

HORSEINMIND 10-DAY PROGRAM

EXERCISES PART 2

1. We need to do a bit check.

- a. One of the easiest ways to fall into having a horse that leans on the bit or is heavy on the front end is having the wrong bit. Truth be told, the harder the bit the more opportunity for the horse to lean. If you have a softer bit in, used correctly, it is much easier to teach your horse to be light. That being said – when you have a puller, having a softer bit at times can feel like more of a challenge. I suggest having any kind of snaffle or loose ring. My best advice for horses like this is to have 2-3 of these bits in slightly different variations that you can switch up on bi-weekly basis your horse. **When horses have been in the same bit for a long time, it is much easier for them to get comfortable leaning on it.** They learn over time how you specifically carry your hands, what it feels like, and in turn come up with ways to take advantage (not work properly) by leaning into it for balance.

2. Identify the type of heaviness you are dealing with.

a. *Your horse does not know how to frame properly, but still drives downward and forward into the contact as a means of pulling / falling in.* In this case, it is important to prioritize teaching your horse how to soften to your contact. Instead of releasing and being supple to your rein pressure, your horse pushes against your hand. The exercises provided in part one will certainly help with this, you want to just keep that in mind when trying to get your horse to lighten in front – it is necessary for them to learn how to break slightly at the poll and raise their wither and back. When your horse is in the correct framing position, the front of their face should be perpendicular to the ground and you should feel a slight upward pressure with your hands opposed to pulling straight back or down. **In this situation, during your exercises its important to keep in mind that you need to put pressure into your hand, using your leg aid, in hopes that your horse will find a softer place (lower, usually) to carry themselves.** It has to be uncomfortable for them. If you have a horse that's very used to leaning on you, the amount of pressure in order to get them to a place of release may feel like a lot because they are able to tolerate a lot of pressure.

b. *Your horse knows how to frame properly, but gets behind the vertical, overbent at the poll and buries themselves.* So, your horse has learned how to properly take the contact, and either they jump in and out of it or they are consistent but instead get behind the vertical and buried in your hands. This is just another evasive tactic when avoiding connection and a way for your horse to balance on your hands opposed to themselves. **You have to consider this when doing exercises to get your horse sat on its hind end, as usually this is an indication that you need more leg and set with less hand aid.** Carrying your hand above and in front, in this case only, is acceptable because you are taking away their ability to balance on you and pushing forward to get them in front of your leg.

3. Introducing the rein-back, reverse.

a. If your horse already knows how to properly back up than use this exercise as a way to analyse how correct they are in doing so. It is so important for a horse to know how to yield to your rein pressure. Being able to back a horse up on a straight line, underneath themselves, with little to no pressure in your hand is imperative for their education. Once learned and executed correctly, you should

never feel like you have to pull or yank your horse to back up.

Keeping these things in mind, ensure that when you are at a standstill you do not drastically change your position. I have a lot of riders that want to lean back and drive their seat into their horse and their leg forward, this is confusing for your horse. Hold your leg underneath you so that you can properly guide your horse in a straight line. The first thing the rein back will tell you is where they don't want to sit down. You know when you ask your horse to back up and they swing all the way out to the right with their hind end? They don't want to sit down on that right hind. Pay very close attention to this. Or next, you ask your horse to back up and they sit there with their mouth open, hollow their back and refuse to take a step backwards? Your horse has a very unclear understanding about how to engage in proper contact with your hand, they don't know how to yield to your hand pressure. Pokes a shoulder? Takes one step backwards but then refuses to do more? Will back up, but requires that you pull with heavy contact the whole time? **All of this gives you a ton of information about the understanding your horse has of your hand.** There are so many holes you can poke in this with a simple exercise. It works just like when you are trying to teach your horse to frame. First, you have to

make it extremely clear what you are looking for, and reward with a release in pressure. That means hand pressure with leg, if you horse is one that is going to take a straight step backwards and not hollow out in their back – reward, walk away, and do it again later. If you horse stands there completely confused with their mouth open or grabs the bit and runs away – get off and teach them how to back up on the ground. Reward, walk away, do it a few times, get back on.

