

PREPARING YOUR HORSE FOR THE HACKAMORE AND BRIDLE

The Spanish type hackamore and bridle are both traditionally designed to operate from feel not force. When they become a forceful tool, the outcome will be reversed from the original intent. Both the hackamore and bridle put pressure on the outside, the jaw and the neck, which if yielding to pressure, the horse will tip the nose to the outside. When they have learned to follow a feel, the nose will tip in the direction of travel while turning and the horse will stay balanced. When these tools are used forcefully as leverage devices the leverage of both the hackamore and a neck rein on a bridle will tip the nose to the outside while pulling the neck to the inside. Two things that tell the tale if the horse has been brought along with understanding is first, the poll will be supple, and second, the jaw will be relaxed, not clenched.

In order for a horse to accept the bridle, they can not be intimidated by it. When a horse is started properly and brought along threw the hackamore and two-rein, a lot of time is spent for the horse to learn threw experience and not fear. Bits that inflict pain such as tongue relief, that pressure the more sensitive bars of a horses mouth, cause the horse to raise their head initially especially with a quick movement from the reins.

A straight bar lying across the horses tongue like the traditional Spanish bits, allow the horse to hold the bit off the bars by flexing the tongue and holding the bit. A roller or cricket encourages the horse to work their tongue by giving them something to play with. They learn to enjoy the sound of a loud cricket and when we pick the reins up they can pick up the bit and roll the cricket which helps them to keep their mouth moist and their jaw relaxed.

Young horses that have not had their mouths violated by harsh bits or harsh hands will learn to enjoy and play with the bit. The horse that dreads the movement of quick or heavy hands or more severe bits will not likely if ever play with and enjoy the bit.

When we push a horse beyond their confidence level, especially when training them in the hackamore or bridle, to the point of fear and confusion, we must be very careful and back out of that area to minimize the damages. When the horse loses its confidence and we punish them and cause panic or resentment, we

may create a situation that could take a multitude of good experiences to offset the one bad experience, and they may never trust that it won't happen again.

We can not force a horse to relax. When their self preservation is engaged they are tense, tight, flighty, and maybe even fighting. They need to be confident that their safety is not being jeopardized, not just their livelihood but free from pain being inflicted on them from quick or heavy hands. Pain and especially quick, unexpected pain or a surprise makes it difficult for the horse to relax.

A very simple test is to take one rein to bring the head laterally. The one eye should look up the rein, the face remains some what vertical; not looking away and the head should not start toward a horizontal position. When you ask for vertical flexion, they should break in the poll without elevating the head first.

The horse can bend their neck laterally and vertically without bending their poll.

Bending the horses neck does not mean they are supple in the poll. Flexing should be a test, not an exercise. When the horse has the proper preparation and understanding, there is no reason for their poll not to be supple.

In the training of a hackamore and bridle horse, a supple poll is the trademark of a horse that has learned to accept and operate with these traditional tools the way they were intended.