



Dr. Beverly Gordon

Gordon Chiropractic, P.C.
www.TheHorseInMotion.com
TheHorseInMotion@aol.com
EquineDC@aol.com

The Horse In Motion, LLC, Pres.
Oyster Bay, NY 11771
Wellington, FL, 33414
cell # (516) 606-4141

Truths in Riding

Regardless of the level at which you ride, there are certain principles which always hold true. These principles, when strictly adhered to in training, promote the development of correct equine movement and allow the horse to reach his full athletic and performance potential. They form the basis for a good foundation and should be strictly adhered to throughout the horses training. Because these principles always hold true in a correctly trained horse, I call these principles ‘truths in riding’.

I find it interesting that when I am called to analyze upper level horses, I discover that, though often very subtle, especially in well trained horses, issues exist because there is a slight breakdown in part of the foundation. As a result, the horse carries a consistent resistance throughout its training, though it might not become apparent until the horse is challenged at the upper levels. Though most upper level horses are well trained, subtle (though sometimes not so subtle) physical or training resistances do exist. Once I determine the exact origin of the resistance, I help the rider/trainer alleviate it by addressing it at the foundation level specific for that resistance and that particular horse. Hence, performance improves. Since good training is always based upon a pure and solid foundation, those principles which always apply must never be compromised. And those principles, known as the ‘truths in riding’, must never waver.

So, that being said, regardless of your level of riding, or the horse you are riding, or the discipline you are riding, there are principles which should always be part of your training program. Here are a few of them.

Basic Foundation and Principles

1. “The horse must develop an immediate response to the aids”. In any human-equine communication, there are two equine reactions which are never

acceptable. One is aggression, and the other is ignoring you. In fact, horses who are not taught early in their training to respond immediately to their riders aids will ultimately develop a need for stronger and stronger aids to motivate them to respond. (I am sure you have seen this scenario many times) A horse's lack of immediate response to the aids is counterproductive in developing a good work ethic as a willing partner. However, a horse who is taught to respond immediately will be focused on the rider and be willing and easily directed. Since equine movement is dynamic in nature, (constantly changing), without immediate responses to your aids it is unlikely your horse would ever learn to respond to light aids. On that note.....

2. "The horse must be light off the aids". (Lightness of aids) You should always goal to communicate with your horse with the lightest of aids, and there should never be a time you are on your horse when you are not striving to achieve this. You should ride always keeping this in mind, training so that your horse responds to lighter and lighter aids. Strive for a soft feel. Communication is always about feel (and intent). If your horse feels dull or heavy, you must consistently address this issue. If you allow this dullness to continue throughout the training, day after day, you are not 'getting to the other side' of the problem and your communication with your horse will be flawed. Always ask yourself, "how light can I be and still get the job done?"

3. "The horse must always move freely forward". (Forwardness) Every movement starts with forwardness. While horses do possess differing abilities and desires to move forward, with some horses being more naturally sensitive than others, the degree to which the horse moves freely forward is very often a product of the rider's ability to *not* interfere with this movement. Free moving horses will have a greater ability to stay 'in front of the leg' where training is most effective. Since the horse is more heavily weighted on his front end, in order for the horse to lighten his forehead, he must shift his weight rearward, moving his center of gravity further back so he horse can develop collection. This can only be achieved by a forward moving horse pushing up through your seat into your hands and onto the bit (hence the term 'on the bit'). We need forwardness to create *connection*, which we need in order to create *collection*. (Interestingly, often when we ride our horses more forward it also improves their straightness) Forwardness also develops strength of the pushing and carrying muscles, and frees-up both the horse's mind and body. Forwardness is a necessary component of any successful training program and

the natural ability of every horse to move forward freely must be preserved and enhanced at all times.

2. “The horse must be straight”. (Straightness). Straightness is not only about position but also about balance and especially about function. Whether moving on a straight line or in a circle, horses can be said to be straight IF they are physically and mentally prepared to move efficiently forward in balance and without loss of energy. By that I mean that all the energy created from behind must necessarily travel through the horse to the bit, and not be lost, for example, through the shoulders. Straightness is paramount to balanced bilateral muscle development, as well as equal joint range of motion (flexibility) on both the right and left side of the horse. So, from a soundness point of view, a straight horse will more likely remain sound, as there would be no off-loading or aberrant stress placed on any one particular limb or set of muscles. Since sound horses break down less, they can naturally reach higher levels of performance in a shorter time. I will add one disclaimer here. Sometimes as part of a training exercise, we intentionally make a horse crooked to help them learn to be straight, especially when dealing with resistances. However, this is always done with the goal of straightness in mind.

Understanding and applying the above basic, but important, ‘truths in riding’ is an essential part of every successful equine training program.

Until next time,
Dr. Bev Gordon