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Resistance-Free Performance

Years ago I realized I could make a greater change in how a horse moves by identifying specific mental, behavioral, training and physical resistances. (*be sure to see last month's article). It seemed the effects of Chiropractic adjustments lasted longer, and the horse's overall frame of mind improved when I addressed these resistances *precisely*. For example, there are any number of variables which can contribute to the horse's difficulty (or inability) to perform a particular skill or movement effectively, such as straightness or bending, and these variables always have their origins in some form of resistance. I realized that when I would break down the difficulty to *precise* resistances, I found I could develop specific 'exercises' which were supremely effective in causing a change in the horse's ability to perform. Since alleviating resistances is paramount to good performance, diagnosing and alleviating resistances is applicable to all disciplines and levels of riding.

Now, that being said, it is my intention to give my readers information which will help in the understanding of how to assess resistances; that is, observing where the resistances might be, and their possible origins. Since the practice of detecting and alleviating resistances is extremely extensive and takes training to develop adequate skill, especially when they are a bit more subtle, this article will address the more salient points. I welcome Sidelines readers to e-mail me for further information or related questions.

Determining the Existence of Resistances

There are methods for observing exactly where resistances exist, and determining what precisely is causing them. Unfortunately, sometimes these resistances are more subtle and it takes some experience to be able to observe them, especially at the higher levels of riding where the subtleties and

refinement of movement becomes a greater factor. However, at any level of riding, it is essential to develop at least the skill to accurately assess movement and correctly judge it's quality and limitations. Therefore, it is necessary for all riders and trainers to become students of *resistance-free performance*.

If you read last month's article (if not - go back and read it), "*Classification System for Understanding Resistance*" you know that there are four categories into which any resistance can fall. They are: **Physical, Training, Behavioral, and Instinctual**. Achieving resistance-free performance is based upon our ability to observe the existence of any given resistance, and our ability to know how to alleviate it.

1) Observing a Resistance - The first step is developing Awareness. Make it a habit to become aware of your horse's movement and his response to your aids. Think about this the next time you ride your horse. For example, is the horse's movement *exactly* the same on both sides? If not, there is a resistance. With regard to your aids, what is the amount of pressure needed by an aid to exhibit a response from the horse? The more pressure needed the more likely a resistance. (Try to get a response with almost no pressure at all). Is his movement *as good as it can* be relative to his conformation? Here is another hint: tension anywhere in the horse is symptom of a resistance. And, this is the key here, is your horse yielding to the pressure of every aid in an uncompromising and willing manner? While you might not know the exact resistance, or it's origin, or how to alleviate it, you should certainly become aware that it exists. You can't begin to fix it if you don't recognize it.

2) Alleviating the resistance - The first step in alleviating a resistance is to understand which of the four categories (physical, training, behavioral, instinctual) the resistance primarily fits into. Most resistances fall into more than one category. Let's assume, for example, your horse exhibits less balance, or is harder in the bridle on one side, or just has more difficulty when cantering on the right lead. If you believe the reason the horse exhibits a resistance is physical in nature, such as a hock issue, that particular resistance might need veterinary attention in order to alleviate it. If you feel, however, that the lack of balance is a weakness due to unevenness as a result of training, you then need to determine precisely which muscles are weak and the best methods to train the horse to fix this problem. The more specific you can be in your assessment the

more effective you can be in alleviating the resistance and improving your horse's ability to perform.

Many resistances are naturally alleviated by training, though I have never seen a horse at any level who did not exhibit some resistance which interfered with his performance (though these resistances may be more subtle to observe by the lay person). I'd like to think truly resistance-free performance exists, but like human athletes, even the greatest competitors have resistances which they are constantly addressing in order to improve their performance and keep them at the top of their game. Resistance-free performance is not something we achieve, it is something we constantly strive to attain.

Several weeks ago I worked with an advanced rider who felt that her GP horse was having difficulty with a particular skill. Though she is an extremely skilled rider, because the primary resistance here was fairly subtle, her correct training did not alleviate it.

In this case, we found she needed to direct her efforts **specifically** toward increasing her horse's spinal rotation of the thoracic vertebrae, which in turn increased the horse's ability to correctly bend through his spine, thereby allowing her horse to take a deeper step with his inside hind leg. This greatly improved her horse's performance though the fix was fairly simple, once it was observed and addressed correctly. Basically, we detected the resistance to which the horse was not yielding, so we were able to adequately address it and in doing so, improve the horse's performance.

As I have stated *sooooo*...many times in the past, **HORSES NEED TO YIELD UNCONDITIONALLY TO PRESSURE!** No exceptions.

Now, one other point I need to discuss. **Most resistances are man-made.** Sorry, but that is true. Whether or not we overtly create them by poor horse handling or riding, we have been, somewhere along the way, responsible for the development of the resistances in our horses. Both on the ground and under tack. Therefore, for purposes not only related to performance, it is our responsibility to help our horses through their resistances. Horses started early in life with resistance-free type of training and handling and proper riding skills

become less resistant and more willing partners. Now there's something to strive for!

Until next time,

Dr. Bev Gordon