



CANADA  
4-H Saskatchewan

# Exploring 4-H at Home



Sustainable Agriculture  
and Food Security

## Pillar: Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

### Activity: Creating Your Own Ranch Trail Challenge

#### Light Horse Unit Three

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## Light Horse

Unit 3



Manual

## Training Tips For Classes That Involve Riding A Pattern

Picking up the correct lead and performing simple and flying lead changes.

When you ask your horse to canter or lope, remember that this is a three-beat gait in which the horse carries more weight on its back end. Be a good passenger. Don't lean in the direction of the lead you want and don't lean forward. The horse needs to be light in its front end. To pick up the correct lead, shift your weight to your outside seat bone.

The horse should always pick up a lead in the back first - then the front. When a horse is on one lead in front and another behind - this is referred to as "crossfiring" or being disunited.

### Simple lead change:

A **simple lead change** allows you to make a downward transition to a trot or jog before asking for a new lead. Remember to cue your horse with the leg opposite the lead you want.

### Flying lead change:

A **flying lead change** is done when the horse changes from one lead to another while cantering/loping.

When you teach your horse to do flying lead changes, make sure your horse is ready. It must respond to well to your cues and travel in a balanced manner "between your legs and reins." It should guide well and not travel with its nose, shoulders, ribs or hips out of alignment for the tasks you ask of it. From a standstill, it should also be able to move into a lope/canter on the correct lead.

Time and patience is required to teach a horse a flying lead change. Do not overdo your training sessions for this maneuver as your horse may become nervous or excited and develop problems that are hard to correct. For example, a horse that anticipates a lead change may drop its shoulder and "dive" into the lead change.

Teach your horse that a change in direction does not always mean there will be a change of leads. If your horse rushes through lead changes, slow down and do more body positioning work.

### Here are some exercises to help:

- Away from the fence in a large arena, trot a straight line and yield the horse to the right or left a few steps of a two track. Then continue in a straight line and repeat the exercise.
- Ride the horse in a circle. As you close the circle (traveling to the right for example), pick up your reins and side pass the horse toward the inside of the circle, using your left leg. (This will move your horse's left shoulder out of the way and help position the horse's hind end for picking up the new lead.) Now, release the pressure from your left leg and apply your right leg. This will cue your horse to pick up the left lead.

- Instead of riding in circles or figure eights, work the horse on a D-shaped pattern. Use the straight side to work on the cues you need to ask for a lead change.
- Counter canter: In this exercise the horse is asked to travel on the right lead if it is loping a circle to the left and on the left lead if it is circling to the right. It should only be used when a horse can hold or pick up leads consistently. The counter canter, which demonstrates the horse's suppleness, balance and obedience, can be a helpful exercise for a horse that wants to change leads before you have asked it to.

### Sequence of the horse's legs in a flying lead change

1. Cue the horse when the outside foreleg is extended forward. The leading foreleg and outside hind leg are down.
2. Next, the outside front leg contacts the ground as the hind legs extend.
3. The horse changes leads as all four feet leave the ground.
4. The first leg to come down will be the new leading hind leg.
5. The leading foreleg is the last to change.

To cue the horse, lift the reins slightly to collect the horse and indicate the direction of change. Shift your weight to the opposite leg and hip. Change the leg pressure in sequence to the horse's stride. If you wait for the suspension before cueing your horse, it will not be able to react in time to make the change front and back.

### Sliding Stops

The sliding stop is not a dead stop. The horse is being asked to respond to the cue, balance, brace its hind legs and then allow the momentum of its gait to carry it forward. The stop will be smoother if the front legs continue in a walking action as the body is propelled forward. This will increase the length of the slide.

To perform a good sliding stop well makes demands on both the horse and rider. A rider error will cause a poor stop by the horse.

### Common problems are:

1. The horse was not collected properly. When the cue was given, the horse was not able to get its hocks under its body. During the stop, it braces for the stop with its front legs.

2. The horse shifts too much weight to the hindquarters. The front quarters pop up as the horse stops. The horse will do the stop with only the hind legs in contact with the ground or with the front legs (held straight) bouncing over the ground. One cause of this can be the rider grabbing the bit and not releasing the (rein) pressure. This unbalances the horse by keeping it from relaxing its front end during the stop. If the horse is relaxed, the head and neck stretch forward allowing a light slide or walking motion with the front legs.
3. Many horses resist the bit during the stop. The horse may get over the bit or open its mouth to avoid the pressure. This can happen for a number of reasons. The horse may open its mouth because it was not traveling on the bit before the stop was called for. The bit or rider's hands may be the cause, or contribute to it. A harsh bit does not shorten the response time of the horse. It only hurts the mouth and makes the horse tense.