Everything should be in very small, easy steps for them to understand. You want to practice this every ride at random times, so that when you stretch tall, carry your hand and squeeze on your rein ever so gently – your horse is able to come through their back and reverse in a straight line without any hesitation. Their head should not be straight in the air but have a soft upward line from the bit to your hands.

Building up their relationship to your hand and also teaching them to properly sit down while not in forward motion is the first step in getting the weight off of their front end.

4. Haunches in.

- a) This can be done on a circle or on a straight line. This is an excellent exercise to incorporate into all of your flatwork because it separates the

shoulder and hind end. Many of you have horses that like to drive in with their shoulder, of course, shoulder fore is also a great exercise, but I like this better for engagement purposes and also because it is more easily understood by a horse that doesn't have extensive latitudinal training. On a circle with your horse, carry your outside lower leg well behind the girth. This can be done at a walk first so that you are able to catch what your horse is doing step by step. While in contact, ask your horse to move their hind end in over the course of three big steps. This is a lot of even rein pressure, so they don't shoot through your hand, and also outside leg pressure back – inside leg pressure at the girth to keep the shoulder in place. After about 3 steps, release the pressure and let them walk normally on the circle. Continue to repeat this pattern until you feel them lift their back and move their outside leg right underneath their body for a few steps. This can be repeated at the trot. If your horse is a master, I would also suggest this as a canter exercise.

- b) This exercise can also be done on a straight line off of the wall. When you feel like your horse understands how to move just their haunches off of your leg, you can try to recreate this exercise on a long line. It is super important while doing this exercise you are able to maintain an inside bend. That means you are encouraging your horse to exaggeratively bend

around your inside leg using your aids. This exercise is extremely helpful in getting your horse to sit down properly on their outside hind. **We have a lot of horses that like to swing around with their hind ends on the flat as well as travelling through a course and educating them about how you require them to respond with their hind end while moving will be extremely helpful in the future.**

5. Long and Low

- a) We hear a lot about long and low but there are different ways to do this depending on what you want to achieve. For your horses, particularly, we want to establish a means of self-carriage. *We are not necessarily at the point where we are looking to get a super engaged long and low – but this is a great exercise to get your horse off of your hand, balancing on their own, and learning how to hold a tempo without leaning on you.* The point of this exercise is to dissolve your connection and not even give your horse the option of using you to balance. So, we are going to forget the fact that they may travel a little heavy in front for this and use it as a tool instead to encourage them to learn how to travel without leaning on you. The more you commit to this, the more you'll get out of it. By

commit, I mean let go! This is a good exercise for the trot, but if you have a hot horse you cannot trust without reins let's start them at the walk. You're going to start with a good working gait in your normal position. As you travel around, I want you to lengthen your rein by an inch. If your horse starts taking the opportunity to fall or run – correct this with a half halt and inside leg and move on. Continue lengthening your reins by an inch or so as you go. You want to get to the point where you can only basically feel the weight of the rein in your hands. This is also a super exercise for you to get in tune with your seat, leg and your voice, as that's what's going to help you control your horse when you don't have your reins. You want to carry your hands slightly above your horse's neck as to have an imaginary, light, upward feel on their mouth as their head is down. If you have a horse that doesn't want to reach down, no problem. Let them travel around with loopy reins and lean into your proper aids instead of your hand. If you have a horse that stretches down so much they pull, give them a short kick off of your hand and continue on. Do not let your horse balance on your hands. The point of this over time is to be able to have your horse follow the lengthening contact down and stretch over their backs, maintain a rhythm without you creating one with your hand, and balance their body and line of travel

without needing constant correction. I have to say, of all of the things I do with horses this is my **favourite exercise**.

If you haven't yet accessed the audio **HORSEINMIND Day Nine** for today it is available on the website with the promo code "betahorse3"! I will be sending out another batch of exercises tomorrow for YOU. Hope you guys had a wonderful weekend and are staying warm. As always, please feel free to message me with any questions. I will also be sending out a link to a final survey for you guys to fill out sometime this week when possible.

Thanks again for being my guinea pigs with this pilot program!

Jess