and maintain his low head position when he feels any pressure on his mouth.

The problems I have described above will arise at sometime through your early training of the lead change. As time goes by these problems will continually arise in varying degrees, horses are not machines, however they both have one thing in common, they both require continual maintenance. The maintenance is achieved through continually flexing your horse and changing leads on a regular basis, so as the lead change becomes second nature to him. I want the rider and horse to be as comfortable with the lead change as they are with the lope departure.

MAINTENANCE

Now we have established a solid lead change on our horse we need to maintain the change and we do this by combining the Western Riding pattern into our workout. I normally have five markers set up in my arena in a straight line. I will start of by changing my horse across the arena, however this does not mean changing in the same spot every time I cross the arena. I always need to be thinking of my "Anti Anticipation Manoeuvre"; so I will set him up and change, or may decide not to change. I change when I feel like it. You must also keep in mind that you have to work on your own cues you give the horse. It's important that if you think you are going to change on the next pass of the arena, then allow yourself to think it, but don't let your body know what your brain is thinking, otherwise your horse will read this and try to change before you want him to. It's so important your horse does not anticipate the lead change because in the Western Riding event you will be penalised for not changing in the middle of the cones or not changing in the centre of the arena.

Once I que a horse to change leads I have to take into account there may be a slight delay while he processes the information given to him.

This delay in changing may be one or two strides - I will never allow it to be three strides. Ideally I would like every horse to change the moment I apply leg pressure, but through trying to enforce this ideal way of changing sometimes compromises the quality of lead change. With this type of delayed change I will always ask my horse to change either one or two strides before the required time and this assures me that the change is finished in the middle of the marker.

We have talked about our horse dropping his shoulder through the change, which is incorrect because our horse will change in front first instead of the rear. When we are practising through the cones we need to be aware of this, and adjust our training accordingly. When making passes through the cones in training we need to approach the cones on the left lead for instance having the cone on the left side of the horse, and go through the serpentine changing between every cone. The next pass we may change on the first cone then leave the second without out changing, and then on the third go ahead and change, however this change will mean you will be changing to the left and heading to the right. Another way to help prevent your horse dropping his shoulder is to approach the cones again with the first cone on your left, while being on the right lead. This time we will be changing every time we go between the cones. Changing now will mean every time you change you will be guiding your horse around the cone in the opposite direction to the way he changed. This procedure can also be used coming across the arena. If we change to the right we direct our horse to the left and vice versa. Using this procedure guarantees you the ability to maintain your horse's "rear to front end lead change."

Once the lead change is established on your horse and we have no trouble changing on a straight line or through the serpentine I like to go looking for another way of changing. I do this to check for any flaws in my horse's training. I like to take my horse and encourage him to drop his shoulder through his changes, and this is achieved by changing him in and out of a circle. By changing to the inside of a circle, I need to be aware that my horse is going to drop his shoulder. To counteract this dropping of the shoulder, I need to maintain my horse's shoulder position on the circle, as I lay my leg on him for the change. There are times when your horse will not take his shoulder to the inside of the circle and still change up front and not behind. This is because he only had to lean slightly in the direction of the change to make it incorrect. It's times like this we have to be receptive to our horse's body movements. The more sensitive you are to the slightest correct or incorrect movement from your horse, the less likely you are to have problems.

Changing to the outside of a circle is the hardest way to change a horse. It is not something he would naturally do unless he was changing direction at the same time. Changing to the outside of a circle, you will notice your horse is less likely to drop his shoulder to the outside when you change leads, in fact he will be more likely to change behind first because of the position we are holding him in. There will be problems encountered when performing changes to the outside of a circle and they will be reflected in the form of resistance, you only have to go back to your exercises to work through this.

Now that you can perform a lead change and incorporate the different ways of changing I have described in this article, you have certainly moved out of your comfort zone with your training abilities. You have also developed a higher degree of suppleness throughout your horse's body and achieved a better understanding of how exercises develop manoeuvres and the more manoeuvres we have the more events we can participate in.



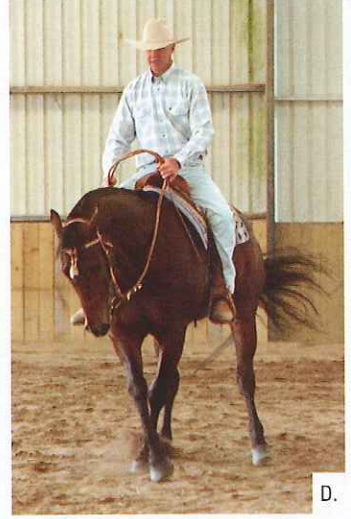
A.



B.



C.



D.

Correction Feb/March issue. Apologies for publication of incorrect photos in part one of this training article. A,B,C & D are the correct photos

- A. David demonstrates how he wants a horse to flex. Not how the horse not only breaks through the poll, but also through the wither. He has totally submitted to all pressure that was applied.
- B. David and daughter Courtney both demonstrate the counter arc. We can clearly see how both horses have no resistance at all while flexing through both the poll and the wither.

- C. Here Courtney demonstrates how not to half pass a horse. In this picture you will see how the shoulders are in front of the hip. Half passing in this position encourages the horse to change in front first instead of the correct way of hind end first, followed by the rear.
- D. Here David demonstrates the correct position for the half pass. We can clearly see the hip in front of the shoulders. This position greates our chance of performing a correct lead change. 🐾

If you missed Part 1 of this training article in Australian Performance Horse Feb/March Issue, please contact Janine on (07) 3891 1299 to purchase a copy.

Free Pictorial Halter Futurity!

APH All Breed Weanling

Judged by a qualified AQHA judge.

Judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.

Horses will be placed down the line and published in the June/July 2007 issue.

1st Prize

Plain Leather Show Halter & Lead
kindly sponsored by TS Granger Saddlery

2nd Prize

Ripstop Combo
kindly sponsored by Val's Horse Rugs

3rd Prize

1 Promectin Plus Wormer
kindly sponsored by Furney's Stock Feeds

Entries close
10th May
2007

APH ALL
BREEDS
Weanling
FUTURITY

1 coupon

To enter:

- Must be registered horses (any registry)
- Send a good near side profile photo of your horse without the handler visible.
- Cut out coupon in this ad and mail in (original no photocopies)
- Send photocopy of registration papers
- Enter as many horses as you like

Email photos to janine@prespub.com or mail to APH Weanling Futurity, PO Box 8337, Woolloongabba, 4102

A special thank you
to our sponsors:

TS Granger Custom Saddlery
(07) 3425 2291

Val's Horse Rugs
(07) 5483 5272

Furneys Stock Feeds
(07) 3216 7399