

Think puts ide the Ring

BY NATALIE DEFEE MENDIK

“

THE WORK YOU DO IN THE ARENA IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE WORK YOU DO ON THE TRAIL, AND VICE VERSA. HORSES NEED BOTH; HORSES NEED BALANCE.”

- CATHY DRUMM

WHO SAYS ALL SCHOOLING HAS TO TAKE PLACE IN AN ARENA? TIME ON THE TRAIL OFFERS A CHANGE OF SCENERY, A QUIETER PACE, AND A BREATH OF FRESH AIR...AND ALSO PRESENTS NEW TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES. MAKE SUPPLE AND STEADY THE NAME OF YOUR TRAIL RIDING GAME!

SET THE STAGE

As you're getting acclimated to the trail, whether it's the end of winter, you have a new horse, or you're new to the trail, start out thinking small. "Bite things off in little chunks," recommends New England-based instructor Cathy Drumm, who teaches internationally across disciplines, including western dressage, dressage, and hunter/jumper. "Start with a short loop so the horse doesn't get too anxious. Try not to push too far out of the horse's comfort zone all at once—gradually build up."

Once you've gotten rolling, think about the tempo you'd like in the arena, and hold your horse to that standard on the trail. Ask your horse to

step rhythmically forward from the hindquarters to the bridle, even if you're just walking on a longer rein. Dawdling is not an option. "Insist on a working walk just as much on the trail as in the arena," says Drumm. "The horse should be marching forward with purpose, alert and listening to you, with a light contact between your hands and the horse's mouth."

Ask your horse to come on the bit for a few moments, staying forward, supple, and round. The trail is a good opportunity to keep your horse's mind on you outside the confines of an arena, which will also later help in new surroundings, like at a horse show. Where footing allows, try a bit of a posting trot, using your posting to help the horse stay in a clockwork rhythm.

For a horse that's tense and quick, sit back, breathe deep, and stay soft in your hands. "If the horse jigs, half-halts

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TO COMBINE
TRAINING
AND TRAIL
RIDING INTO
ONE FUN
OUTING

Hill work is a great way to condition your horse while taking advantage of different scenery.



are essential," explains Drumm. "Stay very patient; impatience tends to make things worse." Drumm notes horses tend to jig for two different reasons: "If the horse is jiggling because he has too much energy, allow him to trot a bit, then walk, and repeat, using transitions to maintain balance," she suggests. "If he's jiggling because he's afraid, sometimes it makes sense to get off the horse and lead him, especially if his jiggling is making you afraid. I always tell people it's not a sin to get off your horse."

By riding with appropriate contact, Drumm explains you are able to stay effective. "If the horse suddenly spooks or hits rough ground, you can make adjustments if needed," she says, noting half-halts play a role as well. "You don't want the horse to be leaning on you on the trail any more than you would want him to be leaning on you in the arena. You always have to practice rebalancing half-halts, whether on the trail or in the arena, in order to make a change. On the trail this could be, for example, where the footing shifts or before crossing water. This helps the horse to engage and pay attention."

STEP UP THE GAME

Outdoor riding on slopes offers conditioning opportunities beyond the arena. "There's nothing better to develop your horse's rear end and back muscles than going up and down hill," remarks Drumm. In a light seat, incorporate gentle inclines into your ride, asking your horse to stretch downward over the topline while walking and trotting uphill. While walking downhill, keep your horse straight and balanced. "When you go uphill and maintain the same tempo and rhythm, you will find that your horse reaches his head and neck forward and really has to push from the rear end to get up the hill. This develops everything you need for a good free walk," remarks Drumm. "Going downhill, ask the horse to engage his rear end and lift his front end a bit." Stick to milder grades so as to not overtax your horse.

Choose a point in the distance and ride toward it, practicing riding straight. Still on that line, ride into a square halt, quietly asking your horse to remain immobile yet attentive. Ride upward and downward transitions, maintaining balance. "Transitions help the horse stay awake on the trail," says Drumm. "They tend to startle when they are half asleep." If room allows on the trail, practice changing bend through a slight serpentine, taking the width of the trail. "When you turn or ride

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Expect your horse to walk rhythmically forward from the hindquarters and focus his attention on you while on the trail.

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HITTING THE TRAIL WITH FIDO

Happy trail riding with your dog entails a partnership between rider, dog, and horse. Good training can pay off with pleasant hours out and about. First off, horse and dog need to respect one another; this means no kicking on the horse's part and no nipping or crowding on the dog's part.

Your horse needs to accept a canine companion without spooking at the dog's movements and sounds. Having your horse accustomed to dogs in the brush only works in your favor: even without a dog on your ride, you never know when rabbits, deer, or other animals will dart through the grass and out of the bushes. A horse that doesn't startle makes a nice trail mount.

Be sure your dog's training is up-to-snuff before your maiden "voyage." Your dog must first be tuned in to your commands when you're on the ground. If things are lacking in this department, find a good dog trainer to work with. You can then transfer that obedience to yourself while mounted.

