



## RIDING WITH *Synchronicity*

### Overcoming Braciness on the reins. PART 1

**Riding should feel soft, fluent, harmonious, effortless and easy.**

If your horse is bracing on the reins the above qualities are not what you will be experiencing.

Bracing on the reins can be caused by:-

- a lack of confidence in the horse
- claustrophobia
- unwillingness to follow leadership/ direction
- conflicting aids from the rider
- lack of feel from the rider

Bracing on the reins will be associated with bracing through the horse's mind and body. In this article we will focus on having more feel and organizing the horse's ribs and HQ's to help the horse get be softer in the reins, particularly in relation to bending to a stop and the indirect rein.

If a horse is heavy, leaning and hard to steer or stop on the reins, it is his mind and the rest of his body that we need to change. To be heavy and lean on the reins horses will have organized the rest of their body in a way which enables them to do that. If we rearrange the body in another way it becomes harder for them to stay in that pattern of resistance through the reins.

#### **Changing their mind.....**

The better the connection and the relationship between you and your horse the less likely resistance will occur because your horse will want be with you and want go wherever you go and do whatever you do. The more feel that we have as we reach for the reins will also influence the horse's mental attitude to what we are asking.

**When you reach down the rein  
Does you horse say 'Oh Yeah' or 'Oh No' ?**

How much feel or intention goes through your hand into the rein every time you reach for them?

How smoothly and slowly do you reach down the rein and close your fingers one at a time starting with the index finger and then proceeding to the little finger?

Where and how do you sit?



#### **Lateral Flexion and bending to a stop.....**

Some horses are very claustrophobic around the head and therefore get very defensive when we touch the reins especially when we are asking for lateral flexion of the neck. Using a combing technique on the reins can help horses to develop confidence because they don't feel trapped. You can comb hand over hand with your palms up – this is especially good for a horse that feels panicky – in this case you may also need to get off and do more preparation on the ground.

Another technique that is great for lateral flexion of the neck or for disengaging the HQ's is combing the reins with your palm down and putting the feel in the rein with your little finger. Lift up the rein with one hand and with the other hand slide the crook of your thumb down the rein until you reach the required length and then close your fingers slowly, starting with the index finger first, until you get to your little finger.

You are going to put the feel or intention into the rein with your little finger as you draw your hand up towards your belly button, rolling your forearm as you do it so that your finger nails are turning up. You will be putting some tension and a lot of intention and feel into the rein as you let it slide through your hands. Keep repeating this combing motion rhythmically on the rein until the horse softens, releasing the instant that there is a small try.



### Step 1



**Step 2** - putting the feel into the rope with your little finger as you draw your hand up the rope allowing the rope to slide through.

Other horses need the certainty of leader- so in this case you will still put the feel and intention into the rein slowly but very surely. Closing each finger with certainty and holding it closed as you slowly bring your hand to your thigh, just above your knee, and fix it there by pressing it into your leg. If the horse really gets stuck or resistant just stop and wait, matching his resistance rather than just pulling him on through and then when he is ready, you can keep proceeding towards your knee. In this instance pushing your other hand into the neck just in front of the wither will help you to stay balanced and relaxed in your legs and body.

When you are doing lateral flexion, in fact when you are doing anything that requires a horse to bend his body and ribs, positioning yourself so that you sit more to the inside of the horse's back is important. Even though in the case of lateral flexion we are primarily only bending the neck, the horse's ribcage is still affected. When we sit to the inside we cause the horse to bend or shorten his ribs on that side and encourage him to lengthen or bulge them on the outside. By shortening your own ribs on the inside and lengthening them on the outside you can also help the horse to bend his ribs. Looking down at your boot on the inside will help this and it also takes the life out of our body.

Organising the horse's ribcage will take a lot of brace out of the rein because when his ribs are bent on the left, his nose will naturally come over to the left and vice versa.

When bending to a stop think about sitting over to the inside and shorten the distance between your inside shoulder and hip.

**N.B.** Sitting on the inside will also prevent you slipping or being flung off to the outside if a horse turns quickly when you bend him in an emergency situation.

Your body will be influencing the horse in a positive way or a negative way whether you consciously think about it or not. If you don't think about how to positively influence the horse's body with yours you could be unconsciously making it very difficult for your horse to do what you are asking, even for such a simple task as bending to a stop.

### Disengaging the hindquarters.....

Experiment with sitting to the inside and bending your ribs when you disengage the HQ's and do any downward transitions with one rein for example simple lead changes or drop to trot lead changes.

In the indirect rein where you are disengaging the hindquarters sideways, you can really help by turning your body so that your belly button and eyes are trying to look over your horse's tail. When you turn this much it will be almost impossible for your horse not to shift his HQ's over and the more you use your body the less pressure or resistance there will be on the reins.

Keeping the horse walking forward as you do the indirect rein, more like a partial disengagement, can really help a horse who gets brace through the ribs and reins. If you can keep the rhythm of the walk flowing forward it is harder for the horse to lock up and resist. By sliding your inside leg back passively, which means that it does not have an active 'life up' intention to it but an intention of just shifting the HQ's with very little life in the body, you will start getting the hindquarters to roll around. If you are sitting to the inside and have your ribs correctly

organized the horse's ribs will be soft and he will get soft on the inside rein. Using the second technique for combing the rein as described above, can be very helpful with this disengaging the HQ exercise. I have found this exercise of maintaining the walk rhythm while keeping their ribs softly bent, combing the reins and partially disengaging the HQ's extremely beneficial in helping horses to relax.

Because of the physiology and the relationship between the mind and the body when horses get in this soft body posture they will also become softer in their minds and calmer in their emotions.

**Part 2 in next month's article will talk about dealing with bracing on your direct rein.**

*Until next time. Mel*

## UPCOMING HORSEMANSHIP COURSES

For details of courses and bookings contact Mel - [mel@melfleming.com.au](mailto:mel@melfleming.com.au) • Phone: 02 666705519

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Raymond Terrace	July 13th	Free Presentation
Raymond Terrace	July 14th, 15th	Intermediate
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Moonbi	Sept 2nd -13th (10 day course)	Psychology/Synchronicity/Bodywork (Mel Fleming & Tony Robinson)
Bathurst Canberra	Sept. 15th -17th Sept. 29th-Oct. 1st	Riding in Synchronicity Intermediate /Advanced
'Banyandah' Howlong	Oct. 8th-12th (5 day course)	Riding in Synchronicity (Mel Fleming & Tony Robinson)
New Zealand	October Date to be confirmed	Psychology/Synchronicity/Bodywork (Mel Fleming & Tony Robinson)
Equitana	Nov. 16th-19th	Presenting with Equus College Is it in the Mind or the Body ?

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