After asking the horse to stop with the reins, the pressure can be reduced after the horse begins the stop. This lets the horse stretch its head and neck forward to follow the momentum of the stop. The rider must judge how much rein to give the horse so that the form of the horse does not fall apart during the stop (compare this to stopping a car and letting go of the steering wheel as soon as you step down on the brake pedal). The rider should keep light contact on the mouth during the stop.

### Horseman's Notebook: Stopping

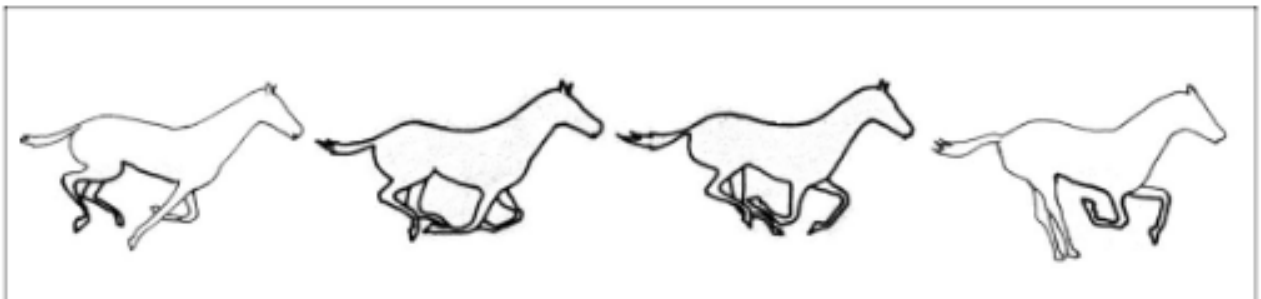
With any bit, the rider's hands are important. Consider that the Thoroughbred learns to run faster with pressure on the bit or that a horse can run away with a rider pulling on the bit. From these examples, we learn that constant pressure on the bit is not effective for stopping the horse. Variable pressure is more understandable to the horse and makes it harder for the horse to brace its jaw against pressure.

4. **The stop may be practiced too many times.** The horse may begin to anticipate the stop and half halt before the rider asks for the stop (called scotching or cheating). Many trainers do most of their stopping work at a walk or trot - leaving high-speed stops for competitive events.

5. **Rider position affects the balance of the horse.** A common fault is that the rider does not prepare before asking for the stop. The rider floats forward and up as the horse stops. This puts the rider's weight forward - therefore causing the horse to become heavy on the front end.

The rider does not need to lean back before asking for the stop. By sitting deep in the saddle and dropping his/her weight down through the heels, the rider will be prepared for the stop. The position should not be stiff. If you are stiff, the momentum will catapult you forward and up over the horse's neck.

6. **Position of the hind legs is important.** To slide evenly, the hind legs must be under the body and even. The horse should be cued when it can place both hind feet on the ground together. This can be done in the leg sequence as the leading leg is extended under the body because the hind legs are off the ground. If the request is made after the "off" foreleg begins to extend, the hind legs will not be placed evenly.



## Rollbacks

The rollback combines the method used for a sliding stop, turn around and lead change to do a 180-degree direction change or turn on the hocks. Basically, the horse is asked to the rollback before the stop is completed. In competition, the rollback is done at a lope. The horse is expected to remain a "straight" and leave the rollback the way it entered it - at a lope.

In training, do not introduce rollbacks at a lope because the horse may get too excited to maintain the correct body position required. Instead, work at a walk and trot. You may start by asking for a complete stop first and even backing the horse a step before doing the rollback. Teach the horse remain straight as it turns. If the horse's body isn't straight when you perform the rollback at a lope later - it may have "departure" problems. It may over bend its body; fail to depart on the correct lead or even trot instead of lope.

**Turn Arouds/Spins** When you practice the turn around, think of it as a series of quarter turns. Break the maneuver down into smaller elements before you do a complete 360-degree turn around.

In early training, you may back the horse first and then use your inside rein to bring the horse around and teach it to follow its nose. By backing the horse first, you will help it engage its hindquarters and turn around its inside pivot foot. Trotting the horse in small circles is also useful in training because you can take advantage of the horse's forward motion to help you execute a turn more efficiently. Once you become more advanced, you will also use more outside rein.

