

Softly

Another new year often brings with it another batch of well-meaning resolutions, most of which seem to fall away by the end of January.

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.

If you only make one resolution this year – and keep to it – I hope it's to do the right thing by your horse each and every day and to strive for softness in all you do... from the ground up. Just imagine what a difference that would make to your relationship with your horse by the end of the year. Helping your horse to be consistently well-behaved, soft and responsive is a new year's resolution worth sticking to!

By 'soft' I don't mean weak or indecisive - being a confident, consistent and kind leader is the basis for everything I do. I mean the 'softness' that comes from a calm horse that does not feel trapped or pressured. The rider's softness on the rope and reins. The horse's softness and responsiveness to cues. The softness that comes only when horse and rider follow each other's feel.

This kind of softness requires you – and your horse – to use your brain, NOT brute force.

A horse may tolerate rough or inconsistent treatment for a time, but eventually the horse will react 'out of character'. I am sure you've heard of the fifteen- or twenty-year-old horse 'suddenly' bucking or bolting for no apparent reason. All too often, these are the horses that are sold to unsuspecting owners, neglected or sold to the doggers because they've been labelled 'dangerous' or put in the 'too hard' basket.



SO HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE THIS SOFTNESS?

Well, you need to start soft to stay soft. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Become what you want your horse to be – soft.

This means learning to ride with awareness, feel, timing and balance. Always start at the walk – if you can create softness at the walk, it's easier to apply the same principles at the trot, canter and gallop, and in all the upward and downward transitions. The key is consistent, soft and light contact.

I make very light contact with the horse as he walks. If, like many people, you think your horse will take off on you if you give him a loose rein, he will. If you trust that he won't, then he won't. Remember – your horse feels what you feel. It's impossible to fool him.

2. One rein for softness and control

The only time I ever use two reins together is when I am working on collection or holding the reins steady while asking for a rein back with a leg cue. Unfortunately, many riders are taught to use two reins to ask the horse to stop, but this causes the horse to lock up his neck and jaw and the rider to lose control. When you pull, your horse pulls; you lean, he leans.

Hold one rein steady while using a light on-off pressure (like squeezing a sponge) on the other rein. It doesn't matter which you hold steady and which you squeeze. I



I use my inside (right) leg just behind the girth to disengage the hindquarters while I hold my right rein tightly (picture, left) and release the left rein and left leg (picture, right) to generate a deep crossover of the hind legs that disengages the hindquarters.

alternate so that the horse remains even on both sides. If the horse pulls on the reins or speeds up, I close my fingers on that one rein with the light on-off pressure and let the horse find the pressure himself. When he slows to the desired gait or speed, I open my fingers and become light again and giving him slack.

3. Ask, don't tell your horse (except when it comes to safety)

I only tell a horse when it comes to the safety. For instance, if the safety of the horse and rider is put at risk by a shy, a bolt, a buck or a rear, there is no time for thinking. You must tell the horse what you want him to do to prevent a wreck. You must exercise absolute leadership. Timing is crucial, but tell him confidently, consistently and kindly by flexing him and disengaging his hindquarters in the case of a buck or bold. If the horse tries to rear, he must first stop. You may have to drive him forward quickly and then disengage his hindquarters.

Many will call this the 'safety stop', but I prefer to call it the 'one-leg stop'. It is an essential skill, but one that if you 'over use', can cause the horse to avoid going forward. Remember, move the horse's feet only when you need to, for instance if the horse is being pushy on the ground or is preparing to fight or flee under saddle.

If I continually tell the horse what I want, I don't ever give him the time to work out my request and so I rob him of the chance to develop understanding. If you are a confident, consistent and kind leader, your horse will learn to trust

your leadership to get him out of trouble if it occurs. He can remain calm and relaxed, which means he is focused on you and trying to understand your request; not distracted or confused. Then it's up to YOU to put your requests in a way your horse understands – or to try different approaches until you find one he does understand. And remember to always reward even his smallest 'tries'.

