



## RIDING WITH *Synchronicity*

### **PART 2 - Dealing with Braciness on the Direct Reins.**

**Riding horse's that are heavy and leaning on the reins does not feel pleasurable to the horse or the rider. With novice riders this commonly appears to be a problem as they try to direct their horses to follow straight lines, turns or circles.**

#### **What is a direct rein ?**

The direct rein leads the horse's front end through a turn. It talks to the horse's nose to ask for a slight amount of flexion and specifically talks to a front foot. That is the left direct rein specifically talks to the left front foot and the right direct rein specifically talks to the right front foot. The horse's nose should lead his turns with a slight lateral flexion at the poll. Note this means that there is NOT a big bend through the horse's neck. Getting horses "laterally over bent" in the neck unbalances them and puts all their weight on the inside front foot, it also can allow the horse to escape through the shoulder if the horse has his own ideas about the direction he would like to go.

The direct rein is a good rein to use for turning when you want to keep a horse's forward momentum going as the horse keeps his hindquarters engaged, meaning the hindquarters are powerful and the horse can push with them. This engagement and power in the hindquarters also means that the horse can use that power against us to brace on the rein if we set things up wrong.

#### **Why does braciness or resistance to the rein occur ?**

Here are some common reasons.

- Rider is grabbing or going to quick down the reins.
- Rider is giving conflicting aids with their body.
- Rider is putting a backward feel in the rein restricting forward motion.
- Horse is moving with too much weight on their front end.
- Horse has mental and or emotional resistance.
- Horse has physical issues and is sore or weak on one hind leg.

If horses get strong and resistant on a direct rein the key is to not get into a game of tug-o-war with them because they will always have the advantage because of their size and strength. Following are some strategies for these different situations. You would always start with checking your riding dynamics first and also how you ask with the feel and direction of the rein.

#### **Check your Body position –**

When things aren't happening as you would like the first thing to check is your body position. Have you really turned your belly button and opened the door on one side and closed it on the other?

Remember that your legs, torso and shoulders are connected to your belly button. So in effect you are turning your whole body.

A common pattern I see with novice riders is that they do not really turn their belly button to point in the direction that they want to go it stays straight or even is turning in the opposite direction (subconsciously of course). The rider's upper legs, hips and shoulders will be influenced by the direction of the belly button. If the belly button stays straight or turns the wrong way it is actually very difficult for the horse to turn in the direction that we want. The rider will be giving the horse a very conflicting message. Learning to be effective in directing with our bodies is crucial. Having a stronger and longer focus and stronger intention will help a lot. The stronger this is the less pressure we will have to use on the reins.

By pointing our belly button in the direction that we want to go we can open the door on one side for the horse

and close it on the other. For example if we want the horse to turn left, we turn left with our eyes and belly button and we open the door on our left side and close the door on our the right side.

We open the door on the left by rotating the elbow and wrist slightly out from your body, think of raising you little finger like a posh lady drinking her tea – this opens your arm and ribcage. Open your leg by slightly rotating your hip joint, knee and toe outward. The leg should remain hanging down in its neutral position and not be pushed forward as this will block the horse. The key is in rotating the hip joint outwards on the open side and closing the leg at the hip joint on the closed side.

We close the door on our right side by closing our right upper arm and elbow, closing the right outside 'supporting' rein against the horses neck (this rein must stay straight and have no backward pull in it), your right leg closes, starting at the hip joint, going down to the knee, down to the calf and all the way to the heel if necessary.

If your horse is not following your focus easily try exaggerating how you are turning you whole body and opening and closing the doors. You can use this even when your horse veers off on a straight line. If he has the

intention of going 45 degrees to the left of your line then you might have to turn and ride with your body turned 45 degrees to the right, to match his intention and out focus him and then the horse will probably meet you in the middle and you will be straight on you original line. You can use this idea whether you are on a straight line or a circle. This could mean that when on a circle you ride part of the circle with your belly button turned in and pointing off across and out the other side of the circle and then for another part where the horse tends to cut in or fall in you might have to turn you belly button out to the outside of the circle. When the horse's intention or focus is the same as yours that is on the circle, then you can go to neutral with your body so your belly button points straight ahead on a straight line or on following the line of the circle or turn.

### **Check the direction of your rein aid**

The direction that you take the direct rein depends on the position you want the foot to be placed. You can think of the horse as a puppet and imagine that the reins are like strings attached to his front feet. The direct rein should have a lifting feel in it and often a forward feel. It should not have a backward feel in it. In the beginning it is good to think of taking the rein up and diagonally forward.



For the basics of guiding your horse when people have trouble with the direct rein it can be because they have a backwards feel in the rein which blocks the horse's forward motion and over bends the horse's neck. This backwards feel makes it very easy for the horse to push against (brace against) the feel of the rein. In this case thinking of keeping the neck straight and really talking to the feet and shoulders will be important. If you imagine that your horse's ears are at 12 o'clock it can be helpful to think of lifting your direct rein forwards towards 10 or 11 o'clock for a left hand turn this will help keep the horse's nose and neck straighter and keep the forward momentum in the feet. If you were turning to the right you could think of taking your direct rein up towards 1 or 2 o'clock.

