

UNDERSTANDING EQUALS CONTROL

More and more people are becoming interested in going bitless. At the same time they are able to see it is much kinder for the horse, they often question whether it's possible to control a bitless horse. That's because transitioning from bitted to bitless can often uncover 'holes' in the training of both horse and rider.

Disclaimer: HorseWyse Magazine and Carlos Tabernaberry recommend that our readers always wear the correct safety equipment – including approved safety helmets – when heading out on the trail. Don't forget to seek professional advice if you need assistance with your horse's training and always put your safety first.



It's why I tell them 'bits do not collect horses – proper training and understanding does'.

Last issue we looked at one of the three main types of bitless 'bridles' – the hackamore. But a 'crossover' and 'sidepull' are also options. Whatever you might choose, remember the principles for using any bridle – bitted or bitless – are the same.

Control is about learning to manage parts of your horse – the neck, shoulders, hindquarters and feet. There really isn't much bend in a horse's body, it's actually lateral flexion through the neck that gives you 90% of control. If you try control a horse by putting pressure on the mouth – with a bit – you simply cause him to panic from pain. Get the horse to understand what you are asking in a calm way and his body will follow.



When I ask her forward, you can see how she is leaning and pulling on the reins. I am just holding her – if I were to pull back, I would put her more on the forehead.



Even on a loose rein, she wants to be high headed.

If a rider causes the horse pain through a bit, it's not surprising the horse may develop a fear of the rider. This fear, which interrupts clear, calm communication with the horse, is another reason problems develop. If the rider is also scared, that interruption is greater because of the likelihood that the rider will be riding with tight contact on the bit.

This warmblood mare (right) came for training – she is naturally a very high-headed horse. On a bitted bridle, I can guarantee you she would be even more high-headed in an effort to avoid the bit. It's at this point that you will hear people suggest using tools – like draw reins – to force the head down into a pretend frame. But that only causes the horse to break at the wrong point (instead of being poll high) and remain heavy on the forehead.

'Through the Eyes of the Horse™'



Instead, I ask for a reinback so that she must use her hindquarters instead of leaning on my reins and hands. You can see her start to soften slightly.



You can see that she has softened at the poll, yet remains poll high.



And she is able to maintain that self-carriage as we walk forward on a better carriage and soft rein.

This is the sort of horse who would end up being ridden in a martingale and an increasingly stronger bit in an effort by the rider to keep that head down or even lunged for hours with side reins. That's not going to fix anything. It's like putting a bandaid on a gaping wound.

In reality, her high head indicates a very weak back. I need to work with her at the trot to strengthen her back, but I need her to understand how to hold herself, in proper self-carriage, at the walk first.

Yes, a martingale would keep her head down, but she wouldn't learn – or understand – how to use her body properly. She would end up overdeveloping the muscles under her neck that she uses to lift her head and brace. Instead, she needs to relax her spine and engage her hindquarters by lifting her back, not hollowing.

I would say that most horses I see don't understand contact. You can ride a horse like this with excessive contact or use side reins or a

martingale. But you will end up with a horse who has back problems – not a lovely topline. Did you know that less than 10% of horses in the world are sound? Can you see why so many problems start at the very beginning, during foundation training?

So instead of focusing on the head, let's look at the hindquarters – people spend a lot of time focusing on the head. A horse will bolt, buck, or rear using his hindquarters. But we focus on the head, not the hindquarters. With lateral flexion, you can ask the horse to yield his hindquarters, as you do in a one-rein or 'one-leg' stop.

It is that lateral flexion that will eventually give the horse the ability to achieve vertical flexion, by stepping under, engaging the hindquarters and working long and low. To do that, I have to get the horse to accept the contact and drive her into my hands.

IN THE SERIES OF THREE PICTURES BELOW, YOU CAN SEE THE PROCESS OF GETTING THAT VERTICAL FLEXION.



Her head is high as she starts to move into the turn.



Moving into the turn, I support her with my inside leg and outside rein and her head begins to lower.



As she brings her body around, her head lowers even more and she steps across nicely.



Now, instead of trying to avoid the contact by keeping her head high, she avoids it by going behind.



I still need to ask her to take that contact, so I hold the contact and drive her forward with my legs. I need to maintain that calmness, so she doesn't get flustered and throw her head up again.



What a difference from the beginning of our session – her head has come right down, she's using her hindquarters better and is able to walk and stretch out long and low.

'Through the Eyes of the Horse™'

We started out talking about control and how it doesn't come through force, like the force of a bit. It comes from proper training and understanding. That's what creates the foundations on a horse that will last a lifetime. This mare has a lot of work to do at the walk – lots of turns and bending to build that lateral flexion and consistent carriage. It takes patience, but it's worth it.