4. Correct your horse - don't punish him - when he demonstrates undesirable behaviour. You will build your horse's confidence at the same time you build confidence in yourself AND your horse.

The most likely reason that a horse doesn't want to do what you ask is a lack of understanding. Make the unfamiliar more familiar to your horse and he will be more willing to accept what you ask of him. The more you handle your horse, calm him, reassure him, correct and reward him, the safer he will feel in doing what you ask.

When training your horse – and remember you're training your horse every time you handle him – focus on achieving that positive 'try' in the right direction, not the end result. Eventually, a collection of 'tries' becomes a complete and smooth end result that you will achieve much more quickly than if you forced your cues or demanded a response.

The only time you should interfere with your horse's movement is to correct an undesired response. Your horse



'Through the Eyes of the Horse™'

does not try to be wrong. He is only giving the response he thinks is the right one, according to how he interpreted your request. If you don't get the right response, just start again until your horse understands your cue and responds correctly.

What we are trying to achieve is a circle of 'feel – timing – balance – correct response' that is as light and soft as possible. We want to do as little as we can to get as much as we can! But this is centred on your awareness of what your horse is doing all the time. It's the key to true communication with your horse. If you combine this with a positive mindset, consistently work towards it every time you handle your horse, you WILL achieve the well-behaved, soft and responsive horse you set out to create at the start of the year.

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.

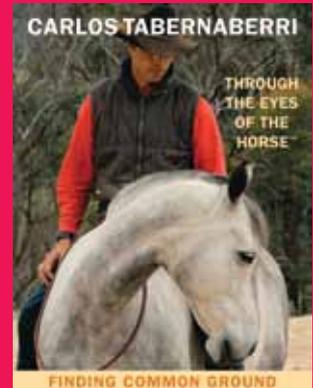
Designed as a must have for riders and horse owners alike Finding Common Ground reveals the methodology and techniques Carlos uses to start and train horses in his clinics, lessons, articles, books and DVDs.

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!

2014 Clinics

February

- 1-2 (Clinic/Private Lessons), Windsor, Oamaru (South Island, NZ),
Contact: Tina Wraight, s.wraight.builder@xtra.co.nz
- 8-9 (Clinic), Euroka Homestead, Megalong Valley (Blue Mountains) NSW
Contact: Briggett English, briggett.english@hotmail.com
- 16-23 (Training), Mt Seymour TAS
Contact: Angie, aquilant@bigpond.com, 0407 576 061

March

- 1-2 (Clinic/Lessons), Geelong VIC
Contact: Kim Barker, kim@heartwoodhorses.com.au
- 9-16 (Training), Mt Seymour TAS
Contact: Angie, aquilant@bigpond.com, 0407 576 061
- 29-30 (Clinic/Lessons), Dooralong NSW
Contact: Virginia Ede, philinvj@gmail.com

April

- 4-6 (Clinic/Lessons), Hervey Bay QLD
Contact: Karen Mueller, kazza56@hotmail.com

12-13

("Save the Brumbies" Clinic), Bellingen NSW
Contact: Jan Carter, info@savethebrumbies.org

20-27

(Training), Mt Seymour TAS
Contact: Angie, aquilant@bigpond.com, 0407 576 061

May

3-6

(Clinic/Lessons), Mogill QLD
Contact: Nicole Rosevear, NicoleRosevear@nti.com.au

10-11

(Clinic/Lessons), Yackandandah VIC
Contact: Jane Zwar, jane@dash.com.au

16-20

(Five-day Clinic), Margaret River WA
Contact: Gi'nelle Stammers, stammersg@boranupgallery.com

22-23

(Clinic), Margaret River WA
Contact: Gi'nelle Stammers, stammersg@boranupgallery.com

July

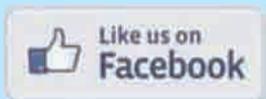
23-27

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

August

TBA

Clinics/Lessons in the Chicagoland IL USA area
Contact: Liz Farrell, efarrell36@rochester.rr.com, 585-734-0251



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