Doing this at a walk will be the best place to start, at the halt his feet are already stuck to the ground so they are harder to influence and it is easier for the horse to brace. You can even experiment with getting in time with the horse's front leg. Start by synchronizing with it at the walk. See how rhythmical you can keep the walk. Rhythm is a sign of relaxation, when horses brace the rhythm is lost.

Getting in time with the feet can be particularly helpful with green horses when beginning to steer them and ride circles at the canter, often times people are putting so much backward feel in the rein that the horses keep breaking gait. Keep thinking about taking your hands diagonally forwards mirroring the leading front leg.

For more advanced riding if you required more flexion in the neck and body or you need to control forward motion in a turn as in a roll back then the direct rein can go more towards 3 or even 4 o'clock or 9 or 8 o'clock. You just adjust it for what ever you need to help the horse.

### **Check the feel in your rein**

Did you go slowly down the rein and put the feel in the rein politely and smoothly?

Did you give the horse time (a few moments) to respond or just close your hand and drag him over?

Sometimes putting a gentle vibration in the rein rather than holding or blocking with a dead feel can make a lot of difference if the horse resists. Horses want a live feel not a dead feel.

### **Getting the horse's weight and balance more onto the hindquarters.**

When the horse's weight is on the forehead it is like trying to steer a car with flat tires. You can get the horse

to shift more weight back to the Hindquarters by riding in a way that allows his back to lift and inviting his hindlegs to actively reach further under his body. This can really help lighten up your horse's steering. For more details see one of my previous articles on 'Riding with Synchronicity'.

### **When there is mental or emotional resistance to your ideas.**

Sometimes horses will lack confidence, so you need to improve the relationship and trust in your leadership.

Use more psychology and create incentive by giving the horse comfort for going where you had in mind this could be rest, a treat or a rub. Use a pattern or physical objects to help your horse mentally understand what you had in mind. Give your horse some more purpose and somewhere to go by following a rail or a trail. Use psychology games like Tit for Tat.

If you feel that the horse is just running through your rein and your body dynamics are right, then a good strategy to use is to change to an indirect rein. Remember to use your whole body and turn so that your eyes and belly button are trying to look over your horse's tail (described in more detail in the last article on 'Overcoming bracing with lateral flexion and the indirect rein'. This will disengage or disempower the horse's hindquarters so they can't be powerful and push against your rein. You will probably only need to hold this disengaged positions for a moment until you feel you have gained control of the hindquarters. The horse may hardly turn or veer off your line but you will feel the rein soften and the hindquarters yield. The moment this happens you can go back to your direct rein position and continue forward before you lose momentum. In a really extreme case you may end up disengaging the horse in a full turn. If every time the horse gets into this brace position he realizes that you can and will disempower him rather than empower him by pulling against him, he will soon give up that game.

### **Horse's with a physical issues - This is very important to consider.**

If you feel that you are asking correctly with your body and politely with your reins then there is always the chance there are physical reasons causing the problem, particularly if the horse has more of a problem with one side in turning or a particular direction on a circle.

The saddle could be unevenly packed, the rider may be sitting crooked and pushing the saddle crooked, or the saddle may have a broken tree.

The horse may have some physical restrictions in his body originating from the hindquarters where one hind leg is sore or weaker than the other. Very commonly you hear people talking about horses “having a good mouth” and now with so many people riding in halters and hackamores they might say “soft in the halter”. However if a horse has a problem in his back, hindquarters or elsewhere in his body he will try and carry his body in a way to find comfort and compensate for the problem in his body. He will get crooked in his body and carry his ribcage to one side and the effect that this can have is that the horse will be heavier on one rein, often referred to as “lugging” on one rein. Commonly this is misunderstood and people try to correct it through the reins rather than healing the body.

The body can be helped with natural bodywork therapies or sometimes it is a case just thinking about riding your horse in a way that encourages him to start using his weaker side and reprogramming the neural system like in physiotherapy or feldenkrais, usually it will be a combination of both. I believe riding the horse could be physically very therapeutic for the horse and the rider.

Young horses may have resistance in the reins or mouth at first because the mouth is so sensitive that they react to the pressure of the bit or perhaps a horse has teeth problems and needs dental work. But usually it is not about the horse’s mouth. In most cases what ever is happening in the horse’s mouth, head and neck is just the symptom of the problem not the cause.

Until next month

*Mel*



## UPCOMING HORSEMANSHIP COURSES

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

Bangalow	July 27th -30th	Intro/Intermediate/Advanced
Gold Coast	Aug 11th-13th	Intermediate /Advanced
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 ?

### EQUINE NATURAL FIRST AID FOR HORSES

Presented by Angela Davison (Equine Herbalist and Bodyworker) **TBA**  
Inflammation, sprains and strains Cuts, Sores, Open wounds & injuries Coughs, colds and infections Feet, Poulting and more

### OPEN FORUM • BASIC MASSAGE & STRETCHING.

Presented by Angela Davison  
Date: TBA - ALL PRACTICAL