If you have a high-headed horse and want to try riding bitless but are a bit worried about it, try using two sets of reins. Have one on the bit and the other on a bitless bridle or halter. It will give you a chance to develop a feel for how you – and your horse – react to going bitless.

Don't worry about collection – that will come. Perhaps in another article! Collection is something horses give us when they have developed the strength and balance to carry themselves with calmness and rhythm.

There you have it – proper training and understanding will give you real control

Until next time – safe riding and God Bless!

Carlos

Photos by Marty Schiel.

© Whispering Acres Horse Starting and Training 2012

Carlos comes to your iPad with Finding Common Ground

Check it out on iTunes!

This book is available for download on your iPhone, iPad or iPod touch with iBooks and on your computer with iTunes. Books must be read on an iOS device.

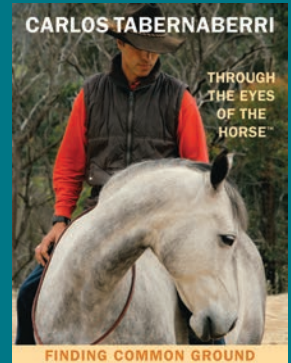
Designed as a must have for riders and horse owners alike Finding Common Ground reveals the methodology and techniques Carlos uses to start and train horses in his clinics, lessons, articles, books and DVDs.

No matter if you own a competition horse, pleasure horse, racehorse or a previously abused horse, Carlos' philosophy can help you forge the loving, trust-based relationship you desire with your horse by finding the common ground in everyday situations.

With step-by-step instructive images and almost two hours of embedded how-to video, Carlos' highly interactive book weaves practical information and instruction with inspiration, always through the eyes of the horse.

"If you really want to know horses, you must love them and have a desire to understand them. If you love and understand them, you will get to know them," says Carlos.

RRP \$19.99. 136 pages (1GB file). Approx. 2 hours video (20 clips). 140 full-colour illustrations (82 step-by-step photos) Fully interactive – highlight, search, notate, bookmark. Requires iBooks 3.0 or later (IOS 5.1 or later)



Where to catch Carlos

No matter what type of horse you own and love, Carlos has a gift to help you understand the horse and achieve the results you want. Clinic numbers are purposely kept small, to make sure every person has an opportunity to work directly with Carlos on everything from spookiness on the ground to problem solving on the ground and under saddle. If you have an issue, bring it to a clinic or lesson!

2013 Clinics

May

2-18 (Clinics/Lesson/Demo) Northern Ireland, including Balmoral Show 2013
(Please check our Facebook pages for more information)

24-26 (Clinic/Lessons) Mansfield, VIC
Contact: Kylie, booties75@bigpond.com, 0407 021 135

June

1 (Lessons) Whispering Acres, Whittlesea VIC
Contact: Carlos, whisperingacres@bigpond.com, 0414 380 396

8-10 (Clinic/Lessons) Boonah, QLD
Contact: Annette, stablesdeville@gmail.com, 0419 547 997

15 (Clinic) Whispering Acres, Whittlesea VIC
Contact: Carlos, whisperingacres@bigpond.com, 0414 380 396

22 (Lessons) Whispering Acres, Whittlesea VIC
Contact: Carlos, whisperingacres@bigpond.com, 0414 380 396

28-30 (Clinic) Sunninghill Equestrian Centre, Stoneville, WA (Perth area)
Contact: Lisa Rowe, nrlmr@primus.com.au, 08 9295 5293 or 0419 967 827

August

14-18 (Five-day Clinic), Challa Station, Mount Magnet, WA
Contact: Debbie Dowden, debandash@bigpond.com, 08 9963 5361

23-25 (Clinic) Sunninghill Equestrian Centre, Stoneville, WA (Perth area)
Contact: Lisa Rowe, nrlmr@primus.com.au, 08 9295 5293 or 0419 967 827

31 (Lessons) Whispering Acres, Whittlesea VIC
Contact: Carlos, whisperingacres@bigpond.com, 0414 380 396

September

14-18 (Clinic/Lessons), Oaks Sport Horses, The Oaks, NSW
Contact: Pim Grogan, pimgrogan@gmail.com or Elizabeth, budz1305@tpg.com.au, 0411 390 432

14-18 (Clinic/Private lessons) KalEquine Services, Cooranbong, NSW
Contact: Deb, kalequine@yahoo.com, 0417 268 884



Like us on
Facebook

www.facebook.com/CarlosTabernaberryHorsemanship
or visit our website www.whisperingacres.com