Your dog should be clear on voice commands for various scenarios, such as "leave it" when he's found something he shouldn't have or something he would like to chase; "heel" for remaining where you would like him in relation to the horse, such as parallel to you; "back" to follow behind the horse on the trail; "come" to stay with you, and so on.

Start practicing with horse and dog in the arena and around the farm. In the beginning, be ready to dismount and correct your dog if needed. Some riders employ the use of training collars with a shock or beep function.

Exposing your dog to trail riding with a dog who's already good on the trails uses positive pack mentality to your advantage, so if a friend has a dog who's great on the trail, see if you can ride together.

Be sure of leash and pet clean-up laws if you are riding on public trails. Steer clear of roads if possible for everyone's safety. Be aware that you may encounter loose dogs, so have a plan for how you'll handle that situation.

Many horses enjoy the canine companionship and vice versa. A horse, a dog, and beautiful nature—who could ask for more?



Connecticut Trail Rides Association Presents Annual BBQ & Auction Fundraiser

CTRA Camp Boardman, 81 Eli Bunker Road, Goshen CT

Sunday August 14, 2016

BBQ Starts at 11:00am -- Auction Starts at 12:30pm



Dinner Details:

The club will supply Hot Dogs, Hamburgers, Chicken, Sausage Patties, Rolls and Beverages.

RSVP no later than Monday August 8, 2016

To: Shirley McClary 203-982-8219

26 Straits Turnpike Lane, Morris, CT 06763

Make Checks Payable to CTRA

Auction Details:

Donations of auction items to be offered should be brought to camp no later than Sunday 10am. Horse Stuff, Household items, and Food items.

This is the club's main fundraiser for the year that helps support the club.

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Total People _____ Total \$ Enclosed _____

Food Item I'm Bringing to Donate (Side or Dessert): _____

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There will be an additional charge of \$2.00 per ticket for tickets purchased at the door

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For more information and to book:
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on a bent line on the trail, ask for the same bending as you would in the arena," Drumm recommends.

Later in your ride you can then add in steps of shoulder-fore, haunches-in, and leg yield or half-pass if your horse is already learning lateral movements. "The best place to work on your lateral work is when you turn toward home, especially on a dirt road or wide track where you can freely go side to side. The horse will happily have impulsion heading toward home, so you can work on sideways without having to create the impulsion that you would have to in the arena," notes Drumm.

GET OUT & GET GOING!

Mix up your routine—a little bridle-path schooling provides a new perspective for you and your horse. Take advantage of whatever the trail brings your way—an improved attitude, more forward energy, less anticipation—for an easy-going tune-up.

Be considerate of the other riders if you are out in a group, allowing the slowest rider to set the pace. Also remember to share the trail with other trail users (think hikers, bikers, and any other outdoor enthusiasts) you may come across—be a good ambassador for the equine community.

For some horses, riding in the open can prove awfully exciting. Know your horse—if you think you may have a fresh horse outdoors, work him before going out. Ride with a buddy if need be. Be smart and safe. 

NATALIE DEFEE MENDIK is an award-winning journalist specializing in equine media. Her personal horse passions include dressage and vaulting. Visit her online at MendikMedia.com.

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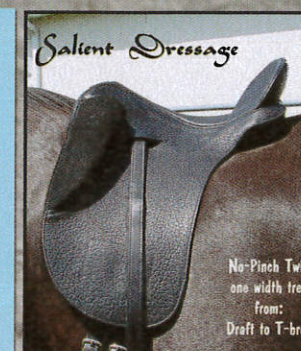
SADDLETREES: "THE PIG IN A POKE" **LEN BROWN'S BLACK MESA CUSTOM TREE & SADDLE**

Len Brown started life with horses in 1982, living outdoors for 8 months & 3000 mile, with a nice lookin young lady thru 6 states with 5 horses. He made his saddle, modified the 3 pack saddles and finished with no white hair on any of his horses. That started Ortho-Flex Saddle Company. He dropped O/F in 2001 and invented the ProTector pad. In 2008 he started up his saddletree operation again to build better saddles for use with the ProTector. Len has spent more on his tree business than the major saddle companies have on their factories. He still spends more time and money on a tree than others do on their saddles. As he says "The tree is the saddle and the bars are the tree."

Playing saddle-fit is a loser's game. My trees are made to work on any horse while riding, not to "FIT" while standing. The Patented ProTector "saddle foundation system" lets you adjust rider balance as needed. It positions your saddle off of the shoulders while protecting them. The ProTector is included with any saddle you buy from Len Brown's Innovations, LLC.

The Salient tree took 6 months to develop. Lifetime guaranteed, it is closer, lighter, and more comfortable for the rider than the limited shapes possible in European saddle construction methods. One tree width, no re-flocking panels, and a reasonable price means this is a revolutionary advancement in the English saddle.

-Len Brown



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