



Mark Langley Horse Training Tips:

Centreing

You may have a horse that rushes. Instead of being behind the centre and feeling like they need your legs to hold them forward, these overly forward horses are in front of your centre and you feel like you need the reins to hold them back. This centring lesson will help these forward horses, as well as everyone else who has been following the series.

Centreing = having a horse calm and relaxed under us without them leaning. Our direction is their direction. You can put them on a straight line or a circle and they will maintain it. They will not feel like they want to be elsewhere.

If your horse is not centred with normal impulsion, it means that your horse is slightly behind. If your centre is going back, your horse is still engaged in forwards. If you are going to the left, your horse goes too far to the left or to the right.

A lot of times, people push their horse in their direction with their legs and reins to keep them underneath the rider. By doing this you can dull your horse's sensitivity and also not get your horse to *want* to centre.

The first lesson I gave you in this series on Impulsion helped your horse to follow or centre with you when going forward. Now, I want to keep your horses centre under us when we go in a straight line or change direction. Whilst teaching your horse to centre, I am also using this lesson to help your horse follow feel with the rein. I'm not going to use my legs, just the reins to guide and follow soft feel. I like to teach people to use their legs to guide a horse's body, but not to use their legs to trap their horses when they are already pushing against us mentally and physically.

Only do one thing at a time: rein or leg to go, not both.

- Only use your legs for impulsion (not for guiding their shoulders).
- In an arena or large area, just ride at a walk; let your horse choose its direction.
- If your horse chooses to go to the left, turn them to the left in 2-3 softening circles then let them go straight and every time they choose to go in a particular direction, use that direction to do softening circles (as I described in the last newsletter, lesson 2 in this series).
- After a while, your horse may choose to stay straight for longer. Once they stop pushing so much to the left or right, start to look for an object to ride to.
- Focus on that object – a letter, a cone, a tree. Remain forward.
- When your horse takes a direction off your chosen direction, pick up a rein on that side and do softening circles. Use the circle to soften and reconnect, focus on the bend.
- When they feel softer and more centred, focus back on the object and realign your horse to the object, take them off in a straight line and on a loose rein towards the object. (I like to zig-zag across the arena.)
- Use this softening and connecting circle on both sides as needed.
- Once your horse can walk longer straight lines, only needing your focus and your centred seat to keep them there, you can start to be a little bit more creative and choose more things to ride to more often..

Your aim: as your horse falls out of your centre and straight line, it disconnects with you. Instead of pulling or pushing with our legs to push against it we allow the horse to go in its direction and we reconnect in the softening circle.

There are other ways to do this lesson with more advancement but this is a good basic lesson to get a horse to do a nice straight line underneath us. You can use this lesson to reconnect with your horse when you leave for a trail ride – refreshing and re-establishing the connection between you that will make for a more enjoyable ride.

It may seem that I am making "the right thing easy (the straight line) and the wrong thing hard" (the circle). Circles are harder than straight lines. But, as soon as I commit to a circle I am trying to make the circle easy, like any normal lesson. "Hard/ easy" is not the right mind frame. You are not punishing the horse by doing a circle, you are looking for softness and connection, in much the same way as a normal "follow the feel" lesson. It is essential to reward any tries in softness and connection. When I feel a little more connection I allow the horse to take a straight line. If your mind-set is wrong you may jeopardise your horses willingness to be happy committing to a circle.

For those that have horses that rush, use the spiralled circle, continuously getting smaller, until your horse centres with your speed. When they centre, offer a loose rein and straight line. Practice this at a walk then a trot and don't canter until your horse can trot at different speeds on a loose rein, only listening to your seat. This exercise may take some time with your horse, don't expect too much too soon. It's really important that you try to calm your horse with your inside rein. You need to stay calm to do this.

With time, horses will listen to us with the feel that we present to them – the feel of our reins and our body. When a horse makes its own decisions, it relies on its brain and it creates the direction through what it can see through its eyes. So when a horse chooses to go off centre in another direction, it is thinking through its eyes; and through its eyes it is choosing where to go. I have found that using my legs to push a horse's body too often causes a resistance that hinders movement or in some cases causes more evasion. **If however I connect the mind first, the body becomes more pliable and more responsive purely because the horse is with me.** Our legs then have meaning in feel – far more directed meaning than when our horse's mind was out the gate.

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