



TRAIL RIDING BASICS... ...PART TWO

Disclaimer: HorseWyse Magazine and Carlos Tabernaberrri 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.

Hopefully, you've been enjoying time on the trail since last issue but there's still so much to do!

In the Winter 11 HW issue, we covered many of the basics for going bush – including the gear you will need, the groundwork you can use and how to get your horse confident with many different sights, sounds and feels before heading out on the trail. And don't forget about the importance of always trying to trail ride with someone you trust and staying aware of your surroundings and your safety. You'll be putting all of that information from our last issue into good use now, along with some of the more advanced training we'll look at in this article.

And training is what this is all about! Trail riding is fun – but it's about being aware and prepared to help your horse to handle new situations; like managing the excitement that comes with 'riding out' and helping your horse to become more comfortable socialising with other horses. **You can't afford to be simply a passenger...it's time for you to become a trainer!**

Take your time

Let's start with how to handle some of the things you might meet up with on the road. In this picture, we have encountered some road resurfacing work just outside our front gate! This might look like any old 'workers ahead' sign to you, but remember to see it from your horse's perspective. Give him the chance to have a good look at it, to feel comfortable and to understand that it's not dangerous. My mare noticed the sign straight away – both when we rode out and when we returned. Remember – it also looks different to the horse out of each eye and from each direction.



Also, although we could hear the heavy equipment long before we saw it, for the horse it's still a surprise when noisy machines pop into view. A horse doesn't understand that the grumbling motor noise is actually coming from a bulldozer or tractor; they need to see it too! Again, the same principles apply – give your horse a good opportunity to look at the vehicle or machinery, watch it move around a bit and get used to the noise. Following it (safely) for a short time will allow your horse to 'chase' it and therefore feel more confident about being around it. And a reassuring pat or scratch lets your horse know he's doing well.

HW's favourite horse trainer

Keep in contact

Contact is particularly important when you're riding out, as it lets your horse know you're still up there! When so much is going on around you - like equipment or kangaroos or other horses or birds flying up from the bush - it would be easy for the horse to become distracted or nervous and forget you're there.

To help him stay focused, I use light contact. By 'light contact', I mean a soft rein, as opposed to a too long or overly loose rein. A soft but steady rein is important for providing guidance and direction, and it puts you in a position to be able to quickly 'pick the horse up' if he stumbles or slips. If you're riding on a loose rein and your horse trips, he could easily bury his face in the trail and lose a couple of teeth. If you're able to pull his head up, you can help him to regain his footing. **Remember:** an unbalanced horse may also panic, fall down or try to run away.

Being social

Socialising on the trail is part of the fun – but it's also another training opportunity.

It's important to be relaxed, but also never forget that your horse is a prey animal. If a prey animal relaxes too much in the wild, it can become another animal's dinner!!



In the photo above, while I'm chatting with my riding partner, my horse (although relaxing a back leg) is clearly focused on something in the opposite direction. If she decided to bolt right now, we might have opposite destinations in mind!

Getting your horse acquainted with your riding partner's horse also requires that you stay aware and focused. Horses that may be comfortable with each other in an arena may often react very

differently out on the trail. They can even react very differently during different events on the trail!

Up and down and round and round!

Another beauty of riding in the bush is that there are so many new and interesting ways to work on your training fundamentals – naturally! Inevitably, you'll have to go around bushes, up and down hills, through water or gates and over logs; so make the most of it! The bush in the picture is a perfect obstacle to practice our circle work and self-carriage.

Cantering uphill is also a great way to strengthen the hindquarters. It strengthens your horse's hind muscles, because he needs to get under himself to push up the hill, which in turn will help his self-carriage and flexion. It's a bit like when you need to get under the handles of a wheelbarrow full of heavy stones, in order to push it up a hill!

To help a horse travel uphill, you must break forward and 'get off' his back using a two-point seat (so your weight rests more in your heels and legs and your seat is light and forward). This will allow your horse to move under himself and will help to give him a soft rein so he can lengthen his neck and balance. Grab a bit of mane if you need to steady yourself and remember; all this work will be strengthening your backside and hindquarters too!



If you look at this picture, you can see that my body position mirrors that of the small tree behind me. Keep that image in mind, because the same applies when you're riding 'down hill'. Although you're sitting deeper in the saddle, with your heels down, your body position needs to mirror the slope or angle of the trees around you.

In this photo, my riding partner and I took the opportunity to canter uphill together, but also to canter off one at a time. It was a great chance to get our horses used to being separated and to teach them to wait patiently until they were given the cue to move off.



Taking the plunge...

Many horses have concerns about crossing water, but the training principles remain the same. Simply give the horse a good opportunity to look at the water, get a sense of the softer footing and help your horse to become confident about what you are asking.

You want your horse to remain calm, not to rush through or try to jump over the water, but to move through at the pace you have asked. Whenever I come across a body of water like this, I always try to gauge the depth of the water at a walk before moving through it more quickly. You wouldn't dive into a pool if you didn't know if it was deep enough – and you certainly don't want to find yourself out of your depth in a pool of water with your horse! On that first pass through, I always kick my feet out of the stirrups so that if the horse needs to suddenly swim, or trips in a hole in the water, (potentially falling sideways and pinning me underneath), I won't need to struggle to free my feet from the stirrups. Once I have established the waterway is safe, then I can move through at a trot and canter, and even with my riding partner.



Total freedom

For me, riding bareback in the bush is as natural as it gets. It's the time when I am interfering the least with my horse's 'free will' and riding in the bush helps both my horse and I to get the most out of our relationship. I can feel, first hand, my horse's movements, his balance, his strength and his breathing – just as he can feel mine.

If you've already had the experience of spending quality time with your horse on the trail, you'll know just what I mean. If it's a dream of yours, now is a good time to get started making it a reality for you both!

Enjoy!



Carlos

2011 Carlos Clinics

August

27-28 (Clinic) Hervey Bay area, QLD
Contact: Karen, mullerk@netspace.net.au

September

2-5 (Clinic/Private Lessons) Boonah, QLD
Contact: Annette 0419 547 997
stablesdeville@gmail.com

10 (Clinic) Maleny, QLD
Contact: Pauline, pca51819@bigpond.net.au

17 (Clinic) Warramate Park,
Sunnyside Road, Seville, VIC
Contact: Tanya 0408 395 721

24-25 (Clinic/Private lessons) Launceston, TAS
Contact: Raylene 0418 167 382
raylene.garwood@defence.gov.au

October

1-2 (Clinic) Bangalow, NSW
Contact: Andi, andi.neilands@gmail.com

15-16 (Clinic/Private Lessons) Bullsbrook, WA
Contact: Debbie, debandash@bigpond.com

29-30 (Clinic/Trail Riding Clinic) Bendigo, VIC,
Contact: Sarah
sarah.andrews101@gmail.com

November

6 (Clinic) Endeavour Park Equestrian Centre,
Picton/Camden area, NSW
Contact: Elizabeth 0411 390 432
budz1305@tpg.com.au



HW Reader Georgia and her gorgeous pony Snickers travelled to Bendigo recently, to have a lesson with Carlos on riding bitless. And no Carlos, you're not allowed to ride Snickers, even if he is the cutest pony you've ever seen! Well done Georgia on some terrific riding!