

# GOING IT ALONE

## Riding your horse away from his buddies

By Joe Wolter

**I was asked to write about specific problems or challenges we encounter working with** horses. For instance, getting your horse to leave other horses while on a trail ride. Now, it would be nice if I could list a couple of things to do. The reader would do A, B and C, and the problem would go away and that would be that.

In situations concerning equipment or something mechanical or electrical, that approach would be fine. But horses have a brain, a central nervous system and an amazing desire to get along with us. We have to respect that.

The horse has a reason for what he wants to do.

The approach the rider takes depends upon the horse's frame of mind. If he is scared, get him to relax before you start directing him in any manner. If he just wants to go where he wants, treat him in a different manner, such as letting him know your desires.

Drift with him the way he wants to go for a minute, then suggest the direction you want to go. Just suggest. Use the lightest little pressure on the rein. He might not want to go your way just yet, but that pressure on the rein keeps him from being as comfortable going his way. The second he thinks about going your way, just relax and go along. He'll probably fall back in with the other horse after you relax, so suggest your way again. Give him a chance to figure out there's no rein pressure if he goes away from the other horse, and he'll decide to move away from him a little. Then just build on that.

The hardest thing for a lot of people

is developing a feel for when their horse is responding. The timing is something you have to learn for yourself. The horse will give you little signs of what he's thinking, and you have to be looking for them. Say you're riding along the right side of another horse and want to veer off to the right, away

from the other horse. You suggest with your rein that you'd like to go to the right. When he's thinking about going right, he'll turn his head slightly the way you want to go, and you'll see more of his eye on that side of his head, or you'll

feel his ribcage shift slightly and bump your left leg.

When he thinks about going right, show you're in agreement by taking the pressure off. Respond to his slightest effort, and you'll find he gets lighter and quicker than he's ever been before.

I first had a breakthrough on getting my horse to leave others in the early '80s in northern Nevada. I was helping a friend start a bunch of young horses on a ranch. After the second or third ride, we rode these colts out in a large lot where all the other colts were turned out. At first, the colts we were riding would just be like magnets with the others. But it wouldn't be long and we could walk, trot or lope right through the middle of them with our arms folded, and they wouldn't look left or right; they'd go right through and out the other side.

My friend got this to work for him first, as I had a little more trouble get-



**Look for little signs of what your horse is thinking.**

ting it to work. I could see how easy it looked for him and his horse, but I just could not get mine to carry on through. Once I quit trying to make it happen, I had more success.

These green, range-raised horses didn't have any calloused places, so it really came quickly, as soon as I allowed it to happen. To tell you exactly what took place is really hard because it was more what we felt, not what we saw. Some colts used their ears before they left, and others didn't, but you could feel them get ready to leave. The main thing was we would lighten up or turn the horse loose when we felt the change.

At first, we would go where they wanted to go, then let them go where we wanted to go.

Years later, I was helping a group of English riders in California, and I got the riders to do the same thing, but it took more effort with some than others. These horses needed a little more convincing, as they were somewhat calloused and the riders were not used to settling for a try. They eventually succeeded, once the riders really paid close attention to what *they* were doing, as well as their horses. U

*Transplanted Californian Joe Wolter traveled coast to coast this year on the clinic trail, in addition to training horses in Texas.*

**Respond to the slightest effort**