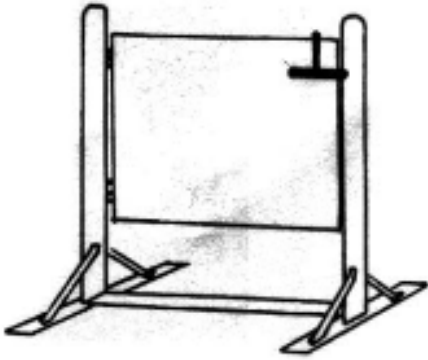
Here's a simple exercise to get you started: Ride your horse in a large square shaped pattern at a trot. At each "corner", ask your horse for a quarter turn and then trot out of it. Make sure that your horse keeps its body straight as you come through the turn. Your corners should not be round. The horse should turn around its pivot foot.

In the turn around, the horse's inside pivot foot carries the weight. Try to keep yourself balanced and centred to let the horse do its job. Don't lean to the inside. Also, if you lean forward, you'll interfere with the horse's movement and if you lean back, you may "tip" the horse back too much.

## **Training Tips for Trail**

Trail horse training is good for a variety of reasons other than showing. The training helps the horse become more sensitive to cues, helps the horse collect, increases concentration and teaches patience. The trail obstacles force the horse to pay attention to where its feet and body are at all times. This will make riding easier for you and your horse.

## Gate



**Gate:** When you teach your horse to go through the gate - BE PATIENT! You don't have to master this obstacle in one day. If you get into a battle with your horse it may get nervous and fidgety every time you approach a gate thereafter.

*Make the gate a good place to be.* After you have been riding your horse, stop your horse next the gate and let your horse relax on a loose rein. Also work on sidepassing your horse up to the gate and then rewarding it. Play with the gate latch so the horse gets used to the sound it makes as well as the fact that you are shifting your weight. Spend several days doing this before you go through the gate.

When you open the gate, don't rush your horse through it. Instead, sidepass/pivot a few steps and stand in the gate with the gate open at a 45-degree angle. Stay here and RELAX. You may even sidestep back to where you started to finish for the day. If the horse starts rushing through the gate, it may form a habit of doing this and you won't be able to maintain your hold on the gate.

To complete training for the gate obstacle, use the same "patience and reward" system described above. Once your horse is comfortable with the gate - approach it in different ways; open it from the other side, pull it open instead of pushing it and back through it instead of riding forward etc. If you always open the gate the same way, the horse will anticipate this. As a result, you may have a horse that tries to push against the gate, expecting it to swing open. With your leg pinned between the horse and the gate, you may have problems encouraging it to move forward enough for you to unlatch it!



**Bridge:** When you first starting practicing the bridge obstacle you may wish to start out by leading your horse over a sheet of plywood. Let the horse take a step, pause and look/sniff at the bridge, take another step and pause again. In this class the horse is expected to cross the obstacle in a thoughtful manner, aware of where it is placing its feet. Don't race over it.

## Back Throughs



A back through obstacle may be created by making an L-shape out of poles or by setting up 3 barrels (in a triangle or in a row). Before you try to do a back through, make sure that your horse is responding to your aids very well. Can your horse backup, sidepass, turn on the forehand and turn on the haunches? Can you back your horse in a circle both ways? Can you ask your horse to only **move one foot at a time** - or does it back quickly when you pick up the reins? Can you as the rider, keep track of where your horse's feet are and "which foot" will move next if you ask the horse to move?

Don't try to teach your horse to move away from your leg while you are in the middle of a back through obstacle. If the horse doesn't respond and you get excited - you may create a bad experience the horse will associate with that obstacle.

Backing an "L-shaped pattern is common. Start with a fairly wide "L." Ride the horse into the "L." Stop the horse so its hind legs are still between the poles. Then back up one step at a time.

## Step Overs (Walk or Trot)

This skill is necessary whether you ride as a pleasure rider; compete in English classes or western trail classes. For the pleasure horse, step overs can be used to help set the head, collect the horse and develop a rhythm.

The horse should be taught to slow down, look at the obstacle and learn to adjust the length of its stride. Begin by using one rail for the step over, adding more as the horse becomes more confident. Change your step overs as your horse gets used to them. Vary the height and spacings. (Suggestions: a series of poles 6-8 feet apart; poles arranged like wheel spokes).

### Horseman's Hint: Trail Competition

When you are in the show ring, you may encounter an obstacle that your horse just refuses to cross or go through. Understand that there may be a point where you just have to give up and move on. If you keep pushing your horse, it may get so excited that it has even more trouble with the following obstacles. As a matter of etiquette - you don't want to hold up the show either. Other competitors are waiting for their turn. Also note that at some shows, there may be a time limit or maximum number of refusals at each obstacle.