Proper Use of Your Legs for a Safe Ride
by Jerry Tindell

Howdy friends and neighbors, it’s Jerry Tindell here from Tindell’s Horse and Mule School and I would like to talk to you about effective use of your legs. The most important part of a safe ride starts with good posture and positioning of your body.

First make sure you have a saddle that properly fits you and your mount and allows you to sit in the middle of your saddle with your legs under you or just slightly ahead. Your positioning is just as important as the good frame you want your mount to have and important in transferring life into his feet.

If you lean ahead and your legs swing back to the rear, you have no energy even though your leg is active. If you lean too far back and your legs are too far in front of you, your legs have no power. If you are only sitting on your pockets you are in a sloppy position.

In order to be an effective rider you need to have correct posture with a three point position between your seat bones and your pelvis. This correct position should match the correct frame of your stock and balance with them. You will become a better rider and this position will assist you when you are required to have a better seat when you need it.

So first think about what you want to happen and prepare for that by sitting up straight in the saddle and put energy into your body but without heaviness. Squeeze first using your seat bones, then your thigh, calf and then heel. As soon as you feel them move, RELEASE. This does not mean stop riding but softy maintain your thought of movement through your body to their legs and feet; Don’t quit riding when they go! Don’t keep kicking when they go but maintain life in your legs without being heavy.

Stay focused and as soon as you get a try, release and soften your legs but keep them active. Keep the life in their mind and body through their feet. Poor posture will give you a poor ride that lacks in purpose and energy. Engage your mind and body in the ride.

Whether I’m at a clinic, teaching students, or training outside stock, the most important direction to build in the stock is forward movement. You do that by teaching them to move in the round pen, then on a halter rope and then later when we ride.

Let’s look at the four basic directions; forward, backward, left and right. All four directions come from the mind going to the horse/mules feet. Any direction is normal and natural for them and to their way of thinking any direction you ask of them means control of them.

There are two types of control – advance or retreat [leave the scene]. When the stock is at liberty on their own and without a rider the four directions have purpose. Directions are very important when we ride. Forward movement has three directions, straight ahead, moving left or moving right. When I want to build courage and confidence, I determine correct forward movement. We have to control the direction in order to control the mind.

To work on and build straight forward movement you will need to have solid leg yields. Your mount must understand how to move forward, left and right away from your active leg. I would practice driving them forward using both legs plus leg yields left and right and get that really solid before I would expose them to concerning situations.

Get good at driving them forward without distractions as you need to get that solid first or you will not be effective when they want to avoid or get afraid of outside stimuli. In other words, until you get effective at keeping them moving forward or left and right when there are no distractions such as new objects, noises, etc. you cannot expect them to stay focused on your cues when they are exposed to outside stimuli.

Build up to this one step at a time so that eventually they listen to you and your leg aids even when previously they would have become distracted, be it at home, on a trail ride or at a competition.

Think and be Safe!
Jerry

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